LEAVING ME AJAR

EDUCATING FOR HOSPITABLE IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality, the reception of the other, is a perennial ethical demand, but one

which is felt acutely in contemporary Western societies, because of increased ethno-

cultural diversity. In this dissertation, I argue that an important aim of education should

be to shape students' identities in such a way that they have a capacity for hospitality.

Educating for hospitable identity hinges on the conception of identity informing the

educative efforts. Currently, identity is commonly conceived of as narrative, and

narrative conceptions of identity range from "folk" conceptions that treat stories as self-

evident, to more refined hermeneutical approaches that theorize narrative structuring

and its role in human lives. I examine these narrative conceptions of identity, and

discuss their limitations for educating for hospitable identity.

I propose an alternative, poststructuralist conception of identity, which disrupts

and augments narrative conceptions. I argue that an understanding of identity in terms

of hospitality is served well by an analysis of discursive performativity: the

effectiveness of language is both dependent on previous iterations and vulnerable to

subsequent iterations. Understanding identity, likewise, as fundamentally dependent

on the other, and vulnerable to the incoming of the other, identity is left ajar. In order to

foster an understanding of such a state of ajarness, I draw on aesthetic education to

suggest a pedagogical model for the training of "deconstructive regard," a mode of

engagement with human artifices ranging from tangible works of art to conceptual artifices such as identity categories. With deconstructive regard, presence and absence are seen as co-dependent, and as both separated and joined by their border.

Finally, I consider educational questions which might benefit from analysis in terms of hospitality and, in particular, in terms of hospitable identity. This discussion provides examples of how curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, teacher identity, and school discourse can be left ajar. Ajarness is not a deficiency to be overcome, but, on the contrary, a necessary feature of discursive practices such as education and identity formation, and a condition for the gesture of hospitality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lodged right in the middle of this term that we extend to honor the people who have influenced and cared for us, is the work 'knowledge.' An acknowledgment is an admission. It makes explicit what is tacit, or sometimes denied, in every scholarly monologue: none of us knows alone. (Grumet, 1988, p. ix)

I thank many marvellous women in my life, including Lynne Wiltse, Linda Stollings, Bonnie Waterstone, Trisha Joel, Dawn Barbeau and Elizabeth Barbeau. All of them have been cherished friends, great hosts and wonderful guests.

I thank my parents for their ongoing support, encouragement, and celebration.

Finally, I thank my partner Ann, for putting up with me, encouraging me, and loving me.

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INTRODUCTION

The overarching theme guiding my inquiries in this dissertation will be educating for hospitable identity. Deliberately or not, students' identities are shaped in and by educational contexts and processes, and by the ideas about identity that are at play in those contexts and processes. I first became interested in ways students' identities are shaped in educational contexts when I reflected upon my own experiences as a student in elementary and secondary schools. I was born in 1971, the first and only child of a shopkeeper, in the old city centre of Gorinchem, a Dutch town of approximately 30,000 inhabitants. Growing up, my friends were generally the sons and daughters of other shopkeepers or restaurant owners. The (secular) kindergarten I attended (age 4 and 5) was at walking distance, also in the old city centre. The elementary school I attended from age 6 to 12, still at walking distance, was a secular, public school of, I suspect, average quality. I was a happy child, although in the later elementary grades, my eagerness for school-learning made me less popular with my classmates.

At age 12, I was the only student of my elementary grade 6 class to move on to the local grammar school. This grammar school, Gymnasium Camphusianum, was a

publicly funded, independent[1] grammar school for approximately 400 students. This small school, with academically high achieving students and good teachers was, in many ways, a privileged environment. But although I enjoyed the quality of education, I became more withdrawn and spent much of my time studying. At age 16 I won a scholarship to attend the Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific, an international boarding school (teaching International Baccalaureate) on Canada's Vancouver Island. Pearson College was and is an educational community of some 200 young people of over 70 nationalities. I was more at ease with myself there and became an active member of the community.

Reflecting upon the differences in my attitudes and interactions, I was dissatisfied with the explanation of "natural" maturation. I began wondering how the differences between the schools played a role in my changing identity. In grammar school, for example, I attended one or two school parties, but soon stopped going to them, feeling ill at ease. At Person College, by contrast, I not only participated in social events, but also helped organize them. How was the person I had been in each of these schools related to the kinds of persons that each of these schools had, implicitly or explicitly, allowed and encouraged me to be?

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[1] I add 'independent' because in the 1980s, schools of one stream (vocational, pre-academic etc.) were beginning to merge into larger (and more anonymous) comprehensive educational institutions offering more than one stream. The grammar school I attended has managed to withstand the policy pressures to this day and is still a small, independent grammar school serving the town of Gorinchem and surrounding villages.

The elementary school, grammar school, and Pearson College offered quite different social environments, quite different contexts in which I was cast as a subject and in which I interacted with other subjects. In elementary school, my classmates' parents were typically shopkeepers, school teachers, truck drivers, municipal civil servants, and stay-at-home moms. Socio-economically, there was little difference between my home environment and the home environments of my classmates and teachers. At the grammar school, however, my classmates' parents were typically accountants, doctors, architects, and lawyers. I noticed that the way most other students in the school dressed and talked was different from what I was used to. I vividly remember my history teacher speaking disdainfully of *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad*, two of the national newspapers in The Netherlands, and opining that at least *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* were worth the paper they were printed on. My parents read *Algemeen Dagblad*, and the teacher's comment made me feel ashamed, pegged as coming from a family that simply didn't measure up.

I became increasingly uncomfortable with many things I had been perfectly comfortable with before: the kind of car my parents drove, the kind of television shows we watched, the brands of clothes we bought (and, more importantly, the ones we didn't buy): in many ways, my family and I seemed inadequate, unable to meet the standards of my classmates and teachers. The difference that made a difference was, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, not the difference in economic capital – my family was

never poor – but the difference in social and cultural capital. I had become a classed subject and the awareness of my class identity was quite uncomfortable.

Pearson College offered an environment in which the difference that made a difference was measured by a new set of criteria: artistic ability, academic ability, athletic ability, ability to care. Pearson College was (and is) strict in its meritocratic principles, admitting only students on full scholarship. Although many of my schoolmates were from the upper middle class or upper class of their respective countries, there was no single set of criteria for class identity, especially for social and cultural capital. Class, of course, is but one of the intersecting axes along which my and others' identities are marked, but for me it was the axis along which I developed my first puzzlement around the concept of identity and, more specifically, around the ways identities are markers that divide "us" from "them," "me" from "you." These memories have motivated and brought to life my current research into questions of identity and the self.

In reading about identity and the self, I have been struck by the prevalence of spatial metaphors: identities are "inhabited," for example, and if I don't want you to know who I am, I may "build a wall" around myself, which may spur someone to ask me to "open up." The self and identity, it appears, can be a fortress in which one lives defensively, but perhaps another kind of dwelling in identity is possible. I have been interested not in a starry-eyed "let's all love each other" but rather in the real tension

between standing for certain values and beliefs, participating in particular identity categories, and yet interacting ethically with those who do not share one's positions, alliances and beliefs. I have sought a metaphor to help me theorize personal identity as a framework for ethical interaction; it should illustrate not the abandonment of one's historicity, context, values and beliefs, nor the rejection or negation of the other's historicity, context, values and beliefs, but rather an interaction which recognizes both the necessity of having a position from which to act and speak, and the necessity of leaving that position open to the incoming of the other, who may act and speak from a different position. The metaphor I have found most helpful for theorizing identity in this way is *hospitality*.

In this dissertation, I argue that an important aim of education should be to shape students' identities in such a way that they have a capacity for hospitality. Educating for hospitable identity, I will further argue, hinges centrally on the conception of identity that is at work, explicitly or implicitly, in educative efforts. Currently, identity is commonly conceived of as narrative, and narrative conceptions of identity range from "folk" conceptions that treat stories as self-evident, to more refined hermeneutical approaches that theorize narrative structuring and its role in human lives. I will examine these conceptions of identity as narrative, and will show their limitations for educating for hospitable identity. Using a deconstructive approach, I will show how a discursive understanding of language in general, and the concept of performativity in particular, disrupt and trouble the conception of identity as narrative,

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without destroying it. The resulting conception of identity leaves (narrative) identity

ajar, and hence offers more possibilities for educating for hospitable identity.[2]

In the first chapter, I examine the three main concepts in the central theme of

educating for hospitable identity: hospitality, identity, and education. The chapter

begins with a rationale for positing hospitality as central to education. I will also

position myself in poststructuralism, deconstruction and radical hermeneutics, which

inform both my theoretical framework and conceptual methodology. In Chapter 2, I

discuss narrative "folk paradigm" conceptions of identity as well as narrative

conceptions of identity as theorized by Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur and Charles

Taylor. Conceptions of identity as narrative are intuitively appealing, and some offer

rich and refined understandings of the process of "speaking" and "writing" identity.

Their weaknesses and limitations, and their implications for educating for hospitable

identity, will be discussed at the end of the chapter. This will lead me to

poststructuralist understandings of language and the concept of performativity, which I

will examine in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I will first discuss a discursive understanding of language, and its

implications for conceptions of identity as narrative. I will then discuss a particular

concept within a discursive understanding of language: performativity. Based on J. L.

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[2] Having announced that I will discuss the limitations of narrative conceptions of identity, I must acknowledge the irony of beginning this dissertation with a personal narrative. In Chapter 2, I will subject my own opening narrative to analysis and commentary.

Austin's explanation of performative utterances, I will follow Jacques Derrida's and

Judith Butler's expansion of performativity to include identity categories as discursive

effects. I will highlight areas of difference and, especially, compatibility between

performativity and the narrative conception of identity. My aim is *not* to pit a

poststructuralist conception of identity against a conception of identity as narrative.

Rather, I aim to use poststructuralist thought to augment a conception of identity as

narrative, and to give it a more critical edge. For an initial awareness of the identity

categories we inhabit, narration works well. But I propose narration needs to be

followed or interrupted by deconstruction, which exposes the discursive constitution of

those identity categories. Considering narrative identity as, itself, performative, offers

new possibilities for understanding how identity is constituted in discourse. I will

further discuss the implications for agency and commonality of the alternative

conception of identity I propose.

In Chapter 4, I look at aesthetic education – not as a subject area in which

educating for hospitable identity can be *applied*, but rather as a pedagogy that can be

seen as paradigmatic for educating for hospitable identity. Through the paradigm of

aesthetic education I advocate training "deconstructive regard," a way of looking which

recognizes what is present (for instance in a work of art), what is absent, and what

constitutes the boundary between presence and absence. The *parergon* (that which

surrounds the work) and the secret (that which eludes interpretation) are two central

concepts in deconstructive regard, and the chapter is organized around these two

concepts. Finally, in Chapter 5, I address questions and issues that are likely to arise in practices of educating for hospitable identity. I highlight the importance of historical inquiry, and draw, once again, on the work of Jacques Derrida to argue that a deconstructive approach to history and heritage can result in a thorough yet hospitable understanding of the *chez-soi*. In this chapter, I provide examples of concrete educational situations and point out what new perspectives are gained by analyzing these situations through the lens of hospitality.

CHAPTER I
IDENTITY AND HOSPITALITY

'Stranger, it would be wrong for me not to honour any guest who comes here, even one in lower state than you: because all strangers and beggars come from Zeus, with his protection.' (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. 2000, 14.55-60)

Leaving me ajar

Ajar: slightly open, on the turn, the way one describes the position of a door or window. But also: at jar, at odds, jarring. When I "unravel the lines of force that semantically traverse the word" (Derrida, 1998/2000, p. 25), I find both *at jar* and *on char*, where *char* refers to a turn or movement. Ajar is an uncertain position, unfixed and unstable. A gust of wind may turn ajar into wide open, or into slammed shut. Ajar, on the turn, requires a turning point, an articulation or joint. Ajar, at odds, out of joint. On what point does my being out of joint hinge? Ajar, not open widely enough to see who may be approaching, who may come in – and whoever is approaching may indeed come in, for ajar is vulnerable to the incoming of an other.

Derrida (1996/2002) remarks that "etymology never provides a law and only provides material for thinking on the condition that it allows itself to be thought as well" (p. 71). The double etymology of ajar provides me with material for thinking

about the state of ajarness, a state which, I will argue, is central to hospitality, the receiving of an other. But Derrida also asks that etymology itself be thought. Etymology, evolved from the ancient Greek words *etumon* (ετυμον) and logos (λογος). *Etumon* is the neuter of *etumos*, which means true or real. *Logos* has many meanings and uses; the main ones that seem to be at work in the later –logy, are word, thought, speech, text, discourse, theory, story, history. Etymology: discourse, theory, history on/of "the real thing." Ironically, I do not expect the etymology of *etymology* to show me the real thing, the true word about *etymology*, any more than I expect the etymology of any other words to reveal the true word. Following genealogical rather than traditional historical inquiry, I will look at the "knotted trajectories" (Derrida, 1998/2000, p. 25) of concepts central to my argument in order to reveal the persisting tensions that leave the concepts *ajar*.[3]

The metaphor of ajarness informs my thinking about hospitality, the concept which will guide my writing about identity throughout. In order to develop a personal identity which is hospitable, I will argue, I need to understand not that I *can* open the door of my identity a crack, but that I *cannot but* be ajar. The door of my identity jars, and will, in the final analysis, not let itself be closed. Educating for hospitable identity means educating for an understanding of this state of ajarness, of openness to the incoming of an other, as a shared condition of identity formation.

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[3] I will elaborate on the distinction between genealogical and traditional historical inquiry at the end of Chapter 2.

Education and the question of hospitality

In the past decades many postindustrial societies, and especially the urban

centres within those societies, have seen a rapid increase in the ethno-cultural diversity

of their populations.[4] This increased (and increasing) ethno-cultural diversity has made

more pressing, or at least heightened awareness of, the question of how to respond to

persons with backgrounds different from one's own. In education, as one of the core

social institutions of postindustrial states, the increased and increasing ethno-cultural

diversity of student populations has similarly raised many questions.

The question of how to respond to persons who one perceives as "foreigners,"

"strangers," "others," can be treated as a question of *hospitality*. Of course, in a more

philosophical sense, one might say that although the question of hospitality may be

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[4] By this, I do not mean that postindustrial societies have been confronted with the largest influx of immigrants in absolute numbers. In fact, most migration occurs within regions and continents, and the number of displaced persons within, for instance, Africa and the Middle East is far larger than the number of displaced persons from Africa and the Middle East who have come to postindustrial societies. However, the context of education with which I am familiar and about which I write will be that of postindustrial societies such as in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe. In Canada, for example, changing immigration patterns have led to a changed ethnic composition of the population and a growing visible minority population. "Immigrants who came to Canada before 1961 were most likely to have been born in Europe, particularly in northern and western Europe and the United Kingdom. Those who came during the 1960s were most likely to have left homes in southern Europe. During the 1970s, the proportion coming from Europe declined; in contrast, the proportion of immigrants from east and southeast Asia increased and began to dominate immigration patterns by the 1980s. And in the early 1990s, nearly one-half of new Canadians came from east and south Asian countries such as Hong Kong and India" (Statistics Canada, 2001, p. 85). And visible minorities are far more likely to settle in large urban centres than elsewhere in the country. In 1996, Canada had a visible minority population of just over 11% (p. 85). Census data show, however, that in metropolitan areas that percentage was much higher: both in Toronto and Vancouver more than 31% of the population belonged to a visible minority. By 2001, that percentage had risen to more than 36% (Statistics Canada, Census 1996 and 2001).

more acutely felt today, it is not at all new. Migration is hardly a new phenomenon, but also and more importantly, every person one encounters is, in some way, other than oneself. No matter how similar the background, another person's thoughts and feelings are fundamentally inaccessible to anyone but her or himself. Psychoanalysts would add that, given the Unconscious, a person's thoughts and feelings are not fully accessible even to the beholder. In other words, every person is *other* to another person – and even to her or himself. Derrida (1992/1995) captured this in *The Gift of Death* with the phrase, "Tout autre est tout autre" (every other is completely other) (p. 68). Thus, the question of hospitality is a perennial question, a corollary of the human condition, but one which may be more acutely perceived against the backdrop of increased ethno-cultural diversity. This increased diversity is certainly felt in educational contexts, where questions of teaching, learning and, generally, collaborating and interacting across irreducible differences have been raised by authors such as Lisa Delpit, Cameron McCarthy, Greg Dimitriadis, and Ram Mahalingam.

Education and the ethical aim

Education and its aims have been framed in many different ways. Loosely following the "ethical aim" as formulated by Paul Ricoeur (1990/1992), I take education to have as its main aim that students learn *how to live well with and for others in just institutions* (p. 172). By claiming this I am clearly siding with those philosophers of education who believe that education is an enterprise bound up with questions of

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ethics, of the good life. Nel Noddings is a theorist whose views on education as a moral

project are currently particularly influential. Noddings (1992) argues that "if the school

has one main goal, a goal that guides the establishment and priority of all others, it

should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people" (p.

10). This view is quite distinct from the view that education should steer clear of

axiological questions, and that the principal aim is for students to acquire the

knowledge and skills that are considered most worthy by society. Clearly, the

attribution of "worthiness" to certain knowledge and skills is in itself a value

judgement, but that is not what Noddings is driving at. Noddings, citing Charles

Silberman (1970), points to the Second World War and the fact that many of the Nazi

officers were highly educated – according to the definition of an educated person as one

who has acquired the knowledge and skills deemed most worthy by society. Noddings

agrees with Silberman that "intellectual development could not ensure against moral

perversity" (p. 11). David Orr (1994), citing Elie Wiesel (1990), similarly observes that

although "the designers and perpetrators of Auschwitz, Dachau and Buchenwald …

were the heirs of Kant and Goethe, widely thought to be the best educated people on

earth … [,] their education did not serve as an adequate barrier to barbarity" (p. 7).

When I say that education ought to aim for students learning how to live well

with and for others in just institutions, this does not mean that I believe this is the

responsibility of formal (school-based) education alone. Neither, however, is the ethical

aim the responsibility solely of the home environment (traditionally family and

religious institutions); schools and other educational contexts are influential in the conditions they create for students' ethical formation.[5]

Before I go on to address the complexities of terms such as "living well" and "just institutions," let me say a word about intellectual development. When Noddings (1992) contends that "intellectual development is important but it cannot be the first priority of schools" (p. 10), she is referring to the traditional, standardized, discipline-based liberal education that focuses on instruction in subject matter. The point is that what one *knows* (including what one knows how to do) is no guarantee for how one will *act* in the world with and for others. But some may take "intellectual development" to mean the development of one's thinking – and *thought* is certainly not the same as *knowledge*. Derrida (1994/2002) writes,

> I have always thought that thinking is acting provided that one considers thought otherwise than as theoretical speculation. ... There is no thought of the future that is not at the same time an *engagement* with the question, 'What should I do?' (p. 254)

I have deliberately used the phrase "acquiring the knowledge and skills that are considered most worthy by society," rather than the term "intellectual development,"

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[5] I speak of "schools and other educational contexts" to indicate that by the term "education," I mean not only formal education in schools, but all deliberate efforts to bring about learning. This includes, for example, educational programs offered by galleries and other cultural institutions, and outdoor experiential programs such as those offered by Outward Bound. First and foremost, I conceive of education as a social practice which straddles the public and private sphere, and which "mediates [the] passage between the specificity of intimate relations and the generalities of the public world..." (Grumet, 1988, p. 14).

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because the latter may be taken to include the development of *thinking* which, it seems to me, is central to learning how to live well with and for others in just institutions.

Now, as promised, let me turn to the difficulties of terms such as "living well" and "just institutions." Who, after all, judges what life is the "good" life and what are the criteria of a "just" institution? I do not seek to establish a new foundation in these post-foundationalist times – in fact, I believe much has been gained by the unmasking of metanarratives as metanarratives,[6] and the questioning of all that presents itself as foundation. Rather, I believe that an inability to answer definitively what living well is, and what just institutions are, paradoxically makes it more important to *aim* to live well and to *aim* to establish just institutions. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that "a certain undecidability ... is the condition or the opening of a space for an ethical or political decision, and not the opposite" (Derrida, 2002b, p. 298). In order to explain this, I return to the question of hospitality, which I introduced earlier in this chapter.

I take hospitality to be the emblematic concept uniting all forms of openness to the incoming of an other. When I speak of "hospitality," I do not only mean hospitality in the common and literal sense of a welcoming of flesh-and-blood guests and strangers, but also, in a more abstract and metaphorical sense, as a welcoming of intangible guests and strangers. The inhabitation by another person of an identity

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[6] I borrow this term from Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984), who means by "metanarrative" (Fr. *grand récit*) a story which serves to explain, legitimate, and guide a society, its institutions and processes. Examples of such metanarratives are "the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (p. xxiii).

category which I also inhabit, for example, demands my hospitality, even though this is not a literal inhabitation of a physical structure, but rather a discursive inhabitation of a conceptual structure.

Although I align myself with Noddings in the sense that I place education in the service of ethics, I should point out that there are some important similarities and differences between Noddings' "ethic of care" and what Derrida (1997/2001) calls the "ethic of hospitality" (p. 83). As a full discussion of the similarities, differences, complementarity, or incompatibility of the two perspectives carries beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will elaborate here on two differences that are particularly salient in the context of my discussion of hospitality. First, Noddings (1984) presents as the paradigmatic relation for understanding caring the relation between mother and child. In her ethic of care, the one-caring can care only for a *known* other. "Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring" (p. 16). Although Noddings acknowledges that the other is "never fully understood" (p. 24), the possibility of engrossment and empathy, of receiving the other's needs, is fundamental to the caring relationship.

In an ethic of hospitality, the paradigmatic ethical call comes not from one's own child, but rather from a stranger who arrives at one's doorstep, and from a stranger who has not yet arrived but may, at some future date. In an ethic of care, such a stranger poses a problem, because s/he interrupts the caring relationships within one's

intimate circle. I will argue throughout this dissertation that interruption (for example, of one's identity) is not only unavoidable, but indeed valuable; not to be feared, but welcomed. In the following illustrative passage, Noddings evokes the reluctance and "wary anticipation" that form a sharp contrast with the openness and welcome at the heart of an ethic of hospitality:

> But what of the stranger, one who comes to me without the bonds established in my chains of caring? Is there any sense in which I can be prepared the care for him? ... In an important sense, the stranger has an enormous claim on me, because I do not know where he fits, what requests he has a formal right to make, or what personal needs he will pass on to me. I can meet him only in a state of wary anticipation and rusty grace, for my original innocent grace is gone and, aware of my finiteness, I fear a request I cannot meet without hardship. Indeed, the caring person, one who in this way is prepared to care, dreads the proximate stranger, for she cannot easily reject the claim he has on her. (p. 47)

A second important difference, related to the cared-for being a *known* other, is that in the ethic of care, the (reciprocal) response of the cared-for completes the caring relation. Noddings writes that "my caring must somehow be completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring" (p. 4). An important implication of this is that, in an ethic of care, "we are not obliged to summon the 'I must' if there is no possibility of completion in the other" (p. 86). The reciprocal gift of the cared-for does not have to be the same as the gift given by the one-caring, but consists, rather, of "the freedom, creativity, and spontaneous disclosure of the cared-for that manifest themselves under the nurture of the one-caring" (p. 74).

In the ethic of hospitality as I will discuss it, the core of the gesture of hospitality is leaving a place for an *unknown* other, who may or may not take that place and who may or may not reciprocate. "The other may come, or he may not. I don't want to programme him, but rather to leave a place for him to come if he comes. It is the ethic of hospitality" (Derrida, 1997/2001, p. 83). As I will discuss in more detail in the next section, hospitality as an ethical ideal is unconditional, and the quality of hospitality given does not depend in any way on reciprocity – and how could it, if hospitality includes leaving a place for the stranger *who may not arrive?*

Hospitality

I have posited as the main aim of education that students learn *how to live well with and for others in just institutions* (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 172), and I have framed "living well" as "living hospitably." I have made mention of hospitality as the receiving of and responding to an other, and have stated that I consider "hospitality" the emblematic concept uniting all forms of openness to the incoming of an other. Now I must examine the concept of hospitality in greater detail, to explain these provisional definitions. In the course of this inquiry, I will identify three tensions or *aporias* which leave the concept of "hospitality" itself ajar. The first is the *aporia* of having to know a guest one cannot ask to know; the second is the *aporia* of having to protect the home one must surrender to the guest; and the third is the *aporia* of reciprocating outside a paradigm of reciprocity.

Knowing a guest one cannot ask to know

The common-sense understanding of hospitality involves the receiving of a

guest by a host. But this guest may have arrived as a result of the host's invitation, or

may have turned up unannounced. Receiving an expected visitor is not quite the same

as receiving an unexpected visitor. Derrida (2002c) speaks of *invitational* and *visitational*

hospitality (p. 357). Extending hospitality to an invited guest is generally not a

particularly demanding task. The guest is known and expected, and the risks of

invitational hospitality are small. The guest who visits unannounced, however, presents

a different situation. In fact, the person who shows up without invitation may not be

recognized as "guest" at all, but rather as "stranger." And yet, true hospitality requires

that I receive precisely this unknown guest, this stranger.

> The *invitation* maintains control and receives within the limits of the
> possible; it is not thus pure hospitality, it rations hospitality, it still
> belongs to the order of the judicial and the political; *visitation*, on the
> other hand, appeals to a pure and unconditional hospitality that
> welcomes whatever arrives as impossible. The only possible hospitality,
> as pure hospitality, must thus do the impossible. (Derrida, 2002c, pp. 400-
> 401, n. 8)

This distinction between hospitality in the order of the judicial and the political

(hospitality of the law), and pure and conditional hospitality (hospitality beyond the

law), is based on a distinction between an economy of exchange and an economy of the

gift. In an economy of exchange, hospitality is extended with the expectation of

reciprocity. In an economy of the gift, however, hospitality is extended unconditionally

and the recipient of the gift of hospitality is not expected to reciprocate. Nor does the

pure gift of hospitality depend on the host's recognition of the guest as a worthy

recipient: hospitality is extended regardless of who the arriving stranger [*arrivant*] is,

and without asking her or him to make her or himself known. Derrida (1997/2000)

writes that,

> absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not
> only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status
> of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous
> other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them
> arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them
> either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (p. 25)

This brings me to a first *aporia* of hospitality. Derrida (1993) explains an *aporia* as a

difficulty of passing, a "stuckness," an impasse, a place from which it is impossible to

move on. Derived from the Greek *aporos*, impassable, it means without (*a-*) passage

(*poros*). The *aporia*, by definition, is not porous, not easily permeable.

The first *aporia* of hospitality is the "stuckness" in offering hospitality to an

unknown other.

> On the one hand, hospitality does not seem to be hospitality if what we
> are welcoming is not a stranger, a real guest, someone whom we have
> not already identified or identified with. ... On the other hand, the
> stranger must be welcomed – in particular ways, by means of particular
> conventions, within a particular language. To be effective, that is, to have
> a genuine effect, to be a real welcome, the guest must be identified, and if
> not called out to or greeted by name at least selected, picked out, *invited*.
> (Naas, 2003, p. 159)

For hospitality to be a pure gift, it ought to be unconditional, hence offered to a stranger who has not been asked to make her or himself known. But for hospitality to be a gift offered and addressed to the other, the other cannot be treated as just anyone, as *n'importe qui*. Hospitality ought to be a personal address, for which I have to know whom I am addressing. When Derrida (1997) was asked to address this *aporia*, he responded,

> Hospitality consists in doing everything to address oneself to the other; it consists in granting him, indeed in asking him, his name, all the while trying to prevent this question from becoming a 'condition,' a police interrogation, an inquest or an investigation, or a simple border check. The difference is subtle and yet fundamental, a question that is asked on the threshold of one's home [*chez-soi*] and on the threshold between inflections. (p. 18, as cited in Naas, p. 160)

Protecting the home one must surrender to the guest

Extending hospitality requires having, or having access to, a space in which the guest can be received. The host receives the guest in her or his home, whether this "home" is a room, house, hometown or homeland. Thus, hospitality requires that the host both have a home and risk it by opening it to the other. The question one is left with is phrased by Caputo (2000) as:

> how to welcome the other into my home, how to be a good 'host,' which means how both to make the other at home while still retaining the home as mine, since inviting others to stay in someone else's home is not what we mean by hospitality or the gift. Hospitality ... means to put your home at risk, which simultaneously requires both having a home and risking it. (p. 57)

This brings me to a second *aporia*, a second impossibility of true hospitality. As I have said, true hospitality goes beyond the laws of hospitality. Extending hospitality only to the friendly guest, the well-mannered guest, the guest in whom we recognize ourselves, is not enough. True hospitality is a gift given without guarantees or expectations. But paradoxically, absolute hospitality annihilates itself: hospitality that goes beyond the law is a gesture in which the host surrenders the home to the guest. The host is thus no longer host, hence is no longer in a position to offer hospitality. Therefore, hospitality is necessarily a self-limiting (hence imperfect) gesture.

> A host is a host only if he owns the place, and only if he holds on to this ownership, if one *limits* the gift. When the host says to the guest, 'Make yourself at home,' this is a self-limiting invitation. 'Make yourself at home' means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property. (Caputo, in Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 111)

The host expects certain things from the guest so that the space into which the guest is welcomed is preserved, and so that the host can continue to extend hospitality. Expectations placed on the guest, however, limit the hospitality extended to the guest. Derrida (1997/2000) points out that, paradoxically,

> one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one's own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one's own hospitality. ... Anyone who encroaches on my 'at home,' ... on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. (pp. 53-54)

My own memories of having been a terrible host illustrate this point. In my early

twenties, after a relationship break-up and a brief stay with my parents, I moved into a

small bachelor suite in Rotterdam. In an attempt to gain a sense of autonomy in my life,

I clung to this small space: it was mine and mine alone. When an old school friend from

Canada called to say she was in the country, I only thought about how great it would be

to see her. It did not occur to me what it would mean to have her stay in my newly

found space for several days. I found out very quickly that I could not offer my home to

her as a free space where she could be herself, and come and go as she pleased. I did

not give her a key and constantly tried to erase the marks of her presence: if she left a

glass on the sink, I washed it; if she left a towel askew, I straightened it. I did not realize

it at the time, but my defensiveness of the new identities "single" and "independent,"

in which I was not yet at home, played out in a defensiveness of my physical space.

There certainly are ways to be a better host, but there is, finally, no way out (*a-poros*) of

the tension between, on the one hand, being too hospitable and jeopardizing one's

position of host and one's ability to extend further hospitality, and, on the other, not

being hospitable enough.

Reciprocating outside a paradigm of reciprocity

I have mentioned that absolute hospitality is offered not in an economy of

exchange, but in an economy of the gift. The distinction between the economy of

exchange and the economy of the gift, however, is not a simple dichotomy. As Paul

Ricoeur (1996) has pointed out, these two economies should be held in "living tension" (p. 35):

> Without the corrective of the commandment to love, the golden rule would be constantly drawn in the direction of a utilitarian maxim whose formula is *Do ut des*: I give *so that* you will give. The rule 'Give *because* it has been given you' corrects the 'in order that' of the utilitarian maxim and saves the golden rule from an always possible perverse interpretation. (pp. 35-36)

Applying this to the question of hospitality, one might say "Give hospitality because it has been given you," or, "Receive the guest because you have been received as guest." Although there is reciprocity in this command, it is a *retro*spective rather than *pro*spective reciprocity, and the gift of hospitality is extended from the host's recognition of indebtedness rather than with an expectation of reciprocity. The third *aporia* of hospitality is that the host must offer hospitality to reciprocate for having been received, while hospitality must be an unconditional gift, given outside a paradigm of reciprocity.

Derrida (1997/1999) reminds us that

> the *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers *in* his own home; he receives it *from* his own home – which, in the end, does not belong to him. The *hôte* as host is a guest. (p. 41)

True hospitality can only be offered by a host who recognizes her or his indebtedness – to others from whom s/he has received hospitality, but even to the guest to whom the host is about to offer hospitality. Derrida underscores this when he writes that the person who extends a welcome "is first welcomed by the face of the other whom he means to welcome" (p. 99).

Lambros Kamperidis (1990) draws on biblical sources to underscore that "only when we know how to behave as guests will we have the honor to act as hosts" (pp. 10-11). The duty to extend hospitality to the stranger is based on the belief that the stranger is "God-sent, therefore sacred" (p. 10), and on the recognition that the host shares with the stranger the condition of being a guest on earth and a recipient of life (p. 5). It is worth noting that "host," "guest," and "ghost" all derived from the same Indo-European root ghosti-s. The notion that the stranger ought to be received as guest because s/he is God-sent – sent from the other side of life, from the world of the dead – is also found in the idea of the ghost. Derrida (2002d) quotes studies of the South-American Tupinamba tribe, where guests are received with tears. This welcoming ritual has been "associated with a cult of the dead, the stranger being hailed like a *revenant*" (p. 359).

The absolute, unknown, anonymous visitor may turn out to be a friendly guest (or friendly ghost) – but the host may also be met with hostility. Both the Latin and the Greek linguistic predecessors of "hospitality," *hospitalitas* and *xenía,* contain this tension.

The Latin *hospitalitas* is hospitality extended to a *hospes* – a stranger, who may be amicable or inimical. Likewise, the Greek *xenía* is extended to the *xenos*, the unknown and foreign person. Derrida (2002d) uses the term *hostipitality* to highlight this tension, and quotes the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which notes "the almost universal semantic link between 'stranger, enemy' (cf. Latin *hostis*) and '*hôte*, customer'"(as cited in Derrida, pp. 401-402).

I have said that hospitality requires having a home, and in the literal sense of a flesh and blood guest showing up at a brick and mortar dwelling, this is not hard to see. But the opening up of the home can also be seen metaphorically; living hospitably requires having a home in one's life, where that "home" is not a tangible place, but rather the being-at-home-with-oneself. The French expression for home, *chez-soi*, illustrates this beautifully. *Chez-soi* literally means at or with oneself. It serves as a plain descriptor of location ("Where were you last night?" "*J'étais chez moi*," "I was at home"), but also as an indication of feeling or atmosphere: "*Je ne me sentais pas chez moi, là*," "I didn't feel at home there." Both senses of *chez-soi* are at play in my exploration of the concept and conceptions of identity as *chez-soi*.

Identity

Although a considerable part of this thesis will be spent discussing various answers to the question What is identity?, I can give some clues here as to the perspective I will take. In a basic philosophical sense, identity is a concept, where a

concept is "a general notion or idea, an abstraction that represents or signifies the unifying principle of various distinct particulars" (Barrow, 1981, p. 7). For instance, if we consider several red objects, what these objects have in common is *redness*. Likewise, if we consider several instances in which distinct objects are identical to each other, what these instances of things-being-identical have in common is *identity*. In logic, identity is defined as "the relation each thing bears just to itself" and the identity of two objects or ideas is constituted by their sharing of all properties (Wagner, 1999, p. 415).

I will consider "identity" to mean something both more general, and more specific than the concept unifying particular instances of things-being-identical. More specific, because I will be concerned with personal identities, rather than the identities of words, objects, or of communities, nations or other collectivities. More general, because I will treat "identity" as a general notion or idea, or what in postmodern parlance might be called a "human construct," thus loosening (but not breaking) the connection to things (or persons) being identical. In the section "Identity and the self" below I will further tease out this connection between "identity" and "things-being-identical." Because the word "identity" has taken on such specific meanings with regards to personhood, some (e.g., Corey, 2004) now use the word "identicality" to refer to the phenomenon of identity in the logical sense (things being the same). Some philosophers (e.g., Elspeth Probyn and Gert Biesta) use the term "singularity" to refer to personal identity and in Chapter 3 I will address this term in more detail.

I will consider personal identity as concept (i.e. an idea conceived by the human mind) or construct (i.e. an idea constructed by the human mind), not as substance or tangible object of study. In other words, identity is something that is attributed to the person (both by others and by the person her- or himself) rather than something the person can truly be said to "have" or "possess." Personal identity is what we are after when we ask, "Who is this person?" and implicit in this question are the actions of that person: "Who is this person who is speaking, walking, meditating, eating, ...?" Put differently, identity is a person's framework for acting, and being perceived as acting, in the world.

Identity and the self

From the preceding section it should be clear that my view of identity is not based on an assumption of an innate soul or self. Yet the concept of self frequently creeps up in discourse on identity, and there seems to be a meaningful difference between the concept of "self" and the concept of "identity." On an intuitive level, the self seems more inward oriented, whereas identity is outward oriented, an interface for acting in the world. In order to explain how I will use the terms "identity" and "self," I will take an excursion into the field of cognitive neuroscience, a field in which terms

and distinctions have been developed which help me position myself in the discourse around the "self" and "identity."[7]

Two of the terms which I have found particularly useful are "core consciousness" and "extended consciousness," as discussed by Antonio Damasio (1999). One of Damasio's central claims is that

> consciousness is not a monolith, at least not in humans: it can be separated into simple and complex kinds, and the neurological evidence makes the separation evident. The simplest kind, which I call *core consciousness*, provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment – now – and about one place – here. ... On the other hand, the complex kind of consciousness, which I call *extended consciousness* and of which there are many levels and grades, provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self – an identity and a person, you or me, no less – and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it. (p. 16)

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[7] In recent years, some of the barriers to interdisciplinary work have been lowered or have dropped away, allowing exciting new connections between, for instance, philosophy of mind, psychoanalysis and neuroscience, producing such fields as neurophilosophy (e.g., Kathleen Akins) and neuropsychoanalysis (e.g., Mark Solms). Philosophical discourse can raise questions that can be taken up by neuroscience, and the findings of neuroscientists can help resolve psychoanalytic enigmas. Questions of self and identity have long been considered off-limits for "serious" science, because concepts such as self, identity, and the closely related concept of consciousness are *subjective* mental phenomena, not objectively observable brain processes. As Damasio (1999) notes, "Studying consciousness was simply not the thing to do before you made tenure, and even after you did it was looked upon with suspicion. Only in recent years has consciousness become a somewhat safer topic of scientific inquiry" (p. 7). And Solms and Turnbull (2002) agree that "in the past century, there was an unfortunate division between the subject matter of neuropsychology and the lived reality of the mind" (p. 1). Now, neuroscience and other disciplines such as psychoanalysis or philosophy can inform one another, rather than be reduced to one another.

Solms and Turnbull (2002) use two different terms, "simple awareness" and "reflexive awareness" (p. 82), which closely parallel Damasio's "core consciousness" and "extended consciousness." Solms and Turnbull note that studies of patients with damage to the *corpus callosum* (the tissue that connects the two brain hemispheres) show that reflexive awareness "is intimately connected with the left cerebral hemisphere and therefore with words (or, rather, 'inner speech')" (pp. 82-83). Damasio also acknowledges that "language is a major contributor to the high-level form of consciousness which … I call extended consciousness" (p. 108). It is especially extended or reflexive consciousness that interests me in my exploration of identity. The term "reflexive" consciousness illustrates the difference between a person capable of subjectivity, and a person capable not only of subjectivity but also of making that subjectivity an *object* of reflection. As will become clear in the section below on discourse, the fact that language plays an important role in reflexive or extended consciousness (and not in core consciousness) is highly salient in my discussion of the concept of identity.

More relevant even to my inquiry than Damasio's discussion of levels of consciousness, is his linking of consciousness to the concept of self. Damasio (1999) writes,

> The sense of self which emerges in core consciousness is the *core self*, a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts. Our traditional notion of self, however, is linked to the idea of identity and corresponds to a nontransient collection

of unique facts and ways of being which characterize a person. My term
for that entity is the *autobiographical self.* (p. 17)

The term "autobiographical" resonates with the narrative conceptions of identity which

I will explore in Chapter 2. Solms and Turnbull (2002) explain that the development of

autobiographical self relies on what in neuropsychology is known as "'episodic

memory' (memories of previous instances of the self in relation to objects)" (p. 97). The

term "episodic," like "autobiographical," points in the direction of a narrative ordering

of subjective experiences.

Identity and horizons of significance

Before providing the definitions of "self" and "identity" which I will use

throughout this dissertation, let me position myself in another part of the conversation

that revolves around the concepts of "self" and "identity": the way the concepts are

used by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Taylor (1989) writes that "we speak

of people as selves, meaning they are beings of the requisite depth and complexity to

have an identity ... (or to be struggling to find one)" (p. 32). This suggests that self is a

prerequisite for identity, much like Damasio's "core self" is a prerequisite for

"autobiographical self." By "self," however, Taylor is not referring to something like

Damasio's core self, but to something much more specific: a moral self. He specifies that

"we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and

find an orientation to the good" (p. 34). So if the self is already so specific, and guides

our actions, how is it distinct from identity? This is not always clear from Taylor's own

use of the terms. For instance, when he writes that "what I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me" (p. 34), it seems that self and identity are synonyms. But elsewhere Taylor does specify what exactly he means by identity:

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (p. 27)

So, having established that people *are* selves and *have* identities, it now becomes clear that self-definition takes place against the backdrop of one's identity. This is indeed consistent with one the central lines of argument Taylor develops in *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991), in which he sets out to retrieve the moral ideal of authenticity or "self-choice" (p. 39). In order to choose and be an authentic *self*, one has to recognize one's "horizon of significance" (p. 38). This horizon or "backdrop against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense" (p. 34) is what Taylor calls *identity*. One's history is central to this identity, and only once one recognizes this history can one choose an authentic self.

Damasio's distinction between the core self and the autobiographical self, and Taylor's distinction between the self and the identity-horizon, both inform and are different from my definition of the central concepts "self" and "identity." I agree with Damasio that it is useful to distinguish between a basic sense that *I am not you* (core self)

and a more elaborate conception of what makes me *me* (autobiographical self), but am

concerned it may be confusing to use the word "self" to refer to both. I agree with

Taylor that it is useful to distinguish between the choices I make for myself, and the

context within which these choices are meaningful, but I prefer to refer to the latter not

as "identity," but rather with terms such as thrownness (Heidegger's (1927/1962)

Geworfenheit), facticity, historicity and context.

I will use "self" to refer to a person's *subjective experience of being-in-the-world*,

something closer to Damasio's "core self" than to Taylor's "moral self." Self is the

feeling or perception that *I am me*, whereas identity is the conception of *who I am*.

Whereas my self gives me the basic distinction between me and not-me (self and other),

it is identity that provides content, that explains *in what ways I am different* from others.

Identity emerges in participation in the social, discursive context, and mediates that

participation. What I call "identity" is similar to Damasio's "autobiographical self," in

that in my use of the terms, having a self is a necessary (but not sufficient) requirement

for having an identity, much like in Damasio's use of the terms having a core self is a

necessary (but not sufficient) requirement for having an autobiographical self.

Identity is clearly traversed by several conceptual lines of force (Derrida,

1998/2000, p. 25). If one conceptual distinction can be made between self and identity,

another can be made between identity-as-sameness and identity-as-selfhood. To further

tease apart the traversing and intersecting lines of identity-as-sameness and identity-as-

selfhood, I now turn briefly to Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the concept of identity. This

discussion will form the backdrop for the perspective on identity I will pursue in this

dissertation: identity-as-difference.

Identity, selfhood, and sameness

Ricoeur (1991b; 1990/1992) proposes that in attempts to untangle the notion of

personal identity, many difficulties arise as a result of a lack of distinction between the

conception of identity as *sameness* (idem-identity) and the conception of identity as

selfhood (ipse-identity). The word "identity" is derived from the Late Latin *identitas*,

which comes from the from Latin *idem* (the same), influenced by the Late Latin *essentitas*

(being), and *identidem* (repeatedly). This etymology suggests that the identity of a

person could be said to refer to that person repeatedly being the same, or repeatedly

being herself or himself. Although the subtle shift from "being the same" to "being

oneself" seems innocuous enough, Ricoeur has emphasized that they refer to quite

different uses and meanings of the term identity. Being the same, or "sameness," is

indeed derived from the Latin term *idem*. However, for the other meaning of identity,

"selfhood," we have to refer to the Latin *ipse*. Ricoeur introduces the conception of

identity as narrative to resolve the tension between identity in the sense of sameness

and identity in the sense of selfhood.[8]

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[8] I will discuss Ricoeur's conception of identity as narrative in more detail in Chapter 2.

Although I appreciate Ricoeur's distinction between identity-as-sameness and identity-as-selfhood, I believe these terms underemphasize the central role of difference in identity formation. In the simplest sense, what makes me *me* is what distinguishes me from everyone else: the collection of ways in which I differ from others is my identity. This is an understanding of identity-as-uniqueness which is recognizable in the conception of identity used in law enforcement: fingerprints, iris patterns and DNA all help establish the unique identity of a suspect. But I will consider identity-as-difference in another way: my identity is not only difference from other persons, it is also *difference from myself.*

In taking this approach, I am, to borrow Patti Lather's (1996) words, proceeding "according to deconstructive moves" (p. 526). In the methodological section below I will speak to deconstruction further, but in theorizing identity as difference rather than sameness or selfhood I am conducting "an oppositional reading within the confines of a binary system," by inverting the binaries self/other and same/other (p. 526). In Chapter 3 I will explain that in a poststructuralist reading, identity is conceived as *différance* rather than as difference, but for now I will defer this difference between *différance* and difference. Some readers might be uncomfortable with the emphasis on difference; after all, if all we are to (or rather from) each other is different, do we have any ties? Is there any common ground left? Judith Butler has asked as much, and in Chapter 3 I will address the question of commonality and universality in the conception of identity as difference.

Identity and discourse

I stated above that identity, as I use the term, emerges in participation in the social, discursive context, and mediates that participation. It is important to underscore that I take personal identity to be discursive (i.e., of discourse), by which I mean that identity is constituted by discursive processes such as reflection and interpretation. By discourse I mean "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988/1997, p. 759). In other words, a discourse consists not only of a particular body of signs (e.g., words), but also of the very categories and limits of intelligibility that make thinking, speaking and writing through that body of signs possible at all. Sarup (1998), drawing on the work of Foucault, explains discourse as a practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks (p. 64), thus emphasizing performativity as discursive feature. I will address this performative nature of discourse further in Chapter 3. For the moment, I would like to emphasize that discourse is a language practice that is tied up with power, and that discourse exists only within a particular historical and cultural context.

Identity and education

Probyn (1996) has laid the charge that, for some theorists, "identity has become a set of implacable statements that suppress, at times, questions about what identity really is for" (p. 9). I agree with Probyn that the emphasis on identity can suggest a recentering of the subject, and does not always answer the question: why does identity

matter? In my view, identity matters because how one conceives of oneself greatly influences how one acts in the world. Every person speaks from certain positions, and perceives the world through certain lenses. The view from nowhere, and the unmediated view, do not exist.[9] Identity is about both positions and lenses, and one's understanding of these positions and lenses influences how one acts in the world. This means that although this thesis is largely about identity, identity is, in the end, not what I am interested in, nor what I claim education should be interested in. Identity is a means to an end, an end which can be formulated generally as living well with and for each other in the world, and which I have connected with the metaphor of hospitality.

But, one might wonder, what makes the question of identity construction important *for education*? As Usher and Edwards (1994) point out, current educational practices are rooted in the modernist tradition, that is to say, they have been set up with the intention of shaping children into rational and autonomous individuals. "Thus education is allotted a key role in the forming and shaping of subjectivity and identity, the task of making people into particular kinds of subject" (p. 25). David Hansen (2004) agrees that education is not merely about "the acquisition of information," but rather about "the development of personhood" (p. 134). In other words, the conception of identity that is at play in education matters because education is one of the social arrangements in which identity construction takes place, is influenced, and, at times, made an explicit objective. Phrased differently, identity can be conceived as *text*: as

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[9] Cf. Thomas Nagel's (1986) *The View from Nowhere*.

structure which both receives and produces signification (Usher & Edwards, p. 18).

Educational practices, which are highly discursive, play an important role in inscribing

the text of identity.

Methodology and theoretical framework

This dissertation is conceptual, that is to say, it is not based on quantitative or

qualitative research. It is not an in-depth study and interpretation of the work of one

theorist, but rather an essay, an argument for which I will use material provided by

various theorists. I wish to emphasize that I will make claims about certain *texts*

produced and released by authors such as Derrida, Ricoeur, and Macintyre, rather than

about the thoughts, ideas, intentions, or oeuvres of these theorists. As Bennington

(1991/1993) explains,

> Faced with [the demand to put things (back) in their context in order to
> understand them], the point is not at all to claim the liberty to read out of
> context, which would be meaningless (one always reads in several
> contexts), but to interrogate the coherence of the concept of context
> deployed in this way (p. 85).

Between the various texts produced and released by theorists such as Derrida, Ricoeur,

and Macintyre, differences and changes in tone, topic, and emphasis can be observed.

But each text both falls short of and exceeds the intentions of its author, and is

connected with other texts in ways that cannot be determined fully. Or in Derrida's

(1972/1988) words: a context is characterized by "structural non-saturation" (p. 3). I

propose that it is possible and legitimate to attend to and respect texts without taking

into account the entire oeuvre of the author – not least because an oeuvre remains open to meaning yet to come, and cannot reach a stage of closure or entirety.

I am, in other words, faced with two modes of writing and reading. One assumes the necessity of doing justice to the philosophical project of the author, and of placing each text within this context; the other assumes precisely the impossibility of doing such justice and determining such context. I have chosen to work from the latter perspective. This does not mean that I read and write arbitrarily or opportunistically, but rather that I respect the text as text, and that I recognize that a final determination of its significance within a context will remain elusive.

It is fair to say that *poststructuralism* provides both my theoretical framework and my methodology. My perspective is often *deconstructive*, and I follow John Caputo (1987; 2000) in thinking of deconstruction as *radical hermeneutics*. Now let me explain each of these related theoretical perspectives in more detail.

Poststructuralism

I could say that what makes this dissertation poststructuralist is that it draws on the work of contemporary theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, who are considered poststructuralists. This may seem like a poor excuse for an answer, a deferral of an answer, but deferral is a central notion in poststructuralist thought. In order to highlight deferral and some of the other central features of poststructuralist

theory, let me engage in another deferral and first highlight some of the central features of structuralist thought.

Structuralism is the umbrella term for a range of research in philosophy, literary theory, anthropology, psychoanalysis and so on, principally in France from the 1950s through the 1970s. Structuralism is generally held to derive its organizing principles from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the Swiss founder of structural linguistics (Allison, 1999a/b). In structural linguistics, language is viewed as composed of signs, and each sign consists of both a signifier, the carrier of meaning such as the sound (phonic signifier) or the black marks on a page (graphic signifier), and a signified, the corresponding meaning. There is no necessary connection between the sound element or other carrier, and the meaning. This connection is based on human convention. According to De Saussure, meaning is differential. "To understand, say, the meaning of the signifier green ... is to know how to draw practical distinctions between green and not-green. ... Meaning is relational and the primary relation for analysis is the relation of difference" (Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 1998, p. 17). In other words, there are no absolutes in language, no necessary connections between words and what words refer to in the world. The differential relations between signs, however, are not disordered, but form determinate structures, such as binary oppositions.

Poststructuralism is not anti-structuralism; it does not deny all insights of

structuralism and shares with it a concern with difference. However, poststructuralist

theorists point out the limitations of trying to define language in determinate structures.

Poststructuralist theorists are mistrustful of universalistic claims about structure and of

teleological claims about the direction of history. (The latter mistrust often manifests

itself in critiques of Hegel's work.)

In poststructuralist theory, more attention is typically paid to the signifier and

less to signified; the signified remains deferred, is always "yet to come." Derrida

(1967/1976) writes that "the signified always already functions as a signifier" (p. 7), and

Bennington (1991/1993) explains this by saying that "in the system of differences that

language is, every signifier functions by referring to other signifiers, without ever

arriving at a signified" (p. 33). The way to any stable meaning takes a "perpetual

detour" (Sarup, 1998, p. 3), and resignification remains possible. As J. M. Coetzee (2003)

has his protagonist Elizabeth Costello lecture, "The word-mirror is broken, irreparably,

it seems. . . . The words on the page will no longer stand up and be counted, each

proclaiming 'I mean what I mean!'" (p. 19). What she suggests is that words (signifiers)

do not unequivocally represent a meaning (signified) and external reality, and that the

slippage and playfulness that characterize much contemporary writing illustrate this

proliferation of signifiers and deferral of the signified. Words can only be interpreted

through the detour of other words, but, of course, these other words send the meaning-

seeking interpreter on another detour, and so on. Soon, it seems as if there is no escape from text.

One phrase which has certainly informed my writing is Derrida's (1967/1976) well-known and much debated claim "il n'y a pas de hors-texte," which is translated by Spivak as "There is nothing outside of the text" and "there is no outside-text" (p. 158). Some believe that Derrida claims here that all there is, is the world of language, but this is not what "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" suggests to me. If Derrida claims that we can never separate experience from language, this does not mean that there is no experience at all, but rather that we do not have any non-discursive access to experience. Derrida (2002a) himself also denies that his claim means that all there is, is language:

> On the one hand, I always think it necessary to recall the dimension of language, and, at the same time, essentially what I do and what begins with a deconstruction of logocentrism consists in, and calls for, a beyond-language, or an outside-language. Often my work is interpreted as the work of someone who says, in the end, everything is language, there is only language, there are no things, there is nothing beyond language; this is an absolute linguisticism. A very paradoxical reception of work that begins by doing the opposite. But I think that the two need to be done. One must constantly recall a certain irreducability of the textual or discursive dimension of language, and, at the same time, recall that there is in the textual something that is not discursive, a trace that is not linguistic. (p. 33)

Spivak's translation "there is nothing outside of the text" does nothing to dispel the "linguisticist" interpretation of "il n'y a pas the hors-texte." Instead, I would propose "there is nothing that escapes text," or "there is no extra-textual realm."

The reader may have noticed that for my argument I draw on texts known as "philosophical," as well as texts known as "literary," and texts written by me, which could be considered "testimony." Should I not make a distinction regarding the status or at least truth-value of these texts? Because of the questioning of the referentiality of the sign, the truth-value of any text is open for discussion in a poststructuralist approach. Derrida's own texts are often called literary, but this does not make them any less philosophical. Boundaries between genres such as "literature" or "philosophy" cannot be drawn with permanence or certainty.

> No exposition, no discursive form is intrinsically or essentially literary before and outside of the function it is assigned or recognized by a right, that is a specific intentionality inscribed directly on the social body. The same exposition may be taken to be literary here, in one situation or according to given conventions, and non-literary there. This is the sign that literarity is not an intrinsic property of this or that discursive event. (Derrida, 1998/2000, p. 28)

In this dissertation I use literary texts in non-literary ways, while at the same time my philosophical writing may be considered literary, depending on the situation in which it is read.

Another characteristic of poststructuralist philosophy, which will be recognizable in this dissertation, is a "decentering" of the subject. The speaking and acting subject, the "I" or "self," has been at the centre of modernist philosophy. The subject has been considered a rational agent, striving for independence. Poststructuralist philosophers ask the self to move over and place the other at the centre

of their theorizing. They emphasize the subject's dependence on the other, and on the other's language, not as a temporary limitation to be overcome, but rather as a necessary condition for the subject's very emergence as subject.[10] The "other" in poststructuralist philosophy is not necessarily a person, but rather anything that lies *across a border*. Notable examples of otherness are death (across the border of life), and the Unconscious (across the border of the conscious mind).[11]

Like in analytic philosophy, language plays a central role in poststructuralist philosophy. However, in analytic conceptual analysis, meanings are considered to be stable and conceptual demarcations to be clear; poststructuralist philosophers contest both of these assertions. Moreover, some analytic philosophers have been adamant that axiological questions are not in the purview of philosophy. In poststructuralist philosophy, however, ethical questions are not eschewed, and in the work of Derrida and Butler, they seem to have gained prominence in recent years.

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[10] Although his work does not take centre stage in this dissertation, the writing of Emmanuel Levinas (e.g., *Totality and Infinity* (1961/1969), *Otherwise than Being* (1974/1981)), which has informed some of the writings of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, exemplifies the centering of the other and the decentering of the subject.

[11] The centrality of the concept of identity might suggest I would take a more explicitly psychoanalytic perspective. Psychoanalysis informs my writing indirectly, through its influence on some of the authors on whose work I draw, such as Derrida and Butler, but I do not seek to provide any comprehensive psychoanalytic reading of the concept of identity. Psychoanalysis proposes critical perspectives for understanding human psyches, perspectives that are worth considering even for theorists who do not locate themselves squarely in one of the (Kleinian, Lacanian, etc.) psychoanalytic camps. Butler (2000b), for instance, makes use of the Lacanian concept of the "constitutive lack" in subject formation, but questions the connection of this concept to an "originary trauma" (p. 142). Likewise, I make use of certain psychoanalytic concepts, such as the Unconscious, without necessarily taking on other elements of the psychoanalytic theories in which these concepts have been developed and used.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is not a philosophical system or school of thought, nor is it a

technique or methodology with clearly discernible or repeatable steps. A deconstructive

approach or mode of thinking typically takes aim at the binary opposites that have

structured language and philosophy, and "gets going by attempting to present as

primary what metaphysics says is secondary" (Bennington, 1993, p. 42). It seeks not to

destroy its object, but rather to make "the constructed character appear as such ..."

(Derrida, 2002a, p. 16).

The concept of hospitality also informs the deconstructive methodology with

which I explore conceptions of identity. Derrida (2002d) writes, "hospitality – this is a

name or an example of deconstruction" (p. 364), and I propose that deconstruction is

properly characterized as a practice of conceptual hospitality. Through deconstructive

critique, conceptual boundaries are shown to be more permeable than might appear at

first glance; concepts are not monolithic, but rather concatenations of past significations,

which remain open to future resignification. In other words: concepts are ajar, open to

the incoming of other concepts. Paul de Man (1979) writes that "a deconstruction

always has for its target to reveal the existence of hidden articulations and

fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities" (p. 249, as cited in Derrida, 2002e

p. 124). Deconstruction does not inflict philosophical force on concepts from the outside,

but rather seeks the fault lines within the concepts themselves, and activates the

internal tensions. By showing the necessary openness and vulnerability of concepts, deconstruction encourages conceptual hospitality.

Whereas some would argue that deconstruction signals the end of philosophical critique, or has at least placed itself outside its tradition, I agree with Samuel Wheeler's (2000) assessment in *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* that deconstruction is legitimately understood as a form of philosophical critique itself. Derrida (2002a) has said on this point that "for what interests [him] in the name of deconstruction to be possible, philosophical culture must remain alive and well. Deconstruction inhabits it and is inseparable from it" (p. 15). In Chapter 5 I will elaborate the educational implications of this perspective, in particular in relation to curriculum and "the canon."

Radical hermeneutics

If one philosophical tradition in (or at least on the edge of) which deconstruction can be situated is poststructuralism, another is hermeneutics, which can be defined as "the art or theory of interpretation, as well as a type of philosophy that starts with questions of interpretation" (Bohman, 1999, p. 377). Where in the past, "hermeneutics" referred mostly to biblical exegesis, today it refers to interpretation more generally. I will follow Shaun Gallagher's (1992) distinction between four hermeneutical approaches. In "conservative hermeneutics" he places theorists such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, who

... maintain that through correct methodology and hard work the interpreter should be able (a) to break out of her own historical epoch in order to understand the author as the author intended, and/or (b) to transcend historical limitations altogether in order to reach universal, or at least objective, truth (p. 9).

"Moderate" hermeneuticists are authors such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, who "contend that no method can guarantee an absolutely objective interpretation of an author's work because, as readers, we are conditioned by prejudices of our own historical existence" (p. 9). Gallagher calls Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel "critical" hermeneuticists, who consider hermeneutics "a means of penetrating false consciousness, discovering the ideological nature of our belief systems, promoting distortion-free communication, and thereby accomplishing a liberating consensus" (p. 11). The fourth approach is "radical hermeneutics," with authors such as Jacques Derrida and John Caputo, who "believe that original meaning is unattainable and the best we can do is stretch the limits of language to break upon fresh insight" (p. 10).

Caputo (1987) proposes that Derrida "does not overthrow hermeneutics but drives it into its most extreme and radical formulation" (p. 4). The essential thing about Derrida's critique of presence, Caputo asserts, "is the opening it creates, not the resolution" (p. 5). Caputo sets out to show that radical hermeneutics "is not an exercise in nihilism, which wants to reduce human practices and institutions to rubble, but an attempt to face up to the bad news metaphysics has been keeping under cover" (p. 6). But not all agree that Derrida's deconstructive work can be brought under the umbrella

of hermeneutics, even in its most radical conception. Bennington (2000), for instance, insists that

> deconstruction is not a form of hermeneutics, however supposedly radical, for ... hermeneutics always proposes a convergent movement towards a unitary meaning (however much it may wish to respect ambiguity on the way), the word of God; deconstruction discerns a dispersive perspective in which there is no (one) meaning. (p. 11)

And Derrida (1986) himself seems to reject deconstruction being called hermeneutic: "By hermeneutic, I have designated the decoding of a sense or of a truth hidden in a text. I have opposed it to the transformative activity of interpretation" (as cited in Gallagher, 1992, p. 19).

So why does Caputo insist on using the term "hermeneutics" at all? In his later *More Radical Hermeneutics* (2000), Caputo explains that radical hermeneutics, the radicalization of hermeneutics, is driven not by teleology, the expectation of truth or true meaning, but rather by the assumption that truth or true meaning, if there is such a thing, is fundamentally inaccessible. In other words, radical hermeneutics assumes that the truth or true meaning that more traditional hermeneutics aims for is inaccessible – not because of inadequate interpreters, interpretive methods or some other circumstance, but structurally, necessarily inaccessible. "It is the absolute and unconditional secret, this structural blindness, that radicalizes hermeneutics ..." (p. 2). But given this structural unknowability, why still bother with hermeneutics at all? Because the human condition gives us no choice, Caputo seems to say; because we find

ourselves in an inescapable game of meaning-making and all we can do is play the game in the honest acknowledgement that we have no idea whether there is any end or point to the game. "For me hermeneutics simply means the necessity of interpretation. … The structural non-knowing, 'blindness,' or unreadability by which we are beset in virtue of the absolute secret is what gives us passion. We are driven by the passion of non-knowing" (p. 3).

As human agents, we have no choice but to act, but to decide what to do from one moment to the next, from one place to the next. That means we have to interpret, we have to come up with meanings and answers as the grounds for our decisions and actions – but a radically hermeneutic stance implies that we should never delude ourselves into believing that any answer or interpretation we have come up with is closed, finished, final. Importantly, this applies as much to interpretations of the world in which we live as it does to interpretations of ourselves-in-the-world: to our self-interpretations, our identity constructions. Radical hermeneutics is a hermeneutics that leaves every interpretation, every meaning and every identity *ajar*.

"Still, why do we have to call this 'hermeneutics,' even a radical hermeneutics? Why this nostalgia for this old word?" (Caputo, 2000, p. 55). First of all, because human facticity or thrownness, to use a Heideggerian term, is deeply discursive, inscribed with many layers of signifiers and signifieds – that is to say, "because we are up to our ears in historical, political, religious, sexual, and who knows what other sorts of structures

and networks, saturated by them ..." (p. 12). And secondly – and here Caputo takes his

cue from Gadamer – because any act of interpretation implies a meeting (a friendly

handshake? a collision? a kiss?) of mental frameworks, of horizons, and therefore

interpretation implies "putting ourselves at risk, putting our own meanings, our own

institutions, our own beliefs and practices ... [at] risk of the approach of the other, of the

neighbor and the stranger" (p. 56).[12] Radical hermeneutics, in its recognition that all

meaning is ajar, is a hospitable hermeneutics. It invites new interpretations, and accepts

that it cannot know what these interpretations will bring, or how they will change

established perspectives.

(In)compatibility

I have stated that I use poststructuralist thought to propose an alternative

conception of identity that disrupts and augments, but does not destroy, a conception of

identity as narrative. Some might object, however, that the ideas of Paul Ricoeur and

Jacques Derrida are so fundamentally incompatible that this is not a philosophically

viable proposal.

I side with Anthony Paul Kerby (1997), who argues that it is quite possible to

bring the ideas of Ricoeur and Derrida, and in fact of other narrative theorists and

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[12] Although in this dissertation I give the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer but the briefest of mentions, I must acknowledge the significance of his work for the development of philosophical hermeneutics. For a more in-depth understanding of the differences between the views of Gadamer and Derrida, see, for example, Michelfelder & Palmer's (1989) *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter.*

poststructuralists and semiotic scholars, in productive conversation with one another. This seems, in fact, entirely compatible with Ricoeur's (1990/1992) own observation that an apparent opposition can be "transformed into a fruitful tension" (p. 167). Kerby draws on both hermeneutics and semiotics to argue a position much like the one De Certeau (1984) has articulated: the self is "an 'implied subject' of narrative utterances" (Kerby, p. 125), and the self is the product not only of self-narration, but largely of being narrated by others and media culture (p. 134). Kerby stresses that the outcome of a conversation between more traditional hermeneutics on the one hand and semiotic and poststructuralist perspectives on the other, is "an overturning not of narrative activity as such as of narrative genres and traditional content" (p. 136). Different from, or at least more strongly than traditional hermeneuticists, however, he emphasizes that the self is not "a pre-linguistic given … but rather … as product of language" (p. 125).

In *Imagination and chance: The difference between the thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (1992), Leonard Lawlor examines the similarities and differences between Ricoeur's and Derrida's views on language and its mediating role in human thought and action. Although Lawlor does not explicitly address Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity or Derrida's views on questions of identity, he does analyze similarities and differences that are pertinent to this topic. Lawlor begins by pointing out that both Ricoeur and Derrida are interested in the discursive mediation of all relations between the (conscious) subject and the world.

Ricoeur's and Derrida's similar attempts at conceiving mediation are based on three insights. First, it is absolutely impossible for thought to achieve complete self-knowledge or self-understanding by means of intuitive self-reflection. ... Second (and this insight is implied by the first), it is absolutely necessary for thought to externalize itself in what both Ricoeur and Derrida have called signs. ... Third and most importantly, while mediation in signs makes truth possible, it also makes truth impossible. Linguistic mediation postpones the end of 'complete mediation' in which the origin would be recovered in all of its determinations. (pp. 1-2)

Ricoeur believes the subject cannot achieve self-understanding through intuitive self-reflection, but that mediation in the form of *distanciation* is required (Lawlor, p. 53). This distanciation is "the reflective, critical or suspicious moment within consciousness" and "establishes the relation and division between subject and object" (p. 53). For Ricoeur, the conscious subject can intend and achieve distanciation, a type of mediation leading to self-understanding. Herein lies an important difference with poststructuralist philosophers. As Foucault and Butler underscore, there is no unmediated subject: the subject itself emerges through subjection to the mediating forces of discourse. And Derrida emphasizes that distanciation is not something the subject can consciously intend or achieve; rather, the subject is "always already" removed from itself, never one with itself.

"As Ricoeur points out repeatedly, because discourse originates in the world, all expressions are about or refer back to the world" (Lawlor, p. 3). In Derrida's view, as he emphasizes with "il n'ya pas de hors-texte," there is no pre-discursive world and any reference is deferred, sent on an indefinite detour via other signs. "For Ricoeur,

immediacy precedes mediation; for Derrida, mediation precedes immediacy" (p. 6). Ricoeur (1975/1977) notes that the question of reference needs to be answered differently for literary texts than for many other texts. He writes that "certain texts, called literary, seem to constitute an exception to the reference requirement expressed by the preceding postulate [that existence is the foundation of identification]" (p. 219) "The production of discourse as 'literature'," he explains, "signifies very precisely that the relationship of sense to reference is suspended" (p. 220). Derrida not only calls into question the possibility of making clear distinctions between literary and other texts, but also emphasizes that other texts and other signifiers keep inserting themselves in any relation one tries to establish between signifier and signified, between sign and sense, and between sense and reference.

Derrida's "radical hermeneutics" (a term he would not espouse) takes the hermeneutic spiral of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and continues to make turns in that spiral long after Ricoeur has said, "Enough!" In Caputo's (2000) words, "Derrida sticks our head back into the text whenever [more traditional] hermeneutics comes up for the air of living speech, its eyes bulging and a look of panic on its face" (p. 54). Ricoeur (1990/1992) admits to saying "Enough!" when he asserts that self-attestation, "the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering ... remains the ultimate recourse against all suspicion ..." (p. 22). Ricoeur wants the person who attests to her or his agency and personhood to be treated with a certain trust rather than be subjected to further questioning about the constitution of her or his subjectivity and identity.

As credence without any guarantee, but also as trust greater than any suspicion, the hermeneutics of the self can claim to hold itself at an equal distance from the cogito exalted by Descartes and from the cogito that Nietzsche proclaimed forfeit. (p. 23)

The notions of selfhood and identity that Ricoeur puts forward are refined and do not posit foundational certainty, but in the end they seem to me to lack the courage of the poststructuralist understanding of the discursive constitution of the subject, its identity and agency. It is precisely this courage and understanding that I believe are needed for hospitable relations with the other.

CHAPTER II
NARRATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY

She realized that although Mr. Valmik depicted life as a sequence of accidents, there was nothing accidental about his expert narration. His sentences poured out like perfect seams, holding the garment of his story together without calling attention to the stitches. Was he aware of ordering the events for her? Perhaps not – perhaps the very act of telling created a natural design. Perhaps it was a knack that humans had, for cleaning up their untidy existences – a hidden survival weapon, like antibodies in the bloodstream. (Mistry, 1995, p. 654)

Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced my argument that an important aim of education should be to shape students' identities in such a way that they have a capacity for hospitality, and that the possibilities of educating for hospitable identity depend on the conception of identity underpinning the educative efforts. In this chapter I will examine conceptions of identity as narrative, and will show their limitations for educating for hospitable identity. Currently, identity is commonly conceived of as narrative, and narrative conceptions of identity range from a "folk paradigm" in which stories are taken to be a form of knowledge self-evidently significant in human lives, to more refined hermeneutical approaches that theorize narrative structuring and its role in human lives. I borrow the term "folk paradigm" from Nancy Fraser (2003), who discusses "folk paradigms of justice" and explains these as "sets of linked assumptions

about the causes of and remedies for injustice" (p. 11). The narrative "folk paradigm,"

as I will discuss it, is a set of linked assumptions about the narrative genesis and social

effects of personal identity.

I examine the narrative folk paradigm of identity because it is a powerful

commonsense conception, illustrated, for example, by the widespread practice of

journal-writing as a form of self-reflection, the use of narrative in therapy, and the

popularity of written and filmed biographies and autobiographies. The narrative

paradigm is certainly pervasive in education. One example is the expectation that

applicants to colleges or private schools can provide a narrative account of their

motivation. For contract renewals, promotions, and grant applications in higher

education, academics are required to produce a convincing narrative of the coherence

and direction in their work. Another example is the common elementary school practice

of asking students to write about what they did in their summer holiday. The

expectation here is typically that students order the events and experiences of the

summer into a story that shows more cohesion than mere chronology.

Informing but not limited to the narrative folk paradigm of identity are several

notable contemporary theorists who discuss narrative as a useful way for thinking

about identity. One of the theorists who promotes a narrative conception of identity is

Alisdair MacIntyre (1984), who writes that "it is because we all live out narratives in our

lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live

out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others" (p. 212). MacIntyre is committed to an Aristotelian notion of unitary virtue, and this "unity of a virtue in someone's life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole" (p. 205). The concept that provides this unitary understanding of human life and personhood is narrative. In other words, the narrative structure provides the glue that keeps together the disparate events and experiences of a human life. "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest" (p. 219).

Charles Taylor (1989) refers to MacIntyre's "quest" in his own discussion of the narrative conception of identity. The quest is a quest for a philosophical or, more specifically, moral framework, without which the human individual cannot have an "integral, that is undamaged, personhood" (p. 27). As I outlined in my first chapter, identity, for Taylor, "is the [moral] horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" (p. 27). Having such a moral horizon is one of the conditions for making sense of my life; another is that I grasp my life in a narrative (p. 47). Taylor clarifies that "making sense of my present action ... requires a narrative understanding of my life, a sense of what I have become which can only be given in a story" (p. 48).

It is worth noting that both MacIntyre and Taylor insist that narrative structuring is not a choice but a necessary and structural feature of the way a human being lives, interprets life, and forms an identity. MacIntyre speaks of narrative

structuring as "the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human action" (p. 208), and Taylor counts it among the "inescapable structural requirements of human agency" (p. 52). Also, both MacIntyre and Taylor write about identity from a concern about "the good life." Although I differ from their perspectives in ways that will become clearer in the chapters that follow, I share the perspective that questions of identity are closely connected to ethical questions. As I have said in Chapter 1, identity matters because how one conceives of oneself greatly influences how one acts in the world.

In the work of both MacIntyre and Taylor, the narrative conception of identity is a hermeneutic conception, that is to say: identity is seen as life interpreted. To ground this hermeneutic perspective, and to gain a more in-depth understanding of the folk paradigm of narrative identity, I turn to the work of French hermeneuticist and theorist of narrative identity, Paul Ricoeur. In the next section, I will limit myself to describing Ricoeur's ideas on narrative identity; my evaluation and critique will follow later in the chapter.

Narrative identity

Ricoeur (1985/1988) elaborates the conception of personal identity as narrative in *Time and Narrative, volume III*. He introduces "narrated time" to bridge the gap between "phenomenological time," the subjective, lived experience of temporality, and "cosmological time," the objective time measured and registered by clocks and

calendars (p. 244). An hour on the clock is an hour on the clock: it is the same, provided the clock is functioning properly. Yet in my experience, an hour waiting for the next train lasts a lot longer than an hour spent on an enjoyable activity, such as gardening, or reading an engrossing novel. A similar gap exists in questions of personal identity. On the one hand, a person is given a proper name, and (generally) carries this name from birth to death. If I encounter someone whom I believe I have met before, I will say, "I believe we have met before?", implying that the I and s/he who are meeting now are the same as the I and s/he that met in the past. But, asks Ricoeur, "What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death?" (p. 246). For even if I ask someone, "I believe we have met before?" I understand that both my interlocutor and I have changed. Both of us will have changed physically and mentally, and yet I recognize the person as "someone I have met before." What can mediate this simultaneous experience and understanding of sameness and difference, permanence and change? Ricoeur's answer is: narrative.

> Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions. (p. 246)

Narrative is a structure that creates unity in life and subjectivity, both of which constantly undergo changes. It offers a way out of the tension between the opposing

demands that the subject retain a recognizable sameness and that the subject develop and change over time.

In *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992), based on the 1986 Gifford Lectures, Ricoeur offers a more detailed explanation of some of the central ideas related to narrative identity. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Ricoeur (1991b; 1990/1992) proposes that in attempts to untangle the notion of personal identity, many difficulties arise as a result of a lack of distinction between the conception of identity as *sameness* and the conception of identity as *selfhood*. In *Oneself as Another*, he reiterates, "Selfhood, I have repeatedly affirmed, is not sameness" (p. 116). The intersection of selfhood and sameness lies in a central characteristic of personal identity, namely that it "can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence" (p. 114). When asking, Who am I? the question of sameness arises because I have a past, present and future. Is the I who asks and answers the question Who am I? the same as the I who may have asked and answered that question two years ago? On an intuitive level, one is tempted to say that a person changes over time, but that there has to be some core set of traits with sufficient stability to allow recognition of that person at different moments in time. Ricoeur grants that in the concept of character, by which he understands "the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same" (p. 119), identity as selfhood and identity as sameness coincide.

But there is another way of looking at the question of permanence in time. Rather than seeking assurance about identity in a "set of lasting dispositions" (p. 121), one could seek assurance in the reliability of the person's word over time. "The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another" (p. 123). The key to understanding what Ricoeur calls self-constancy as distinct from self-sameness, is that keeping one's word offers a continuity explicitly in the face of change: "even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, 'I will hold firm'" (p. 124).

Identity in the sense of selfhood can, according to Ricoeur, only be understood in this dialectic between sameness or character, and self-constancy. Ricoeur's motivation for analyzing selfhood in terms of the two elements in this dialectic, is "to highlight the properly ethical dimension of selfhood, irrespective of the perpetuation of character" (p. 156). It is narrative structure that mediates and holds together these elements of continuity and change, sameness and difference.

Virtual narrativity

Narrative is particularly suited for structuring personal identity, because, claims Ricoeur, it is the very structure through which human beings make sense of the events in their lives. In his essay "Life in Quest of Narrative," (1991a) Ricoeur sets out to reconcile living and narrating, for it is commonly understood that "stories are recounted and not lived; life is lived and not recounted" (p. 20). He makes use of

Aristotle's notion of *muthos*, and uses this notion not in the static sense of plot (as a product), but in the dynamic sense of emplotment (as a process). Ricoeur defines "the operation of emplotment as a synthesis of heterogeneous elements" (p. 21). The synthesis takes place on three levels: 1) a multitude of separate incidents are transformed into one whole story; 2) these separate incidents are often discordant and are brought into concordance, whilst preserving the tension between expectation and surprise; 3) from a temporal perspective, a succession is transformed into a configuration.

Ricoeur's thesis is that the composition and configuration of the story are completed not in the act of writing by the author, but in the act of reading by the reader. This, then, "makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative" (p. 26). Ricoeur refers to Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) to explain how by reading a text, we appropriate the world (horizon) of the text in our imagination, whilst at the same time of course being embodied in our own world of action. The text thus serves as an important mediator in the hermeneutical process. "From a hermeneutical point of view, that is to say from the point of view of the interpretation of literary experience, a text ... is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself" (pp. 26-27).

This is a crucial passage. At once, Ricoeur asserts that the way we relate to the world, the way we relate to others and the way we relate to ourselves, is interpretive. In

other words, in order to relate, we "make sense" – of the world, in the process of reference, to others, in the process of communication and of ourselves in the process of self-understanding. In fact, interpretation for Ricoeur is central to the human condition; it is what makes the *homo sapiens* a human being. "A life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted" (pp. 27-28).

Now that Ricoeur has established that stories are not merely recounted, but lived, he must establish that life is not only lived, but recounted. He does this by identifying 1) a semantics of action (how we understand human conduct as more than just observable movement or behaviour); 2) an implicit symbolism of action (how action is always symbolically mediated and constitutes a context); 3) the pre-narrative quality of human experience. He elaborates on this latter point especially to explain experience as "virtual narrativity", as a "potential story", "in search of a narrative" (pp. 29-30).

"Are we not inclined," Ricoeur asks rhetorically, "to see in a given chain of episodes in our own life something like *stories that have not yet been told* …?" (p. 30) This refers to the experience of seeking coherence, seeking the thread on which to string the seemingly unconnected fragments of our life. Ricoeur concludes that "narrating is a secondary process grafted on our 'being-entangled in stories'" and that "an *examined* life, in the sense of the word as we have borrowed it from Socrates, is a life *recounted*" (pp. 30-31). MacIntyre (1984) agrees with Ricoeur that the narrative structure is not imposed externally, but rather inherent in human life and action itself. He speaks of

human action in general and conversation in particular as "enacted narratives," and adds, "Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration" (p. 211).

Hannah Arendt on narrative identity

Prior to Ricoeur's work, the conception of identity as narrative was discussed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958), and Ricoeur (1985/1988) indeed refers to Arendt (p. 246). Arendt's conception of identity as narrative is especially interesting for its emphasis on the interdependence of narratives, and its recognition of the unattainability of a finished narrative within a human lifetime. Arendt asserts that the "realm of action," including speech acts, is the realm in which human beings can be truly human. "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (p. 179). Arendt emphasizes that our identities show in acts and speech, but they elude the actors and speakers themselves. We cannot describe our identity, nor can we describe someone else's identity.

> The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a 'character' in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us. (p. 181)

Arendt describes how human beings insert themselves into the human world through acts and speech (p. 176). This human world consists of a "web of human relationships" (p. 184). The life story of the newcomer is affected by and, in turn, affects the life stories of all those in the human world into which s/he enters. That is why we can say that, "although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story" (p. 184). We are the protagonists, the subjects at the heart of our stories, and we are co-authors, for sure, but we can never claim full determination of the life story that we call our identity. Arendt also makes it very clear that narrative identity only reveals itself in retrospect, and that we, as actors and speakers, can never fully know our own identity.

> Action reveals itself only fully to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian .... What the storyteller narrates must necessarily be hidden from the actor himself, at least as long as he is in the act or caught in its consequences, because to him the meaningfulness of his act is not in the story that follows. Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and 'makes' the story. ... This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life; but as such it can be known, that is, grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end. In other words, human essence – ... the essence of who somebody is – can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story. (pp. 192-193)

By Arendt's account, subjects do not occupy the position of actor/speaker and storyteller at the same time. While acting and speaking, the subject does not have a view of the place of the actions and speech in the development of the narrative

structure that constitutes her or his identity. But although the narrative structuring of actions and speech occurs retrospectively, this structuring is "inevitable." In the realm of action, human beings reveal themselves as human through the inevitable narration of their lives.

Arendt asserts the existentialist perspective that existence precedes essence, and adds to it the rather cruel feature that this essence cannot be known by the subject itself – except, perhaps, in a last moment of lucidity on a deathbed. This profound realization resonates in Derrida's (1982/1985a) observation that "This life will be verified only at the moment the bearer of the name, the one whom we, in our prejudice, call living, will have died. It will be verified only at some moment after or during death's arrest" (p. 9). The story can be known only after the storying stops.

Evaluation and critique of narrative identity

The first part of this chapter has been largely descriptive, aimed at giving an account of the main characteristics of narrative conceptions of identity. The second part will be more evaluative, aimed at assessing some of the limitations and weaknesses of the narrative conception of identity, and of common applications of this conception. Let me reiterate that I am treating narrative conceptions of identity quite generally. Not each particular manifestation of narrative identity will show all of the weaknesses and problems I discuss below. Part of my critique is aimed more at the narrative folk paradigm; another part is aimed both at the folk paradigm as well as at more

theoretically refined hermeneutic conceptions of narrative. The weaknesses and

problems I identify are general tendencies of narrative conceptions of identity, and

create challenges for educating towards hospitable identity.

Narrative's suggestion of continuity and direction

Narrative structuring tends to pay little or no attention to what has been

excluded from the narrative. The events that make a narrative have been selected,

which means, by definition, that there are other events which have not been selected. In

constructing a narrative, unity and continuity are emphasized, and there is always a

risk that elements that do not fit an established narrative thread are obscured or

excluded.

Carol Shields' (1993) novel *The Stone Diaries* presents compelling examples of the

human effort it takes to shape and order a life into a coherent narrative. Main character

Daisy Goodwill comments, "The recounting of a life is a cheat, of course; I admit the

truth of this; even our own stories are obscenely distorted; it is a wonder really that we

keep faith with the simple container of our existence" (p. 28). As a child, Daisy

Goodwill

> understood that if she was going to hold on to her life at all, she would
> have to rescue it by a primary act of imagination, supplementing,
> modifying, summoning up the necessary connections, conjuring the
> pastoral or heroic or whatever, even dreaming a limestone tower into
> existence, getting the details wrong occasionally, exaggerating or lying
> outright, inventing letters or conversations of impossible gentility, or
> casting conjecture in a pretty light. (pp. 76-77)

The notion that a sense of unity of one's life needs to be "rescued" by stringing loose experiences and events together on a narrative thread, emphasizes that without such rescue effort, a person's experiences are at peril of drifting apart, sinking away, or floating around without much connection.

Another example of the tendency of narrative to obscure its exclusions and discontinuities, comes from Michel Foucault's critique of historical narratives. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971/1984), Foucault follows Nietzsche in arguing against traditional history and for "effective" history, or history guided by genealogy. Traditional history seeks an origin (*Ursprung*), while effective history traces descent (*Herkunft*).[13] Traditional history, like traditional narration, creates connections and continuities as a way of making meaning. It claims to take an objective stance, outside history itself, and in creating a chronological sequence of events, from past to present, it obscures the fact that events from the past are interpreted from a perspective that is firmly rooted in the present. Furthermore, traditional history is often teleological: it creates narratives with a clear sense of direction and progress, without acknowledging the larger or "meta" narrative from which the *telos* has been derived.

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[13] In *Truth and Method* (1960/1994), Gadamer uses the term "history of effect" to indicate "that historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects" (p. 300). He further writes, "When a naïve faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge" (p. 301). Thus, although Gadamer and Foucault both critique historical objectivism, Gadamer uses "effective history" as a descriptor for the effects past events have on present perspectives, whereas Foucault uses "effective" history to describe an approach to historical research and writing.

Effective history, on the other hand, is more like archaeology. It scratches away

layer by layer, acknowledging that it started digging in a particular spot at a particular

time. It accepts that there may be unexpected breaks, discontinuities in the

archaeological process, when excavations have to be started elsewhere. In the end one

may be left with a patchwork of holes that are all in some way or another connected to

one's initial question. Carol Shields (1993) observes, "Biography, even autobiography, is

full of systemic error, of holes that connect like a tangle of underground streams" (p.

196). In other words, it is not mere accidental imprecision that narrative suffers, but

rather a structural, "systemic" impossibility to give a factually correct account of a life.

Secondly, these errors are meaningful. What is left out, changed, or distorted, is as

important as what is included and remembered with accuracy. Thirdly, it is worth

observing that despite the limitations and problems that Shields acknowledges in

narrative ways of capturing identity, she still continues to use them. She does not

dismiss narrative altogether, but is aware of its constructedness and of the disjointed,

fragmentary nature of the life it patches together.

The desire for uncovering pre-existing meaning, the assumption that "things

happen for a reason," is persistent in traditional narrative accounts of history. History

driven by genealogy, however, never succumbs to the temptation of this metaphysical

comfort. It acknowledges that,

> the forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative
> mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts. They do not manifest

the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attraction is not that of conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events. (Foucault, p. 88)

In other words, effective history does not hide the fact that, for whichever phenomenon or event one studies, things could very easily have been otherwise. This fundamental contingency does not only apply to history in general, but also to *my* history, my story: my narrative identity. Traditional narration can let me be comfortable with the meaningfulness of my life, where meaning is derived from the apparent continuity and direction of the events of my life. When the writing of one's life history is guided by genealogy, however, I cannot but face that my life could very easily have been otherwise. *I* could very easily have been otherwise.

To his credit, Ricoeur (1985/1988) is aware that a narrative identity is the result of a selection and composite of a multitude of events and experiences, which can be arranged in a variety of narrative ways. He acknowledges,

> just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents ..., so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives. In this regard, we might say that, in the exchange of roles between history and fiction, the historical component of a narrative about oneself draws this narrative toward the side of a chronicle submitted to the same documentary verifications as any other historical narration, while the fictional component draws it toward those imaginative variations that destabilize narrative identity. In this sense, narrative identity continues to make and unmake itself .... (pp. 248-249)

Narrative identity, Ricoeur argues here, is always a work in progress, being stabilized through documentary verification and destabilized through "imaginative variations."

In the dialectic Ricoeur suggests, however, the distinction between historical truth and

fiction is preserved. I would emphasize that there is no historical truth free from

fictionalizing interpretation or "imaginative variation," without an order, direction, and

meaning imposed on it after the fact. In Chapter 1 I quoted Derrida's (1967/1976) claim

"il n'ya pas de hors texte" (p. 158). The "historical component" of narrative identity,

which Ricoeur suggests should be subjected to "documentary verification" is not *"hors*

texte," does not escape textuality. The referentiality of the language with which the

narrative is told or written is, at best, deferred, and the demarcation between history

and fiction is unclear. Although Ricoeur (1985/1988) does not draw a sharp distinction

between history and fiction, he does suggest that narrative identity "comes to be

constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives" (p. 247). In

other words, narrative identity on Ricoeur's account moves in the direction of a truth-

telos through a process of ongoing verification and rectification.

Narrative's suggestion of autonomy

As is apparent especially in MacIntyre's (1984) work, one of the appeals of a

narrative structure is that it is typically understood as a unitary structure, one which

"links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end" (p. 205). This unity

revolves around one protagonist, the subject of the narrative identity, sustaining the

idea that the subject is autonomous. The ability to construct a coherent and unified

narrative with oneself at the centre is considered a sign of mental health. In this way,

narrative identity keeps the subject firmly centered and has a tendency to give little or

no attention to the indebtedness of the subject to the other.

One theorist who critiques narrative for this tendency is Judith Butler. In her

keynote address "Ethical Violence," at the 2001 conference hosted by the Association of

Psychoanaysis of Culture and Society, she specifically critiqued the common

psychoanalytic aim to assist subjects in self-narration. Butler claimed that asking for a

narrative identity imposes "ethical violence," because it is asking for a seamless account

of subjectivity and denying the interruptions that mark the subject from the beginning –

from its inauguration as subject, from its biological birth, and even before that.

Subjectivity, according to Butler, is characterized by fundamental interruption, even

before there is any semblance of continuity. This formation of the subject, characterized

by interruptions, has ethical significance. The unconscious is a way of being

dispossessed by the other, from the start.

Butler (2001) notes that "there was a before to me which I cannot narrate." This

"before" to my conscious self and identity takes many forms: from the physical body of

my mother, to the discourses in which I can emerge as subject, to the Unconscious

which always interrupts my consciousness. When the subject takes the inception of her

or his consciousness as a "natural" beginning of self-narration, this "before" is denied.

According to Butler, "the subject can never fully recuperate the conditions of its own

emergence." In other words, the "I" cannot give an account of how it became an "I" and

the subject lacks knowledge about an important part of its identity: its emergence. Conceiving of identity as narrative gives the impression that subject is in control, conscious of the conditions and processes of its own identity. Butler's insistence on the radical unselfknowingness of the subject, in her own words, "mocks the posture of narrative control."

Questions of autonomy and control in narrative bear especially on the author or authors of the narrative. Toni Morrison (1992) speaks of "the narrative into which life seems to cast itself" (p. v). That life *seems* to cast itself into a narrative structure suggests that there may be more to the casting than meets the eye at first glance. For one can ask, Who or what is doing the casting? And with what authority, consciousness, and control?

To their credit, Arendt and MacIntyre have also recognized the question of the author as a complicated question in the conception of identity as narrative. Indeed, Arendt (1958) writes that "nobody is the author or producer of his own life story" (p. 184). This points to the fact that no single author can single-handedly cast her or his own life into a narrative structure, and no life can be cast narratively without the narrative threads of other stories. And MacIntyre (1984), despite his insistence on the unity of a human life, also acknowledges that "we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. ... We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our own making" (p.

213). However, neither Arendt not MacIntyre decenter the subject/protagonist, and neither acknowledge the interruption of narrative identity by the Unconscious. The subject/protagonist remains the master of the narrative, albeit a master who needs to acknowledge others' assistance. Other accounts of narrative identity, moreover, do emphasize the active authorial role of the subject. Donald Polkinghorne (1988) for example, writes that "we *achieve* our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration" (p. 150, emphasis added), and that "narrative presupposes and draws on the human *competence* to understand action" (p. 151, emphasis added).

Once again, narrative conceptions of identity tend not to invite a consideration of my dependence on the other in general terms of the Unconscious, physical sustenance, and cultural embeddedness. But beyond that, for my self-narration I am also dependent on the other's narration of me. In Jamaica Kincaid's (2002) novel/biography *Mr. Potter*, several passages point directly at this dependence of self-narration on narration by the other. Kincaid writes, in the voice of daughter and narrator, "... and I remember this incident of waving to him because my mother has told me about it and through my mother's words, I have come to see myself waving to Mr. Potter ..." (p. 126). In a later passage, in which the narrator and daughter is speaking about her mother, Kincaid writes,

> And she fed me and fed me her milk and I drank it and drank it and then one day her breasts ran dry, no milk came out of them, and this is just

what she said to me when I was three years old and five years old and
then seven years old, and then after a time she no longer told me that
story … . (p. 144)

Both passages highlight how the subject begins narrating herself through the stories her

mother tells her about herself. The mother starts the thread of the life story and the

daughter picks it up and continues the narrative with herself as the subject. The mother

looks down on the infant and thinks, "I am feeding you," a sentence in which she

herself is the subject. She tells the child, "you drank," making the child the subject in the

mother's narration, and allowing the child to start her own self-narration: "I drank."

Shields (1993) likewise observes that "the most substantial parts of a human narrative

… were borrowed from the impressions that other people – friends and family and

passing acquaintances – had of us" (p. xvii).

My narrative identity is interrupted not only because the other precedes me, but

also because the other leaves me, by death or another departure. Butler (2004)

underscores the interruption of self-narration by the grief that follows the death or

other departure of the other.

"What grief displays … is the thrall in which our relations with others
hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that
often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to
provide, in which that challenge the very notion of ourselves as
autonomous and in control. I might try to tell a story here about what I'm
feeling, but it would have to be story in which the very 'I' who seeks to
tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling; the very 'I' is called
into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not
precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my
speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I

choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must." (p. 23).

The departure of the other unravels my narrative; when the other departs, s/he takes something of the very woof and warp of my narrative fabric with her or him, causing tears I cannot repair. In Chapter 1 I sketched an experience of being a bad host after a break-up. The departure of the other had unraveled my narrative, but since I did not understand that tears are part and parcel of my narrative identity, I sought to stop the fraying. I want to underscore that the departure of the other is *not* the exception to a rule of narrative autonomy and unity. The other *always* departs, and departures and absences *always* disrupt my narrative autonomy and unity.

It must be said that Ricoeur (1990/1992) is not blind to the dependence of the subject's self-narration on the narration of others. He connects this dependence to the lack of closure of the narrative. A narrative identity is never determinate, but rather a fabric that frays at both ends, for

> there is nothing in real life that serves as a narrative beginning; memory is lost in the hazes of early childhood; my birth and, with greater reason, the act through which I was conceived belong more to the history of others – in this case, to my parents – than to me. As for my death, it will finally be recounted only in the stories of those who survive me. I am always moving toward my death, and this prevents me from ever grasping it as a narrative end. (p. 160)

Butler (2001) objects that a narrative conception of subjectivity and identity wrongly gives the impression that the narrative starts with the birth of consciousness and does

not do justice to the dependence on others. In part, this objection rests on a narrow conception of narrative; as Arendt, Ricoeur and MacIntyre show, it is quite possible to acknowledge the necessary openness of a narrative beginning and end, as well as the constraints on the (co-)author's autonomy, while maintaining that narrative structuring is central to human identity construction. Butler's critique, however, also points at the narrative equation of human action with human conscious action. Thus, narratively structured identity tends not to acknowledge the Unconscious. Moreover, the Unconscious does not merely interrupt identity at its narrative beginning or end, but continues to interrupt consciousness throughout the subject's life.

Another way of describing the limitations of narrative identity, commonly shaped as biography and autobiography, is offered by Derrida (1978). He uses the term "auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic" (p. 146) to indicate that since the life of any individual subject necessarily frays at the edges, any writing by the subject of the subject's own life (autobiography) cannot exclude the life of the other and the Unconscious (hetero-), nor can it exclude death (thanato-). Narrative conceptions of identity share a focus on autobiography, not on auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphy, and this focus on the narration of the conscious, living self sustains the notion of an autonomous subject.

Narrative's emphasis of time over space

A third limitation of narrative conceptions of identity is that they tend to underemphasize the role of space and place for the subject and her or his identity. Narrative is primarily the ordering of experience in time. Ricoeur (1984) writes that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative[;] narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (as cited in Kerby, 1997, p. 135). And Polkinghorne (1988) writes that "the self is that temporal order of human existence whose story begins with birth, has as its middle the episodes of a lifespan, and ends with death" (p. 152).

The structure of narrative identity thus typically emphasizes temporality. The question arises whether narrative does, and can do, justice to the spatiality of identity. Contemporary theorists such as Elspeth Probyn (1996) use the angle of space and place rather than time for inquiry into identity.[14] The current attention to spatiality has, for instance, led to the realization that identities have geographies as well as histories. Questions of "diasporic" and "nomadic" identities have arisen, especially in post-colonial theory. Rodriguez (2002) illustrates how the (discursive) ethnic identity of immigrants is changed by a change in geographical context. "What Hispanic immigrants learn within the United States is to view themselves in a new way, as

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[14] The current attention to spatiality is connected with an attention to the body; the body is an undeniably spatial entity, whereas the mind does not occupy physical space. Postmodern theory has criticized the mind-body dichotomy that pervaded modernist thought, and subjectivity is now more commonly conceived as embodied, hence having spatial qualities.

belonging to Latin America entire – precisely at the moment they no longer do" (p. 117). Someone who was "Guadalajaran" in Mexico and "Mexican" in Latin America becomes "Hispanic" in the United States.

Although in narrative conceptions of identity the temporality of identity receives most attention, narratives also have spatial contexts. Michel de Certeau (1984) writes, "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (p. 115), and this notion of travelling is indeed recognizable in common expressions such as "life journey." De Certeau quotes a study by Linde and Labov (1975) of the type of discourse used by New York residents in describing their apartments. A small minority of these descriptions took the form of a map, which De Certeau characterizes as "a plane projection totalizing observations" (p. 119). The vast majority of the descriptions, however, took the form of a tour, which emphasizes movement through space. The tour is an itinerary, in which both time and place play a role: the movement through space is given a temporal order.

The description of one's identity, to which I have previously also referred as *chez-soi*, can certainly take the form of an itinerary, in which a journey through time *and* space accounts for the constitution of an identity. In other words, a conception of identity as narrative should include an awareness of geography and spatial context. That this is possible is illustrated by Jamaica Kincaid (2002) in her account of Elfrida Robinson's walk towards her suicide:

> And she walked from the flat center, which was formed by clay, toward
> the south and southwest, which was hilly for it had been formed by long-

dormant volcanoes, and then she walked north and then toward the northeast, and she passed the Bendals stream, which was near the village of Bendals. ... She walked toward Rat Island, a small formation of rock that was connected to Antigua by a narrow sliver of land, an isthmus. ... But it is to this place that Elfrida walked, Rat Island, into the bay there, and the seas took her in, not with love, not with indifference, not with meaning of any kind. (pp. 74-76)

Kincaid does not describe how long this walk took, or how long Elfrida Robinson had been planning to walk into the sea, or what was going through her mind as she walked – instead she provides the route of her walk towards death.

However, an itinerary is still typically a linear narrative, constructed from departure to arrival, past to present, rather than genealogically. An itinerary has a direction, a destination, and even if the destination is not metaphysically posited as destiny, there often is little room for what Derrida (1994/1997) calls "destinerrancy," the "'more than (a) one [plus d'un ou plus qu'un]' of destination" (p. 217). This notion of errant destiny/destination calls attention to the retrospective attribution of *telos*. The meaning of a narrated identity, whether its emphasis is on temporality or spatiality, is created in hindsight, from the place of arrival. A genealogical and archeological tracing of the history and geography of an identity may reveal fragmentations and discontinuities that were smoothed over in the itinerary.

Inquiry into the spatial context(s) of identity formation often takes a phenomenological approach, which encourages attentiveness to the details of lived experience, including the sensory perceptions of the spaces in which life unfolds. In

calling attention to the elements of space and place in identity, it is easy to forget that

lived experience is itself always already mediated. In *Specters of Marx* (1993/1994),

Derrida speaks of *"ontotopology"* as that which connects ontology with topos, as "an

axiomatics linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [*on*] to its

situation, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of territory,

native soil, city, body in general" (p. 82). In my raising of the role space and place (and

not only time) play in identity construction, I do not mean to assert a topological

essentialism. Neither do I mean to suggest that any *topos* has a single, clear, and

determinable meaning. Neither the place where one finds oneself in the present, nor

one's native soil, nor any other place for that matter, are necessary conditions for the

development of a "true" or "authentic" identity. However, one's identity at any

particular moment in time cannot be understood outside its spatial context. It is

undeniably influenced by one's geographic location, as well as the traces of the

geographic locations in which one has found oneself in the past. And if one conceives of

one's identity as narrative, it means that this narrative also has a geographic context,

and that the narrative changes when the geographic context changes.

Narrative's inattention to discursive conditions

Perhaps the most important, and from my perspective certainly the most

interesting, limitation of narrative conceptions of identity, is that they tend not to focus

much attention on the way personal identity is constituted by *discourse*. Let me reiterate

that I view discourse as "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988/1997, p. 759), which not merely represents but forms the objects of which it speaks. In other words, language is not simply a neutral medium with which a life can be recounted. Rather, language itself has force and shapes the identity of the person; it also circumscribes the very range of identity categories from which a person can intelligibly compose her or his own personal identity. The focus of narrative conceptions of identity, however, is on narrative as a structure providing a flexible unity to a multitude of actions and experiences.

In the folk paradigm of identity as narrative, where narrative is often taken as a more direct and unproblematic representation of a life and person, there tends to be little attention to this performative, shaping force of language. One example of this inattention is the typical grammatical form of self-narrations: the first person singular. This form keeps the subject at the centre and does not acknowledge that language has constitutive force not only on the semantic but also on the syntactic level. Butler (2004) notes that the first-person narrative does not foster an understanding of the implication of one life in another, of one narrative in another. Speaking specifically of the narrative national identity of the United States, Butler writes,

> The ability to narrate ourselves not from the first person alone, but from, say, the position of the third, or to receive an account delivered in the second, can actually work to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken. (p. 8)

Likewise, in narrative personal identity, the grammatical convention of narrating

myself in the first person does nothing to decenter my subjectivity. Within the narrative

folk paradigm, the identity is rarely shaped in the form of an address or a narration by

another. Thus, my dependency on the other, and on the language of the other, remain

largely hidden.

In a more sophisticated hermeneutic understanding of narrative, however, there

is attention for the grammatical positioning of the subject, and its dependency on the

language of the other. In *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992), Ricoeur draws on the work of

Levinas to emphasize the ethical condition of being addressed. Ricoeur notes that he

shares with Levinas the "conviction that the other is the necessary path of injunction"

(p. 355). The condition of being addressed thus becomes central to the ethical aim as

formulated by Ricoeur:

> To find oneself called upon in the second person at the very core of the
> optative of living well … is to recognize oneself as being enjoined to live
> well with and for other in just institutions and to esteem oneself as the
> bearer of this wish. (p. 352)

Jamaica Kincaid (2002) makes use of the narrative folk paradigm's assumption

that the protagonist must syntactically be at the centre of the narrative in the following

example:

> This sentence should begin with Dr. Weizenger emerging, getting off the
> launch that has brought him from his ship which is lying in the deep part
> of the harbor, but this is Mr. Potter's life and so Dr. Weizenger must
> never begin a sentence; I am not making an authorial decision, or a

narrative decision, I only say this because it is so true: Mr. Potter's life is his own and no one else should take precedence. (pp. 8-9)

Mr. Potter, a black, illiterate Antiguan chauffeur, is the kind of man who has mostly played minor roles in the margins of other people's narratives. In an act of resistance, Kincaid makes explicit that she will do Mr. Potter the honour of placing him at the centre of his own biography, and making him the grammatical subject of sentences that are about his life. Kincaid's syntactic act of resistance has force only against the backdrop of the narrative folk paradigm, in which it is assumed that the protagonist is the subject of her or his (auto)biography. Kincaid's intervention is a comment on the colonial tradition and heritage in which only the colonizers' narratives were heard, in which the colonizers were central subjects, and the colonized did not play more than minor roles.

Earlier in this chapter I commented on the tendency of narrative approaches to pay little or no attention to what has been excluded from the narrative. This exclusion occurs not only on the level of events and experiences, but also on the level of narrative's discursive conditions. In Chapter 1 I noted that a discourse consists not only of a particular body of signs (e.g., words), but also of the very categories and limits of intelligibility that make thinking, speaking and writing through that body of signs possible at all. In other words, a discourse allows certain things to be thought, spoken and written, while others are unintelligible, unspeakable, unwritable. Butler (1993), for example, addresses how discourse "orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which

qualifies as 'the human'" in terms of gender (p. 8). The persistent absence of pronouns for intersexual or genderqueer people illustrates the discursive limits to their claims to personhood.[15] Neither in the narrative folk paradigm, nor in a moderate hermeneutic understanding of narrative, such limits of intelligibility tend to be questioned. What identity categories, fears, and desires are in the discursive realm of the abject and cannot be thought, spoken, or written? Within narrative paradigms, this question is not likely to be answered.

For thinking through the hospitality of a narrative identity, it is important to think through the hospitality of the discourse in and through which the narrative is constituted. Since hospitality is a gesture, an important consideration in analysing the hospitality of discourse is on the gestures discourse makes: on what discourse *does*, rather than on merely what it represents or means. I have found that narrative conceptions of identity are not the most inviting to such a perspective. An etymology of the word "narrative" here provides, as Derrida (1996/2002) suggests, "material for thinking" (p. 71): the noun and adjective "narrative," like the verb "to narrate," are derived from the Latin *narrare* (which means "to recount"). More interestingly, *narrare* is derived from *gnarus*, which means "skilled" or "knowledgeable" and which, in its negative form, has developed into the current English "ignore" and "ignorance." For narrative, one of the significant "lines of force that semantically traverse the word"

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[15] The pronouns "ze" and "hir" have been proposed and used by some genderqueer people, but in mainstream discourse they are not commonly used or understood.

(Derrida, 1998/2000, p. 25), therefore, is knowing. What is not necessarily welcomed into this picture is the outside of knowing, that which makes knowing possible and which disrupts it: the Unconscious, and the discursive categories that delimit intelligibility.

Yet another problem associated with narrative conceptions of identity is that they tend to make universalistic claims about the narrative structuring of personal identity. Narrative is presented as a necessary structure that people must have in common, because they share the experience of temporality. Stephen Crites (1997), for example, suggests that narrative structuring is a form of cultural expression which is, itself, not a product of culture, and certainly not the product of "individual choice and contrivance" (p. 26). He proposes that "the form of active consciousness, i.e., the form of its experiencing, is in at least some rudimentary sense narrative" (p. 33).

The assumption that narrative has universal relevance for personal identity raises questions about the boundaries of humanity, and the guardians of these boundaries. If a person does *not* structure her or his identity narratively, does that mean this person is not human? imperfectly human? mentally ill? And who gets to say so? Perhaps the increasing presence of hyperlinked text and other non-narratively structured text on the internet and elsewhere will change the way people order the events of their lives. Will the folk paradigm of identity change, or will people be judged for their inability to form "proper" narratives? The narrative folk paradigm tends not to pay much attention to the contextuality of the very structure of narratives.

Narrative and hospitality

The key question is now to what extent, and how, the limitations and weakness of narrative conceptions of identity impede the hospitality of narratively structured identities. Once again, for someone's identity, the *chez-soi*, to be hospitable, there must be an openness to the incoming of the other. The four limitations I have discussed above all suggest, to a greater or lesser degree, that a narrative paradigm is not the conception most suited for developing hospitality.

For example, narrative's suggestion of continuity and direction draws attention away from the contingency of identity. My personal identity, narratively conceived, tends to present itself as coherent and does not call attention to the fact that it is, to borrow Marge Piercy's (1982) words, "a work of artifice" (p. 47). A lack of awareness of the contingency and precariousness of my identity makes it easy to ensconce myself in this seamless narrative and not question its constructedness and its exclusions. Narrative creates unity to cover over the gaps and fragmentations, but these gaps and fragmentations are precisely what leave my identity ajar. Will I even hear the call of the other, and understand my own vulnerability to the disruption, rewriting and reinterpretation of my identity, if I am comfortable in my unified and coherent identity?

In narrative conceptions of identity, my identity is first and foremost conceived as the story of *my* life. This suggests not only that I am the protagonist of the narrative, but also that I can take credit for the story as it has "unfolded." Such a perspective does

not invite a consideration of the fundamental dependency on the other that is at the root both of my life and the narrative account of that life. The conception of identity as narrative focuses on the individual narrative as unit, a perspective which fits with the view of the person as autonomous individual. Thinking of my identity in this way, it is easy to forget how entangled "my" story is in the stories of others – so entangled, in fact, that I cannot separate them without leaving tears and fraying edges. Will I understand that I am always already ajar, vulnerable to the incoming of the other, if I think of my narrative identity as independent and self-governing?

Because narrative is, by its very definition, an account of a series of events, experiences, and so on, presented as connected and in an order, narrative conceptions of identity emphasize the temporal rather than the spatial qualities of identity. This means, for example, that there is often little recognition of the role the physical, cultural and geographic context plays in identity formation. In order for my identity to be hospitable, I need to have an understanding of the heterogeneity of its past, and its openness to change. If I am not aware of the changes that identities undergo as a result of voluntary and involuntary travels, or of the constitutive influence of the distribution of identity categories in space, I miss an important way of seeing how identities hinge on the places in which they have developed, and are left ajar.

Finally, narrative's inattention to its own discursive conditions seriously hinders an understanding of the way my identity and the discourses in which it emerges are

implicated in one another. The narrative folk paradigm tends to operate from the perspective that language is a medium that represents experience, and it pays hardly any attention to language's shaping force. Ricoeur's and others' hermeneutic perspective acknowledges that experience is mediated by language but emphasizes the possibility of conscious reflection upon this mediation through distantiation. By emphasizing emplotment and other characteristics of the narrative structure, neither of these narrative conceptions considers the constitutive force of the language on a more basic level: that of subjectivity and consciousness itself. If I do not recognize that it is only because I have been received into discourses that precede and exceed me that any narrative identity can emerge, how likely am I to recognize my responsibility in making these discourses welcoming places for others?

It is ironic, to say the least, that I open a text which provides a critique of narrative conception of identity with – precisely – a narrative. I could say that I have provided this narrative merely in anticipation of the question commonly asked at the oral defense of a dissertation: "How did you arrive at your research question?" A more satisfactory answer, perhaps, is the explanation that the point of the opening narrative is not so much what it says, but what it does, and what it does is perform a gesture of hospitality into the more conceptual parts of the dissertation. The presentation of a narrative in a text which questions narrative is, itself, a performative contradiction, but one that serves to highlight the *performative* (rather than representative) qualities of texts, including narratives, which I will address in the next chapter.

A third answer is that this narrative illustrates some of the limitations of narrative as an interpretive structure for understanding personal identity. The narrative I have presented is retrospective, as personal narratives typically are; it is an account that produces meaning after the events, rather than an account of "what happened." The narrative is perhaps more interesting for what it leaves out than for what it presents, and much of what is left out from the narrative is related to motivation. Let me give an example. Although the sentence "At age 16 I won a scholarship to attend the Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific" is not a lie, it hides a whole world of truths neither reader nor narrator may ever access. How and when and why exactly did I decide to apply for this scholarship? *I do not know.* Other than a curiosity about foreign places and a dose of teenage idealism I do not remember much about my motivations, but given the position of the sentence in a narrative about class consciousness, it seems fair to ask if, beyond getting away from uncomfortable class difference at the grammar school, I was driven by a desire to increase my social and cultural capital at an international school. *I do not know.* A second example: "In grammar school ... I attended one or two school parties but soon stopped going to them, feeling ill at ease." Again, the inclusion of this sentence in a narrative about class suggests that my discomfort was caused by an emerging awareness of class difference. But was it? Hearing echoes from Richard Rodriguez's (1982) autobiography *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez,* I wonder if sexual orientation should be considered a telling absence in the narrative. *I do not know.*

In the next chapter, I will argue that these and other instances of not-knowing are constitutive of personal identity. I will propose an alternative conception of identity, which approaches identity not from what is present, as narrative conceptions typically do, but from what is absent. This alternative conception will address in particular my concern that narrative conceptions of identity tend to pay insufficient attention to the discursive conditions which allow a narrative to be formed as it is. I will emphasize the subject's dependence on discourse not of her or his making, and, to explain language's constitutive force, I will elaborate the concept of performativity as the quality of language to produce or perform that which it purports merely to describe. The conception of identity I will propose is more helpful for understanding identity as more or less hospitable, and for thinking about educating towards hospitable identity.

CHAPTER III
IDENTITY: AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTION

'You ask if I have changed my plea. But who am I, who is this *I*, this *you*? We change from day to day, and we also stay the same. No *I*, no *you* is more fundamental than any other. You might as well ask which is the true Elizabeth Costello: the one who made the first statement or the one who made the second. My answer is, both are true. Both. And neither. *I am an other.*' (Coetzee, 2003, p. 221)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analysed folk and hermeneutic conceptions of identity

as narrative. In this chapter, I will propose a different way of understanding identity,

emphasizing discursive perspectives. I propose this alternative way of understanding

identity because the conception of identity held, explicitly or implicitly, by educators

affects the kinds of identities students are, explicitly or implicitly, encouraged and

allowed to form. Narrative is a folk paradigm of identity that is pervasive in

educational texts and practices, but, as I have argued in the previous chapter, it is not

the most conducive to developing a hospitable identity. The tendency of self-narrations

to obscure the lack of continuity between and direction in life events, to suggest an

autonomous narrator-protagonist, to disregard place, and to pay insufficient attention

to the discursive material of narrative, can lead to glaringly inhospitable identities.

To mind comes the example of "Vince," a white male student in an

undergraduate curriculum theory course. When the students in the course were asked

to discuss Peggy McIntosh's (1990) article "The Invisible Knapsack" and reflect upon

ways in which they themselves were privileged, Vince expressed that he did not think

he was "privileged" in any way. He believed Canada was a fully meritocratic society,

and that anyone who didn't succeed had only their own lack of effort or ability to

blame, not any lack of "privilege." Vince narrated himself as a white male university

student having worked hard for his current success, and deserving every bit of it. His

individual narrative fit quite harmoniously in the collective cultural narrative of

Canada as meritocratic society, and Vince defended his narrative against suggestions

that perhaps he was not fully autonomous in this tale of cumulative learning and

success. His story emphasized direction in his life: he knew what he wanted and he was

going after it. It also emphasized he was the principal actor in his life, bringing about

the results that would lead him to the next level of success. It was an airtight story in

which there was little or no room for others without whom he would not have had the

experiences he did, nor for others who had been less successful. Others' lack of success

had nothing to do with Vince's success, he felt, and their situations and stories did not

belong in his.

As an educator who aims to contribute to students' learning how to live well

with and for others in just institutions, I am concerned about identities constructed

along the lines of Vince's self-narration, and about other closed narrative identities. In

this chapter I will address deconstructive critiques pertinent to the concept of identity,

as well as the concept of discursive performativity, to arrive at a conception of identity

which offers more possibilities for hospitality. I do not dispute that individual human

beings have distinct perspectives and characteristics which guide their actions and

which make it possible to recognize them in various times and places. I do dispute,

however, that what is commonly called "identity" is stable, transparent or decodable,

and autonomous, and I suggest that a conception of identity *under deconstruction* is more

hospitable.

In deconstructing notions such as "identity," Derrida (1967/1976) explains,

it is not a question of 'rejecting' these notions; they are necessary and, at
least at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them. ... Since
these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they
belong, we should be even less prone to renounce them. (pp. 13-14)

He adds that "the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the

outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by

inhabiting those structures" (p. 24). In this chapter, therefore, I will not abandon, but

rather inhabit the concept of identity, and reconceive it from the inside out. In the two

sections that follow, I will propose a new way of understanding the concept of identity,

by drawing on two of Derrida's critiques: the critique of the metaphysics of presence,

and the critique of the stable border.

Identity without a metaphysics of presence

In *Of Grammatology* (1967/1976) Derrida critiques a long tradition of Western

philosophy for its logocentrism and phonocentrism: the belief that human thought is

directly expressed through speech and that writing is of a secondary order, derived

from speech. This belief rests on a "metaphysics of presence," the foundational belief

that speech is fully present to itself and to the speaker, and that the word-sound

(signifier) is firmly coupled with meaning: a "transcendental signified" (p. 20).

> The affirmation of the essential and 'natural' bond between the *phonè* and
> the sense, the privilege accorded to an order of signifier [i.e., the
> phoneme] (which then becomes the major signified of all other signifiers)
> depend expressly ... upon a psychology of consciousness and of intuitive
> consciousness. (p. 40)

In brief, a metaphysics of presence rests on three assumptions: 1) that thoughts are fully

present to the thinker, i.e., that the thinker's consciousness fully captures thought; 2)

that speech, through its proximity to consciousness, fully captures thought; 3) that

writing is derivative and fails to fully capture thought or speech. Writing is

characterized by the absence of both the signatory and the referent (pp. 40-41), but,

notes Derrida, this absence does not make writing a derivative or secondary linguistic

operation. Rather, absence is at the heart of *all* language, for language, as a system of

signs, is a system of traces for which no origin can be found. In Chapter 1 I noted that in

poststructuralist theory more attention is typically paid to the signifier and less to

signified, and that the way to any stable meaning takes a "perpetual detour" (Sarup,

1998, p. 3). Now it is time to elaborate on that claim and explain its pertinence to the concept of identity.

Identity is mediated through language. Whether conceived as narrative or not, there is no such thing as pre-linguistic identity. In other words, identity relies on systems of signs, of signifiers and signifieds. In his critique of the metaphysics of presence, Derrida argues that there is no transcendental signified that anchors meaning. The signified remains deferred and functions, in turn, as a signifier. This perspective stands in contrast to, for example, the perspective of Paul Ricoeur (1976), who writes that "because we are in the world, because we are affected by situations, and because we orient ourselves comprehensively in those situations, we have something to say, we have experience to bring to language" (pp. 20-21). Although the phrase "we have experience to bring to language" does not suggest that experience is unmediated – Ricoeur (1975/1977) acknowledges that "there is no standpoint outside language" (p. 304) – it does emphasize language as a representation of *presence*, or in Ricoeur's words, "Something must *be* for something to be said" (p. 304, emphasis added).

In formulating a conception of identity that moves beyond a metaphysics of presence, I must move away from the emphasis on experience and towards an examination of language itself, for, as Derrida (1967/1976) has observed, the concept of experience "belongs to the history of metaphysics and we can only use it under erasure [*sous rature*]. 'Experience' has always designated the relationship with a presence,

whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not" (p. 60). To claim that

one's words (signifiers) represent one's experience (signified) is to gloss over the fact

that experience itself consists of signs, of signifiers-with-deferred-signifieds, in which,

moreover the trace of the absent is constitutive.

My identity, however I name or narrate or otherwise structure it, is a signifier

which points to a signified it cannot capture. What I call "my identity" is a trace (or a

constellation of traces) from other signifiers, *but the meaning-origin of those signifiers*

remains out of reach. This is what Derrida calls an "irreducible absence within the

presence of the trace" (p. 47).[16] This leads me to the first attribute of identity:

dependence. If my identity is a trace or constellation of traces, the meaning or elusive

origin of these traces lies outside of my identity. I am, for who I am, dependent on

absence, on something outside of myself. This is anathema to the modernist assumption

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[16] For the concept of trace, Derrida (1967/1976) acknowledges his indebtedness to the work of, among others, Emmanuel Levinas (p. 70). In "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity" (1957/1987) Levinas introduces "heteronomy" not as some inferior condition of dependence from which one ought to liberate oneself to gain autonomy, but as one of "two directions the philosophical spirit takes" (p. 47). Philosophy as autonomy, according to Levinas, is a philosophy which reduces the other to the self and same; philosophy as heteronomy is a philosophy which transcends the self and same and moves towards the other.

> The ego, the oneself, the ipseity ... does not remain invariable in the midst of change like a rock assailed by the waves (which is anything but invariable); the ego remains the same by making of disparate and diverse events a history – its history. (p. 48)

Levinas places the movement of narrative identity, which reduces disparity and diversity to one self of which it emphasizes sameness, squarely in philosophy as autonomy. Justice, however, requires letting the other be "in the inexpugnable fortress of its singularity" (p. 50) and acknowledging one's indebtedness to the other. It is the trace of infinity in the other that forms, for Levinas, the ground for my ethical responsibility toward the other. I am called to justice by an other whom I cannot measure; this is heteronomy.

that the subject is, or ought to be striving to be, autonomous, that is to say, self-governing and independent of others.

For my identity constitution I am dependent on the other not only in general terms, because of my dependence on discourse not of my own making, but also in terms of narrative identity more specifically: I am dependent upon a recipient for the completion of my self-narration. In Derrida's (1982/1985b) words,

> it is the ear of the other that signs. The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the autos of my autobiography. When, much later, the other will have perceived with a keen-enough ear what I will have addressed or destined to him or her, then my signature will have taken place. (p. 51)

Here, Derrida emphasizes that self-constitution is possible only through the detour of the other. It is only when the other hears me, that there is a "me" to speak of. This underscores a Levinasian conception of subjectivity as emerging after and through indebtedness to the other.

Another understanding of identity's dependence on the other emerges from the angle of hospitality. Derrida (1997/2001) writes, "I am not the proprietor of my 'I', I am not proprietor of the place open to hospitality. Whoever gives hospitality ought to know that he is not even proprietor of what he would appear to give" (p. 85). By disrupting the metaphysics of presence, and acknowledging that my identity is dependent on the other, I can come to understand that my identity is not my property, and that I cannot and ought not close it off for future incoming of the other. I am mistaken if I think I am

autonomously extending a gesture of hospitality from within the identity categories

that I inhabit. I only inhabit those identity categories because I have been received into

them, and although I may take responsibility for inhabiting them in hospitable ways, I

am not the owner of what I appear to give.

Identity without a solid border

Derrida's (1993) deconstruction of the concepts of property and border offers a

way to rethink the borders of personal identity. Identity would seem to be property *par*

excellence, it would seem to be the property most properly called property: identity, my

ipseity, my me-ness – what could be more mine? My identity properly belongs to me,

and me alone, or it wouldn't be my identity. But property relies on borders; without

borders I could not protect what is properly mine, nor could I keep apart my property

from others' property. However, the border-line is aporetic, not only because its aim is

to be impermeable, but also, and more so, because the border cannot possibly be what it

is intended to be: indivisible. Derrida writes that,

> ... where the identity or indivisibility of a line ... is compromised, the identity to oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge – the crossing of the line – becomes a *problem*. There is a *problem* as soon as the edge-line is threatened. And it is threatened from its first tracing. The tracing can only institute the line by dividing it intrinsically into two sides. There is a problem as soon as this intrinsic division divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything. (p. 11)

Touching both sides it is meant to keep apart, the border is, from the moment it is drawn, two. The border is never indivisible, never individual, always two. The possibility of a pure or uncontaminated border is taken away before it is created. De Certeau (1984) calls this "a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of difference between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them" (p. 127).

To the first attribute of identity (the haunting presence of the absent, the reliance of the included on the excluded), this adds a second attribute: identity is porous, with less than hermetic borders. Not only is my identity dependent on what it excludes (the trace), but that which has been excluded can never be relied on to keep its proper place and stay on the other side of the border around my identity. Both attributes are structural, that is to say, regardless of any particular content of identity, but it is important to underscore that no particular structure of identity is posited. Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence and of property and border lead to the view that whatever structure identity takes is structurally dependent on a past other, and open to the incoming of a future other. The other thus becomes central to an understanding of self-identity.

Dwelling in liminal spaces

I have suggested thinking of identity as *chez-soi*, and of hospitality as metaphor for understanding ethical identity-construction. One way of looking at a hospitable *chez-*

soi is as a construction that *leaves identity ajar*. Another, related, way of looking at a

hospitable *chez-soi* is as an identity that *dwells on its own borders*. Dwelling on the border

of one's identity is a way of acknowledging that borders are not clear demarcations

between inside and outside, but rather *liminal* zones that bridge and connect outside

and inside (the Latin *limen* means threshold.) Dwelling in liminal zones is particularly

promising for cultivating hospitality, for, as Michael Naas (2003) observes, "it is always

on or from a threshold, from a limit between inside and out, that hospitality is offered

or given or, as we say, *extended*" (p. 154).

As my use of terms such as "home" and "threshold" suggests, I believe that

architectural analogies are helpful for thinking through the concepts of hospitality and

liminality. Balconies and porches, for instance, are liminal spaces bridging inside and

outside. Elspeth Probyn (1996) writes about Montreal's balconies as border-zones

between and hybrids of private and public space and as spaces "where one sees an

ongoing inbetweenness" (pp. 5-6).

> From balconies' early incarnation as outside parlors, people continue to
> actually live on them: television sets are installed outside, as well as
> armchairs, sofas, herbs, flowers, or entire vegetable gardens, radios,
> awnings and curtains – the whole resembling a tent city, without the veil
> of canvas, on upper floors above busy city streets. Living on the outside
> for the summer entails a proximity to others as well as the drawing of
> new frontiers. In my own case in the area of Mile-End (a mixed
> neighborhood of Jews, Greeks, Portugues, Anglos, Francos), my back
> balcony (or more precisely, *la galérie*) is a mere foot and a half wide and
> joins me with my two neighbors, women with whom I often converse.
> Our moments of conversation are ordered by an inaudible rhythm so

that we talk when we talk and at other moments proceed as if we were alone in enwalled gardens .... (p. 4)

It is quite conceivable that Probyn has conversations with her neighbours only from balcony to balcony, that they do not invite each other into their homes, and that they may not exchange more than a nod and a smile when passing each other in the street. Interacting on or from the balcony means interacting in a space that is more "at home" than the public neutrality of the street, without requiring the risk of having the stranger-neighbour in the intimate spaces of one's home. By choosing to dwell on the balcony, both Probyn and her neighbours choose to open themselves up to interactions that might otherwise not occur.

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) affirms the possibilities opened up by dwelling in liminal or "interstitial" spaces when he writes, "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (pp. 1-2). Bhabha discusses a work by African-American artists Renée Green, in which she used the liminal spaces of the museum building itself – attic, boiler room, stairwell – to illustrate the architectural metaphor of liminal zones of identity. Bhabha comments,

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end from settling into

primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (p. 4)

Bhabha refers to the liminal space not as border, intended to keep two spaces apart, but rather as "connective tissue," as joint. Moreover, he emphasizes that people don't live in liminal spaces: balconies and stairwells are spaces in which people can linger a while, but they are not places particularly suitable for making a home.[17] Thus, people need a home they can leave and return to, but it is especially in the "hither and thither" of liminal spaces that their identities interact with those of others, and that the possibility of cultural hybridity emerges. Spaces that are often considered marginal to the architectural structure, such as the lobby, the balcony, and the stairwell, thus take centre stage in the theorizing of hospitality.[18]

Derrida (1997/2000), writes, "in order to constitute the space of a habitable house and home, you also need an opening, a door and windows, you have to give up a passage to the outside world [*l'étranger*]" (p. 61). He does not write: tear down the walls of your house and home. It is by virtue of boundaries around the *chez-soi* that we can even speak of hospitality: one cannot invite someone into one's home, if there is no

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[17] The fact that some homeless people see themselves forced to take up "residence" in liminal spaces, under bridges, in bus stations, and in subway tunnels does not make them any less "homeless."

[18] This reversal resonates with the poststructuralist decentering of concepts central to modernist thought, such as the self. To borrow Patti Lather's (1996) expression, in emphasizing the centrality of marginal spaces for hospitality, I am performing "an oppositional reading within the confines of a binary system, by reversing the binary" (p. 526), in this case the binary centre/margin.

outside to that home. Hospitality requires the crossing of a boundary; without boundary and transition, both "visitation" and "invitation" become meaningless concepts. But the crossing of any threshold, physical or symbolic, requires transition through a liminal space rather than a single step across a single line.

In order to ease the crossing of the threshold, one offers the guest a liminal zone: a doormat that reads "welcome," an awning over the front step, a place to hang a coat, take off outside shoes. One grants the guest a moment to adjust and acclimatize, get used to the sounds and smells of the house, perhaps wipe eye glasses that fog up with a move from the cold outdoors to the warmth of the house. "We would … always do well," advises Naas (2003), "to linger a while on the threshold, on this place of transition that is so easily overlooked as we rush from one community, experience, or way of life to another" (p. 154). Literary works provide examples of what it might look like to linger on the borders and thresholds of identity categories. Ivan E. Coyote's (2000) stories in *Close to Spider Man* illustrate the possibilities of living a bi-gendered or intergendered life; Rebecca Walker's (2001) *Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* and Lawrence's Hill's (2001) *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada* explore the possibilities of living a bi-racial or interracial life.

I have discussed the notion of liminality not as an additional feature, but as an elaboration of the concept of the border. Once again, the borders around one's personal identity are not single lines, nor are they impermeable. The two features of the

conception of identity I propose, its structural dependence on the other, the trace of the

absent, and its porosity, have a parallel in the structural dependence and porosity of

language as analyzed in speech act theory. Because identity is discursively constituted,

understanding what language *does* is helpful for understanding what identity *does*.

Speech act theory, and its emphasis on what is performed and produced by language, is

a particularly useful perspective. The concept of performativity is the hinge on which

my conception of (discursive) identity turns. It is to this concept that I now turn.[19]

Performative discourse

The work of the English language philosopher J. L. Austin (1911-1960) is one of

the bases of what has been become known as speech act theory.[20] Austin (1961; 1962)

distinguished "performative" from "constative" utterances. In the paper "Performative

Utterances," published posthumously in 1961 and based on a talk he gave in 1956,

Austin walks the listener/reader quickly through the main characteristics of

performative utterances. A performative utterance does not report or describe an

action, but rather commits the action. In the case of a performative utterance, "in saying

what I do, I actually perform that action" (p. 222). Commonly used examples are "I

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[19] The word "performativity" has been used in different ways by different people. In Chapter 4 I
will touch on Jean-François Lyotard's (1979/1984) use of the word. Throughout Chapter 3,
however, I will use the word only along the lines of the work of J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida and
Judith Butler.
[20] Speech act theory, also known as "pragmatics" is the theory of language use. It focuses on what
language *does*, as distinct from semantics, which focuses on what language *means* (Bach, 1999, p.
869).

invite," "I apologize," and "I promise."

In direct response to the principle of verification of the logical positivists,[21] Austin points out that although performative utterances are not true or false, they are not nonsensical either. This does not mean, however, that all performative utterances are successful. Depending on the interlocutors and the context in which the utterance is made, a performative utterance can achieve or fail to achieve what it sets out to perform. For instance, "I thee wed" is a performative utterance which fails if the subject happens to be speaking to a same-sex partner in most parts of the world. Austin refers to performative utterances that achieve performance as "happy" or "felicitous" and to performative utterances that fail to achieve performance as "unhappy" or "infelicitous." In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), he addresses in greater detail the various kinds of infelicities that may happen to performative utterances.

Austin begins his inquiry with obviously performative formulas such as "I promise" and "I thee wed," but he concludes that more utterances have performative qualities than might appear at first glance. Not all performatives take the easily recognizable form of explicit performatives, but implicit performatives can be rephrased in explicit form. Austin suggests that "any utterance which is in fact a performative should be reducible, or expandible, or analysable into a form with a verb

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[21] According to this principle, propositions are meaningful only if they are verifiable either internally, on formal logical grounds, or externally, on empirical grounds. All other propositions are considered 'nonsense.'

in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical)" (pp. 61-62). This is

an important step: from positing only explicit, verb-based performatives such as "I

promise," "I apologize," "I welcome you," and so on, Austin expands the notion of

performatives to include the possibility of adjectives and statements. When a judge in a

court says "Guilty," that is equivalent to the explicit performatives "I find, pronounce,

deem you to be guilty" (p. 62). When a waiter says to a client, "This plate is very hot,"

that is equivalent to the explicit performative "I warn you that this plate is very hot."

In the course of his inquiry, Austin discovers that the line between constative

and performative utterances, and hence between speaking and acting, cannot be drawn

definitively. He concludes that the "the notion of the purity of performatives ... was

essentially based upon a belief in the dichotomy of performatives and constatives,

which we see has to be abandoned in favour of more general *families* of related and

overlapping speech acts ..." (p. 149). The term "speech act" indicates that speech can

also be understood as act, and that one can analyze the performative force of utterances

which do not appear to be performatives.

Performativity expanded

Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler are two of the theorists who have expanded

the concept of performativity. Derrida (1972/1988) points out that what Austin wrote

about the spoken word was just as valid for the written word: both speech and writing

have meaning as well as force. Continuing his argument from *Of Grammatology*

(1967/1976), Derrida takes on the phono-centrism of traditional philosophy, which

reasons its way from speech to writing. Instead, Derrida reasons his way from writing

to speech. By focusing on writing first, he is able to focus on the notion of absence,

which manifests itself more clearly in writing, and then examines whether and how

absence plays a role in speech. He concludes that all marks, including phonemes

(phonic signs) can be theorized from the perspective of the grapheme (written sign).

Of particular interest to the discursive conception of identity I am proposing are

the concepts of citationality and iterability, which emphasize the openness of present

discourse to previous and subsequent uses. Derrida (1972/1988) argues that the "total

speech act," which Austin claimed was central to his inquiry, extends beyond the

present utterance into future and past. The "total speech act" (or "discursive event," as

Derrida likes to refer to it) not only includes the present context, but also each context in

which the word(s) can be used in the future. The repetition of a word in a new context

is a repetition that alters: an iteration. Thus, every word is "iterable," and every total

discursive event extends into the future. Moreover, the total discursive event also

extends into the past: a word has meaning and force only because it cites, in one way or

another, a previous use in a previous context.

> Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat
> a 'coded' or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I

pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were
not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not then
identifiable in some way as a 'citation'? (Derrida, p. 18)

In other words, each spoken or written word, in order to be intelligible, must refer to

previous uses of itself (citationality), and each spoken or written word, once released by

its speaker or writer, can be re-used and changed in the process (iterability).

I wish to emphasize that citationality and iterability work in parallel ways to the

two attributes of identity I discussed earlier in this chapter: the dependence on the other

and the porosity of its borders. Each discursive act is citational, that is to say, dependent

on other discursive acts that preceded it, and each discursive act is iterable, that is to

say, open to change, open to being dislodged and changed by "the incoming of the

other." Citationality and iterability are aspects of discursive performativity which help

us think through identity's dependence on the absent (trace of the other) and identity's

openness to change by new inhabitants and new iterations.

As I have argued, one of the limitations of a narrative conception of identity is

that it tends to obscure the "fraying edges" of an identity, the indebtedness of a self-

narration on the other. Derrida's discussion of "citationality" underscores that not only

narrative structuring, but any discursive act of identity constitution is fundamentally

indebted to others' previous discursive acts. The indebtedness of identities and

discursive acts to each other is illustrated by an exchange between Jacques Derrida and

John Searle in the 1970's.[22] In "Limited Inc a b c" (1977/1988), Derrida emphasizes this discursive indebtedness by analyzing the common academic practice of acknowledging, in publications, the ideas and assistance of colleagues. Where do the acknowledgements end, and where does the indebtedness end? Derrida writes,

> What I like about this 'confrontation' is that I don't know if it is quite taking place, if it ever will be able, or will have been able, to take place; or if it does, between whom or what. Evidently, John R. Searle and 'myself' do not sign here, or speak for ourselves. (p. 37)

In addressing Searle, Derrida implicitly also addresses all the authors through whom Searle speaks, and who speak through him. Addressing "Searle" thus becomes addressing "Searle + an unknown number (n) of authors". "In order to avoid the ponderousness of the scientific expression three + n authors,'" Derrida decides "to give the presumed and collective author of the *Reply* the French name 'Société à responsabilité limitée' – literally, 'Society with Limited Responsibility (or Limited Liability) – which is normally abbreviated to *Sarl*" (p. 36). From this perspective, every narrative, thus every narrative identity, has as its author a 'Société à responsabilité limitée'. An important corollary of the subject's limited responsibility for her or his identity is the limited credit the subject can take for this identity construction. For example, as a woman, I not only bear limited responsibility for the meanings of the identity category "woman," I can also can take limited credit for these meanings.

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[22] "Limited Inc a b c" (1977/1988) is Derrida's reply to John Searle's (1977) "Reiterating the Differences: A reply to Derrida," which Searle wrote in response to Derrida's "Signature Event Context" (1972/1988).

Convention, repetition, and alteration

Both citationality and iterability figure centrally in Judith Butler's further work

on the concept of performativity. Butler, who can be considered the prime theorist in

the area of identity and performativity, has theorized the concept of performativity

especially in relation to the construction of gender identity. She emphasizes that

"performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual" (Butler, 1999, xv).

Austin (1962) had pointed out that "illocutionary acts rely on the force of *convention*,

which dictates that in certain circumstances, the issuing of a particular utterance is itself

the performance of an act (and not merely a locutionary one)" (p. 114, emphasis added).

Butler (1993) underscores the importance of convention for understanding

performativity.

> Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of
> a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like
> status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which
> it is a repetition. (p. 12)

Discursive acts not only work because of conventions, they also reinforce and

perpetuate them. With each repetition and reiteration, the convention grows stronger

and makes digression by new discursive acts more difficult.

Conventions and their repetition are important for the discursive production of

identity. The production of gender identity in school contexts, for example, relies

heavily on a kind of ritual discourse amongst youth that affirms heteronormative

constructions of boyhood and girlhood. I vividly remember a school camping trip in the

first year of my grammar school, where participation in collective flirting behaviour

with a young and handsome male teacher was an important part of the ritual that

allowed me to be "one of the girls." We competed in composing creative and daring

notes to post on the door of our sleeping quarters, demanding to be kissed goodnight

by the teacher in question. He complied.

Ritual repetition of desire, including aggressive desire, for the opposite sex, is

just as much part of the discursive production of boyhood. Michael Kaufman (1997)

observes that verbal sexual harassment of girls in schools typically takes place by

groups of boys, not by individual boys.

> Although the girls were the objects and the victims of the harassment,
> the boys weren't doing it primarily to have an impact on the girls. They
> were doing it for the other boys. They were proving to the other boys
> and, presumably, to themselves, that they were real men. The harassed
> girls were tokens of their masculine credentials. (p. 17)

Boys and girls do not express a pre-existing natural masculinity or femininity, but

rather actively participate in gendered (and heteronormative) ritual discourse to

construct their gender identity. In the process, they reinscribe and perpetuate this ritual

discourse.

The convention on which the performative force relies is not only reiterated, it is

also concealed, disclaimed, dissimulated. Derrida (1990/2002) has observed that

performative force often rests on the dissimulation of the convention upon which it

rests. Discourse can legitimate itself "by denying its performative power and rooting it

in a constative self-representation ..." (p. 33). Characterizations of groups and

individuals function along these lines, denying their own performative power and

passing themselves off as constative. In other words, one may think one uses language

merely to describe, refer, and represent, but in fact one reiterates, and hence

perpetuates, the performative force of certain discourse.

The concept of performativity is often, but not very helpfully, illustrated with

the examples of baptism and marriage. "Naming is calling into being," is the

explanation then given of performativity. But although the utterances "I christen thee"

and "I pronounce you husband and wife" are certainly performatives, they are

exceptional cases of performativity, which may obscure more everyday instances.[23] Both

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[23] The prime example of performative force of an utterance by a speaker with "special authority" comes from Louis Althusser (1971/1994), who discusses the interpellation of the subject by divine address. According to Althusser, interpellation by religious ideology works in the same way as interpellation by other ideologies. But Butler (1997b) questions the appropriateness and generalizability of Althusser's example for understanding discursive performativity.

> As useful as it is, Althusser's scheme restricts the notion of interpellation to the action of a voice, attributing a creative power to the voice that recalls and reconsolidates the figure of the divine voice in its ability to bring about what it names. ... But perhaps most important to consider is that the voice is implicated in a notion of sovereign power, power figured as emanating from a subject, activated in a voice, whose effects appear to be the magical effects of that voice.(p. 32)

Butler here critiques not only the phonocentrism of Althusser's argument, but also the assumption of the generalizability of the sovereignty of the interpellating subject. Butler points out that in Althusser's argument, "power is understood *on the model of* the divine power of naming, where to utter is to create the effect uttered. Human speech rarely mimes that divine effect ..." (p. 32).

in baptism and in marriage, the utterer is a representative of a religious or civil institution and as such has special authority.[24]

Butler's (1999) crucial insight into discursive identity construction more generally is that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual ..." (p. xv). In other words, rather than as the creative power of a single utterance by a sovereign speaker, performativity is better understood as the *cumulative* creative power of repeated spoken and written language in all contexts: interpersonal communication, mass media communication, educational discourse, et cetera. The way in which, for example, "woman" or "Jewish" or "deaf" are portrayed in (or remain absent from) advertising, school texts, sitcoms, legal discourse, and so on, is performative: it *produces* the very identity categories it seems to describe. Discursive performativity means not that I, as autonomous subject, "perform" my identity the way an actor performs a role, but rather that I, as subject, *am being performed* by the discourse in which I participate. Identity, on this account, can be understood as a discursive effect, or rather series of effects. This series of effects is not fixed, but open to change with each altering repetition (iteration). This leads Butler (1999) to describe an identity category as a "performatively enacted signification" (p. 44). One's personal identity can thus be described as an always shifting configuration of performatively enacted significations.

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[24] In the examples of baptism and marriage, also, traditions and conventions lend validity to the individual speech acts.

Implications for narrative identity

I have proposed a conception of identity that foregrounds the discursive conditions of identity constitution. This conception does not eliminate, but rather disrupts and augments the narrative conception of identity. The conception of identity I have outlined above, and especially the discussion of speech act theory, should make it clear that there is an important difference between narration as an *identity-constituting process* and narrative as an *identity-representing product*. I have argued that there is no pre-discursive, hence no pre-narrative, identity. Narration can be understood as a discursive act which produces effects we call identity. And it is not the only discursive act which produces such effects. Identity is narrated into being (or perhaps better: into conceptual existence), identity is named into being, identity is photographed into being, and so on.

The example of Vince, the student about whose self-narration I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, illustrates the performative force of self-narration. When Vince narrated himself as someone who had worked hard for his success and deserved every bit of it, he did not simply represent an objective reality of a hard-working and deserving Vince, but rather he *declared* himself hard-working and meritorious. In other words, his educational autobiography *produced* the effects it purported to describe. In declaring himself to be hard-working and deserving rather than, in any way, privileged, Vince positioned both himself and others in the class; this was the performative force of his speech act.

Vince's identity as a product of narration, however, remained incomplete and deferred. De Certeau (1984) explains,

> in narration [as distinct from description], it is no longer a question of approaching a 'reality' ... as closely as possible and making the text acceptable through the 'real' that it exhibits. On the contrary, narrated history creates a fictional space. ... Narration ... produces effects, not objects. (p. 79)

Taking the view that language constitutes rather than merely represents reality, I conceive narration as an identity-constituting activity which fails to produce a coherent and stable identity-product. Any narration must be highly self-conscious, aware of its not-knowing of a constitutive past, aware of the shaping power of the language with which the narrative is told or written, aware of the constitutive force of exclusions and absences, fragmentations and discontinuities – aware, also, of the limits of its own awareness, for example through disruption by the Unconscious. In Chapter 2, I discussed Arendt's perspective on narrative identity, which emphasizes that the story can be known only after the storying stops. One of the central features of the conception of identity I am proposing, by contrast, is that *the storying never stops*, not even after the death of the subject, and that the story can never be known in any certainty or essence.

This leads me to an explanation of a conception of identity as *différance*. The neologism *différance*, introduced by Derrida, combines the words and concepts of difference and deferral.[25] By *différance*, Derrida points not only at difference, but at

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[25] In French, the verb *différer* means both to differ and to defer.

difference from a source or origin which, itself, remains deferred. It is difference twice

over, difference that cannot be pinned down. By conceiving personal identity as

différance, I wish to emphasize not only that identity constantly changes, that the

configuration of inhabitations of identity categories constantly shifts, but also that no

origin or destination/destiny can be identified from or toward which these shifts move.

Personal identity as stable meaning-giving product remains deferred.

In her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967/1976), Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak explains *différance* through the example of a book and its readings.

> Two readings of the same book show an identity that can only be defined
> as a difference. The book is not repeatable in 'its' identity: each reading
> of the book produces a simulacrum of an 'original' that is itself the mark
> of the shifting and unstable subject ... using and being used by a
> language that is also shifting and unstable. (p. xii)

The identity of the human subject is as elusive as the identity of the book of which

Spivak speaks. Two instances, manifestations, impressions of the same human subject

show an identity that can only be defined as a difference. There is no essence to this

identity, no source or origin for the altering repetitions (iterations); identity is but a

chain of simulacra.[26] The difference of identity is a difference with itself, a difference

with an origin that is always already deferred: *différance*. After undergoing

poststructuralist critique, what is called "narrative identity" is a chain of telling/writing

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[26] "Simulacrum" here is meant as copy without model, as re-presentation whose reality or
original presentation has disappeared. See Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994), *Simulacra and Simulation*.

and retelling/rewriting, without *any story that is an essence as either origin or*

destiny/destination. The only narrative is the one that emerges in the narration, and each

retelling/rewriting is an iteration: a repetition that alters, yet that is anchored in

previous narrations; these previous narrations are themselves, however, iterations-

without-origin. This is identity conceived as *différance.*

One might wonder if "identity" is the best word to describe identity conceived

as *différance.* Once the concept of identity has been deconstructed, perhaps it is no

longer productive to use the word "identity" to designate this deconstructed concept.

Given my Derridean emphasis on difference, iteration, metonymy and instability, the

inevitable connotation of sameness in the word "identity" might confuse matters. An

alternative term that has been used by various theorists is "singularity."

Derrida (1997/2001) notes that "singular existence, even if it is given over to non-

self-presence, dislocation, and the non-reappropriation of a present, is for all that no

less singular" (p. 13). Elspeth Probyn (1996) distinguishes the singularity (identity) of

the individual from the specificities (identity categories) the individual inhabits. She

writes,

> To use yet other terms, the movement from specificity to singularity can
> be understood as processes that render the virtual actual – the way in
> which the general becomes actualized by individuals as singular. Simply
> put, we do not live our lives as general categories: as a lesbian I should
> do this; as a feminist I ought to do that. (p. 22)

Gert Biesta (1997) also prefers "singularity" over "identity," precisely because "identity" connotes sameness. When paraphrasing Hannah Arendt's (1958) "men ... reveal actively their unique personal *identities* and thus make their appearance in the human world" (p. 179, emphasis added), Biesta writes, "men differ from each other and disclose their 'distinct uniqueness,' their *'singularity'* in all their acting and speaking" (p. 94, emphasis added).

In this dissertation, however, I have continued to use the term "identity" for three reasons. Firstly, "singularity" is a more academic and less commonly used term; by using "identity" I signal a connection with questions of "identity politics" and everyday discourse about identity. Secondly, the word "singular," like the word "single," may create the impression of an atomistic individual. Speaking of the subject's "singularity" suggests that the subject is a subject onto herself or himself. One of the characteristics of identity as I conceive it, however, is an understanding of the subject and the subject's identity as dependent on, and vulnerable to, others. Thirdly, by continuing to use "identity" in ways that dislodge some of its old meanings (e.g., "sameness") I illustrate the possibilities of discursive iterability. Although meanings such as "sameness" will always remain part of the history of the signifier "identity," it is possible to reinscribe the signifier with a new signified.

Agency

In the conception of identity which I have proposed, the agency of the subject is also reconceived. The process by which the discursively constituted subject gains agency may need to be understood a little differently, but the subject does have agency. I could argue that my ability to act does not depend on a fully theorized understanding of subjectivity or identity. Butler (2004) writes,

> "If you saw me on ... a protest line, would you wonder how a postmodernist was able to muster the necessary 'agency' to get there today? I doubt it. You would assume that I had walked or taken the subway! ... We do not need to ground ourselves in a single model of communication, a single model of reason, a single notion of the subject before we are able to act" (p. 48).

But the theory need not be cast aside: agency can very well be theorized *within* the conception of identity I have sketched. In a conception of identity as *différance*, as dependent on and vulnerable to the incoming of the other, the subject has been decentered, and emphasis is placed on the discursive constitution of the subject and of the identity categories which s/he inhabits. Nevertheless, discursive constitution is not discursive determinism, and the subject derives agency from the very discursive processes in and through which it is cast. Let me explain.

Judith Butler borrows from Michel Foucault when she explains how the subject is, in a sense, *subjected*. "Subjection consists precisely in [the] fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our

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agency" (Butler, 1997a, p. 2). The dependency on discourse not of the subject's own

making seems to deny the agency of the subject; at the same time, it is only within this

discourse that one can emerge as an intelligible subject, that one's ability to act is

initiated and sustained. This, of course, seems self-contradictory, and Butler shows her

awareness of that by asking: "How can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition

for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination,

understood as the deprivation of agency?" (p. 10). The answer lies in a conception of

discourse as both enabling and constraining; discourse shapes, but not absolutely and

not monolithically:

> Whereas some critics mistake the critique of sovereignty [of the subject]
> for the demolition of agency, I propose that agency begins where
> sovereignty wanes. The one who acts (who is not the same as the
> sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted
> as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling
> constraints from the outset. (Butler, 1997b, p. 16)

If the subject becomes subject (*asujettissement*) only through being subjected to

discourses not of her or his making or choosing, whence can the subject derive agency?

Paradoxically, the subject's agency is derived from its appropriation of the discourse by

which it is subjected. Precisely because discourse is not a stable monolith but rather a

constellation of discursive events that always contain the possibility of failure and

subversive reappropriation (iterability), can Butler claim, "Agency exceeds the power

by which it is enabled" (p. 15). The subject is performatively called into being, and "the

name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a sense of agency from

ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call" (Butler, 1997b, p. 163). Excess and ambivalence are inherent in the discursive event.[27]

A deconstructive, hospitable perspective seeks precisely the excesses and ambivalences in discourse which provide openings. Discourse might seem to be a closed system in which there is little room for new signifieds and signifiers, but a closer look reveals the necessary hospitality in discourse, its necessary vulnerability to resistance and change. As Derrida (1967/1976) writes,

> Within the closure, by an oblique and always perilous movement, constantly risking falling back within what is being deconstructed, it is necessary to surround the critical concepts with a careful and thorough discourse – to mark the conditions, the medium, and the limits of their effectiveness and to designate rigorously their intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction they permit; and, in the same process, designate the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed. (p. 14)

The discursively constituted subject derives its agency from the crevices in discourse itself. The subject emerges as subject by being subjected to discursive power. This powerful discourse and its effects, however much they may appear as "closure," are not fixed and monosemous: rather, they are unstable and polysemous. Meaning spills over,

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[27] Lyotard (1979/1984) likewise acknowledges that human subjects are discursively constituted:
> Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at 'nodal points' of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. (p. 15)

However, Lyotard also points out that this discursive constitution of subjectivity and identity does not eliminate agency. "No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent" (p. 15).

preventing closure of the discourse and of the effects of power. The subject, subjected to discursive power, can see "the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed." The crevice opens up not because of lack, but rather because of an excess of meaning.

The master's tools

In this question of change *from within discourse itself*, I cannot ignore the echoes from Audre Lorde's (1984) well-know and oft-repeated assertion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 123). Can I change and transgress the boundaries of the identity categories I inhabit while inhabiting them, and while continuing to use the very discourse (tools) which constitutes me as a subject in these identity categories?

Judith Butler (1999) implicitly responds to Lorde's assertion when she writes, "There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there" (p. 185). Butler insists that although it may seem that the oppressed has to take her or himself out of oppressive discourse altogether to find a space for social existence, very often it is simply not possible to take oneself out of oppressive discourse. Adrienne Rich (1971) acknowledges this dilemma when she writes, "This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you" (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 167).

The subject inherits the "oppressor's language" and other discourses s/he is thrown into. A heritage, however, is not monolithic but internally fragmented.

> Let us consider, first of all, the radical and necessary heterogeneity of an inheritance ... . An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. ... If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret – which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so?' (Derrida, 1993/1994, p. 16)

Discourse is inherited many times over, and in each instance of inheriting, discourse is translated. Small shifts occur in this passing on, in the translation of translations of written and spoken signs and the ideas and categories that make them intelligible. In other words, one is shaped but not determined by discourse, and all discourse is, to some extent, unstable. Discourse perpetuates itself through use, but each instance of use entails a translation which dislodges and reinscribes the discourse.

Agency and responsibility

The extent of the agency derived from the appropriation of discourse will vary depending on the particular discursive events – and their institutional authority and cultural history – that make up the history of a subject's subjectivation. When Butler (1997b) emphasizes that "contexts inhere in certain speech acts in ways that are very difficult to shake" (p. 161), she calls our attention to the risk of blaming the individual subject for the successful or unsuccessful reappropriation of discursive acts. Yes, the

subject does have agency, hence responsibility, but these can only be judged in the context of the particular interpellative history of that subject. In this Butler takes position somewhere between Pierre Bourdieu and Derrida.

In order to explain *differential* agency and responsibility more fully, allow me a summary of the agreements and disagreements between Butler, Derrida and Bourdieu on this point. Bourdieu (1991) criticizes Austin for thinking "that he has found in discourse itself – in the specifically linguistic substance of speech, as it were – the key to the efficacy of speech" (p. 109, as cited in Butler, 1997b, p. 146). In other words, Bourdieu proposes that the ability of language to bring about effects is not inherent to discourse itself, but rather dependent on the social power of the one using the discourse, hence derived from institutional authority external to discourse. Derrida, by contrast, emphasizes not only that performativity is a feature inherent to discourse, but also that changes to this performative force through the reappropriation of discourse are always possible. Derrida (1972/1988) writes,

> Austin does not ponder the consequences issuing from the fact that a possibility – a possible risk – is *always* possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility. Nor whether – once such a necessary possibility of infelicity is recognized – infelicity still constitutes an accident. What is a success when the possibility of infelicity [*échec*] continues to constitute its structure? (p. 15)

Both performative force and the fallibility of this force are necessary features of discourse itself.

Butler is not satisfied with either Bourdieu's or Derrida's position. She observes that it is possible to make performatives fail by reappropriating them, but also that this possibility can be exploited with varying degrees of ease or difficulty in different cases. Butler (1997b) argues that Bourdieu fails to account for the possibility of a change in power relations through subversive reiterations of the performative. "In making social institutions static, Bourdieu fails to grasp the logic of iterability that governs the possibility of social transformation" (p. 147). She also argues that Derrida's position does not account for the greater or lesser difficulty various speakers may encounter in attempting to deploy the necessary fallibility of all signs strategically.

The pertinence of Butler's critique for the purposes of my argument lies, in particular, in the insistence that in different circumstances, the necessary fallibility and iterability of performatives may be *more or less easily exploited*. Although I do not believe that this contextualization is foreclosed by Derrida's analysis, it is indeed underemphasized. Both Butler and Derrida are interested in "the possibility of a derailment from within" whereas "Bourdieu inadvertently forecloses the possibility of an agency that emerges from the margins of power" (Butler, 1997b, p. 156). Butler, however, calls attention to the fact that the possibilities of breaking the performative free from its existing context, the possibilities of subversion and reinscription, are *unequally distributed*.

Furthermore, Butler observes that a break with the past does not eliminate that past, and that injurious performatives have a tendency to become inscribed on the body. "One need only consider how racial or gendered slurs live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee, and how these slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their history, taking on the semblance of the natural ..." (p. 159). The effects of instance after instance after instance of being interpellated in hurtful ways become sedimented in the bodies of those for whom the slurs are intended. The slurs "enter the limbs, craft the gesture, bend the spine" (p. 159) and this makes it easy to focus on and blame the individual bearer of such bodily marks rather than recognize the accumulation of discursive effects.

Subjects with different identities have different social positions, hence different power, and unequally agentic subjects should not be held equally responsible for the resignification of the identity categories in which they participate. In the contemporary North American context, for example, there is a considerable difference between the extent to which discourse related to aboriginal women has been dislodged, and the extent to which discourse related to gays and lesbians has been dislodged. The word "queer" has been used as a derogatory epithet for gays and lesbians, but has largely been reclaimed, and is now often used with pride by gays and lesbians in referring to themselves. The oppressive history of the word has been reinscribed to such an extent that it is now used in mainstream television shows such as "Queer as Folk" and "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy."

The word "squaw," however, which has been used as a derogatory epithet for

Aboriginal women, has not been dislodged and reinscribed to nearly the same extent.

There are some aboriginal people who address the use of this word; Janice Acoose

(1995), for instance, has written *Iskwewak - kah' ki yaw ni wahkomakanak: Neither Indian*

princesses nor easy squaws, and photographer Brad Callihoo has made and exhibited a

series of photos of aboriginal women under the title "They're not squaws." A defiant

use of the word "squaw" as honorary name, however, along the lines of the reclaimed

"queer" is not (yet) common.[28] Where in North American (especially urban) society,

gays and lesbians have come a long way in claiming visibility and civil rights, the

ongoing social, cultural and economic marginalization of aboriginal people affects their

"possibilities of (discursive) derailment from within" (Butler, 1997b, p. 156).

The question of agency and responsibility arises not only when considering the

differential possibilities of dislodging and reclaiming discourse, but also, and perhaps

more pressingly, when acts of physical violence are committed. Does an understanding

of the subject as subjectivated, cast in discourse beyond her or his control, leave enough

room for questions of culpability and accountability? In response to the events of

September 11, 2001, Butler (2004) writes,

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[28] This despite the fact that the word "squaw" is borrowed from the Algonquian family of native languages and simply means "woman" or "female." The Alberta Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) has in fact declared that it will no longer tolerate the word "esquao" (the northern linguistic equivalent of "squaw" as an insult. "IAAW is claiming back the term for all Aboriginal Women to stand proud when we hear Esquao applied to us" (as cited in Bruchac, 2001).

Those who commit acts of violence are surely responsible for them; they are not dupes or mechanisms of an impersonal social force, but agents with responsibility. On the other hand, these individuals are formed, and we would be making a mistake if we reduced their actions to purely self-generated acts of will or symptoms of individual pathology or 'evil.' (p. 15)

Butler's response is a sensible rejection of the simple dichotomy between being fully self-determining and being fully determined by forces outside one's control. A more nuanced account of the derivation and limitations of agency is certainly possible.

"Our acts are not self-generated, but conditioned. We are at once acted upon and acting, and our 'responsibility' lies in the juncture between the two. What can I do with the conditions that form me? What do they constrain me to do? What can I do to transform them? Being acted upon is not fully continuous with acting, and in this way the forces that act upon us are not finally responsible for what we do" (p. 16).

The juncture between being subjected to discourse not of our own making and acting upon and though that discourse, is the locus of responsibility in this poststructuralist perspective. It is in this view of agency that I position my account of identity as neither culturally or biologically determined, nor self-determined. Subjects are cast in discourse which positions them in certain identity categories, but these positionings are not fixed. Subjects do have agency, although not all to the same extent or in the same way, in the iterative responses to their various positionings. These responses can make collective identities, participation in which makes up personal identities, more or less hospitable places for the arrival of an other. For this the subject carries responsibility.

Commonality/universality

The conception of identity as *différance* that I have proposed offers news ways

for thinking about human common ground and about ethico-political action. Some

theorists are concerned that a Derridean conception of identity as *différance* and, more

generally, critiques of identity as essence, result in the loss of common ground (shared

essence) necessary for ethico-political human interaction. Butler (1992) refers to

feminists voicing this concern when she writes,

> There is the refrain that, just now, when women are beginning to assume
> the place of subjects, postmodern positions come along to announce that
> the subject is dead .... Some see this as a conspiracy against women and
> other disenfranchised groups who are now only beginning to speak on
> their own behalf. (p. 14)

And bell hooks (1990) describes a similar response from African-Americans:

> Considering that it is as a subject that one comes to voice, then the
> postmodernist focus on the critique of identity appears, at first glance, to
> threaten and close down the possibility that this discourse and practice
> will allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonization
> and domination to gain or regain a hearing. Even if this sense of threat
> and the fear it evokes are based on a misunderstanding of the
> postmodernist political project, they nevertheless shape responses. It
> never surprises me when black folk respond to the critique of
> essentialism, especially when it denies the validity of identity politics, by
> saying "yeah, it's easy to give up identity, when you got one." ... We
> should indeed [be] suspicious of postmodern critiques of the "subject"
> when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people
> feel themselves coming to voice for the first time.

My response to this concern will be twofold: on the one hand, I will outline what room

for commonality and universality my conception of identity leaves; on the other, I will

explain how the conception of identity as *différance* forms the basis for ethico-political action.

Poststructuralist theorists are typically mistrustful of universalistic claims. "The fear, of course, is that what is named as universal is the parochial property of dominant culture, and the 'universalizability' is indissociable from imperial expansion" (Butler, 2000a, p. 15). However, that does not mean that questions of universality have disappeared from poststructuralist discourse, or that they have been declared off-limits. Butler (2000c) argues "that a concept can be put under erasure *and* played at the same time; that there is no reason, for instance, not to continue to interrogate and use the concept of 'universality'" (p. 264). In poststructuralist discourse, the universal has been emptied of content, is no longer "the container of a presence" but has become "the placeholder of an absence" (Zerilli, 1998, as cited in Butler, 2000a, p. 33).

In her 2001 lecture "Ethical violence" Butler said, only half-jokingly, that a provisional sense of (human) community can be wrought from the fact that "we are all half-mad." We are all half-mad in the sense that we are all radically unselfknowing, opaque to ourselves and fundamentally dependent on the other. It is the subject's foreignness to itself, however, that forms the ground for its connection to others. Following psychoanalytic theorists such as Jean Laplanche, Butler (2000b) acknowledges that "the subject comes into being on the basis of foreclosure" (p. 153), but notes that this foreclosure is, itself, socially and discursively constituted. In other

words, the subject can only emerge as subject through the production of a gap in the subject's self-knowledge; this gap goes by the name of the unconscious, but "the unconscious is not a psychic reality purified of social content ..." (p. 153). What human subjects share, what can be postulated as new universality, is a constitutive lack, but *this universal lack does not have a universal form or content*. In other words, universality is "contaminated by particularity" (Laclau, 2000, as cited in Butler, 2000b, p. 163).

Butler (2000a) suggests we ought to "rethink universality in terms of [the] constitutive act of cultural translation" (p. 20). In line with Derrida's critique of the solid border I outlined previously, Butler (2002c) emphasizes contamination, the very impossibility of a pure border, as a placeholder for the universal. She does not, however, wish to posit this border-crossing as *a priori* universality:

> There is no self-identity to any particular culture, and any culture which is fenced off from others under the name of cultural autonomy is subverted in part by the crossing of cultures that happens at its border, if not elsewhere. So yes, every particular culture has always-already crossed over the border, into another one, and this very crossing is essential to (and subversive of) any conception of particular culture. And although I am glad to make this formulation in universal terms ('every culture...'), I am less sure that the universality is secured for a priori reasons. Nothing about the kinds of translations and contaminations that happen as part of the very project of cultural autonomy can be specified prior to an analysis of the forms they actually take. (p. 275)

Although Butler here discusses culture as collective identity, I would argue this analysis is equally pertinent for the individual identities that result from participations in collective identities. To paraphrase, then:

There is no self-identity to any particular *subject*, and any *subject* which is fenced off from others under the name of *individual* autonomy is subverted in part by the crossing of *identities* that happens at its border, if not elsewhere. So yes, every particular *individual identity* has always-already crossed over the border, into another one, and this very crossing is essential to (and subversive of) any conception of particular *identity*.

Derrida (1997/2001) also locates the universal in absence and lack, when he writes, "Somehow, this secret that we speak of but are unable to say is … the best-shared thing in the world; but it is the sharing of what is not shared: we know in common that we have nothing in common" (p. 58). One thing human subjects have in common is mortality – yet when it comes to dying and the moment of death, we know that we have nothing in common. Following Heidegger, Derrida (1992/1995) writes, "Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, 'given,' one can say, by death" (p. 41). Paradoxically, that which I have in common with absolutely every other human being, the coming of my death, is also my absolute singularity, that which I cannot share with anyone, for nobody can die in my place nor can I take on the death of anyone else. And I share with every other human being not only the coming of my death, but also my vulnerability to the coming of the death of the other. Butler (2004) writes

> Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a 'we,' for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all. (p. 20)

The universal lack, whether in the form of the subject's unselfknowingness or foreignness to the self, the subject's mortality or the subject's vulnerability to the

mortality of the other, forms the new ground for ethical action. Butler (2001) posits that

the radical unselfknowingness of the subject "mocks the posture of narrative control."

The subject cannot even begin to refer to itself outside of its relation to the other.[29] This

awareness of constitutive incompleteness and dependence (heteronomy) forms the

basis for humility, and for generosity when this humility is extended to others. The

subject must acknowledge the unknowability of the other as well as the self, and must

conclude, according to Butler, that "ethical relations are not reducible to acts of

judgement." Deferring judgement thus becomes a new ethical imperative.

Strategic alliances

Releasing an attachment to essentializing narratives, narratives that centre

around the membership to certain collective essentialist identities, means rethinking the

grounds for political action. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) analyze how the

political Left has struggled for decades with the "fragmentation of the different

positions of social agents which, according to the classical [Marxist] paradigm, should

have been united" (p. 18). Laclau and Mouffe argue that "it is necessary to analyse the

plurality of diverse and frequently contradictory positions, and to discard the idea of a

perfectly unified and homogeneous agent, such as the 'working class' of classical

discourse" (p. 84). They argue that people occupying different and even contradictory

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[29] Note the connection to Martin Buber's (1923/1970) philosophy of fundamental relationality:
"There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It" (p.
54).

subject positions may strategically join forces, not based on a perceived shared essence, but based on shared political interests.

Laclau and Mouffe take a post-Marxist and post-structuralist approach, asserting that "the era of 'privileged subjects' – in the ontological, not practical sense – of the anti-capitalist struggle has been definitely superseded" (p. 87), and positing "the precariousness of every identity, which manifests itself as a continuous movement of differences" (p. 122). It is precisely this precariousness and indeterminacy of all individual and collective identity, however, that forms the basis for new political action from the Left.

Laclau and Mouffe point out that the neo-conservative and neo-liberal "new right" seem to be effective in unifying "multiple subject positions around an individualist definition of rights and a negative conception of liberty" (p. 176). They conclude,

> In the face of the project for the reconstruction of a hierarchic society, the alternative of the Left should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression. (p. 176)

Equivalence, they explain, establishes a relationship between differences, in reference to a negative (i.e., antagonistic) external (pp. 127-128). "Two terms, to be equivalent, must be different – otherwise there would be a simple identity" (p. 128). In a chain of equivalence, the differences between the two terms do not disappear, but a relation is

established between them on the basis of a shared antagonism with something external. Laclau and Mouffe are aware that, at first glance, there might seem to be "an incompatibility between the proliferation of political spaces proper to a radical democracy and the construction of collective identities on the basis of the logic of equivalence" (p. 181). However, this incompatibility arises only if "this space of equivalences ceases to be considered as one political space among others and comes to be seen as the centre, which subordinates and organizes other spaces" (p. 186). As long as no one identity or cluster of political interests reifies itself or positions itself as "primary," political action based on strategic alliances of shifting and unstable identities is viable.

Concluding comments

In this chapter have proposed a conception of identity which emphasizes the necessary ajarness of all identity categories, and all personal configurations of inhabitations of those identity categories. The conception of identity I have proposed does not replace, but rather disrupts and extends the conception of identity as narrative. In my poststructurally oriented conception of identity, there is room for narration as an *identity-constituting process*, but narrative as an *identity-representing product*, remains deferred.

Drawing on speech act theory, I propose identity be understood as series of discursive effects rather than as source or origin. Just as discourse, for its performative

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force, is characterized by citationality and iterability, identity is characterized by its dependence on the other, and the other's discourse, and the permeability of its borders. In direct response to some of the concerns I expressed in Chapter 2 about narrative conceptions of identity, understanding identity through the performative force of discursive acts emphasizes the dependence of the subject (heteronomy), and the contingency and openness to change of the identity categories it inhabits.

The subject derives its agency from the cracks opened up by the altering repetitions (iterations) of discourse. Discourse is an accumulation of discursive acts, but between discursive acts, slippage and spillage occurs. This creates openings for discourse to be dislodged and its force redirected. Common ground between subjects with different identities can be found in a shared constitutive lack, in the form of disruption by the Unconscious but also in the form of shared mortality and shared indebtedness to the other. Possibilities for collective political action emerge from strategic alliances in which no single identity is reified or trumps others, but in which shared antagonism to an external force brings diverse subjects and their identities together.

In this conception of identity, the subject and its constitutive difference are permanently left ajar. Because discursive iteration is open-ended, no closure of identity categories is possible – neither in the identity categories I inhabit, nor in the identity categories the other inhabits. An understanding of one's identity in this way facilitates

hospitality. If I understand that the sense of who I am *in the here and now* is a moment in a chain of past and future meanings; if I understand that the other's sense of who s/he is, is, likewise, a moment in a chain of past and future meanings; and if I understand that for both myself and the other, these chains of past and future meanings are part of larger discursive webs which neither of us controls but in which we both participate, then it is easier to act hospitably and leave a place for the other. The question now is: how can I come to see myself and others this way? One answer which I will explore in the next chapter, is: through the development of "deconstructive regard."

CHAPTER IV
DECONSTRUCTIVE REGARD

I look back over what I've written and I know it's wrong, not because of what I've set down, but because of what I've omitted. What isn't there has a presence, like the absence of light. (Atwood, 2000, p. 498)

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have presented the view that the possibilities of educating for hospitable identity are closely bound up with the conception of identity underpinning the educative efforts. I have argued for a conception of identity as a home (*chez-soi*) with the doors and windows ajar, for guiding education towards hospitable identity. My misgivings about the conception of identity as narrative are based on the observation that a hospitable *chez-soi* needs to be aware of its own dependence on an outside, of the constructedness of beginnings (entrances) and ends (exits), of absences and discontinuities, of the language in and through which identity is produced, and so on. The question is now *how* students can be taught to be attentive to these matters. What will encourage and teach students to see through or beyond the singular and immediate meaning or message that one's personal identity, especially when presented in narrative unity, seems to convey?

If students are not encouraged explicitly to question the constructedness, exclusions and fragmentations of unitary meanings, it is easy for them to become or remain inattentive. This attitude of "getting on with things" without acknowledging or questioning what allows us to do so, has been described by Virginia Woolf (1985) as being "embedded in a kind of non-descript cotton wool" (p. 70, as cited in Greene, 2001, p. 137). What can tear this cotton wool, what can show the ruptures in the apparent smoothness? What can leave us ajar?

I turn to works of art and aesthetic education for developing a pedagogy that fosters hospitable identity, based on my own experiences with works of art and aesthetic education, and the way they offer experiences which can disrupt taken-for-granted ways of seeing. One memorable experience that left me ajar occurred more than ten years ago, when watching a dance performance. The choreography being performed was Jiri Kylian's *Tiger Lily*, and I watched it in The Hague, as part of a course assignment during my undergraduate studies. I had little experience with seeing dance, little knowledge of dance to draw on, and as someone who was accustomed to reasoning her way out of questions and quandaries, I was feeling unsure of myself. *Tiger Lily* shook me to the bone – literally, physically – yet I did not understand what I had seen. I believe I was shaken as much by the performance as by the experience that something beyond my intellectual grasp could have such an impact on me. The experience literally opened up for me the possibility of receiving something that was decidedly other, that did not fit in my existing interpretive frameworks. I had not

invited the experience, had not tidied my home to prepare myself for a visitor, but had

been surprised by a stranger nonetheless. This stranger made me aware of having an

interpretive framework, and the confrontation with something that did not fit

compelled me to question its boundaries.

Maxine Greene (2001) describes in the following words the impact aesthetic

experiences with works of art have had on her:

> It is certainly true for me that novels and plays and films help me free
> myself from embeddedness in cotton wool. The disclosures that I
> experience are not always pleasant; some of them afflict me with outrage,
> some with a kind of despair. But ... they are almost always followed by a
> desire to explain. (p. 138)

Aesthetic experiences can shake up taken-for-granted ways of seeing oneself and

others, including the boundaries that keep self and other apart, and the language

through which identity categories are sustained. The desire to explain opens the door a

crack, and may leave it ajar.

In this chapter, I will discuss *aesthetic education* as the paradigm for the kind of

pedagogy I believe is suited for developing hospitable identities. In discussing aesthetic

education, I am not so much interested in one subject, such as studio art or art history,

but rather in a pedagogy that can be used in various formal subjects or informal

programs. I use the word "aesthetic," informed by its etymology, not in the sense of

"beautiful," but rather in the sense of aesthetizing.[30] "Aesthetic" comes from the Greek *aisthanesthai*: to feel, to perceive. Hence, *aesthetizing* refers to the bringing alive of the ability to perceive actively and attentively, and its opposite, *anaesthetizing*, much like it is used in medicine, refers to the numbing and impoverishing of perception.[31]

Although there are various kinds of aesthetizing encounters that enhance one's perceptiveness, Maxine Greene (2001) contends that encounters with works of art offer particularly strong aesthetizing experiences. The artist has done her or his job of carefully perceiving, and proceeded to a selecting and ordering of the multitude of what s/he has perceived. That makes works of art "particularly suited for aesthetic regard. They are made by living persons for living persons; they offer each of us visions *for us* – if we are willing to open ourselves to them, to attend" (p. 12). I will follow Greene's lead here, hence my examples will be of aesthetic experiences of works of art, although I grant that works of art are not alone in providing occasions for aesthetic

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[30] "Aesthetizing" needs to be distinguished from "aestheticizing," as it is used by Martin Heidegger (1954/1971) and Mike Featherstone (1991). When Heidegger warns against "a preoccupation with aestheticizing" (p. 213), he is referring to a preoccupation with beautifying flourishes and decorative fancies. Under the heading "aestheticization of everyday life," Featherstone analyzes a variety of ways in which the boundaries between art and everyday life are effaced, including "the project of turning life into a work of art" (p. 66) and the saturation of everyday life by a constant flow of signs and images (p. 67).

[31] John Dewey and Maxine Greene use the term "(a)esthetic" in similar ways. Dewey (1934) uses "esthetic" to refer to "experience as appreciative, perceiving and enjoying," in other words, actively involved (p. 47). Slackness, incoherence, and submission to rule and convention, by contrast, lead to "anesthetic" experience (p. 40). Greene (2001), following Dewey's lead, writes that aesthetic education is intended "to empower teachers, students, parents ... to act upon their freedom in the world they share with others. That means resisting determinism, apathy, indifference, carelessness, and the numbness or the *anaesthesia* that seems to affect so many people's lives" (p. 111, emphasis added).

experience.[32] Although aesthetic education can certainly involve literature and poetry, and performances of music, theatre and dance, I will draw examples especially from two-dimensional and three-dimensional visual art.

The pedagogy I will sketch through the example of aesthetic education is rooted in radical hermeneutics and deconstruction. In Chapter 1 I introduced radical hermeneutics as a deconstructively oriented interpretive approach which leaves every interpretation and every meaning ajar. Radical hermeneutics acknowledges both the necessity of interpretation and the impossibility of reaching interpretive closure. I use radical hermeneutics of art as an "exemplary example," a paradigm, for a radical hermeneutics of identity. It is helpful to start teaching radical hermeneutics by focusing on works of art: visible, audible, tangible, etc. objects, texts, and performances. From there, students can be invited to consider their identities, those elusive conceptual "objects," by asking themselves questions similar to the ones they asked themselves when considering works of art.

Again, the question central to this chapter is how to teach students to be attentive to the ajarness of their identity. How can one go about increasing students' awareness of the constructedness and permeability of the boundaries around the identity categories they inhabit? How can one go about showing them that despite their

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[32] Aesthetic education as I conceive it involves the use of works of art *as works of art*, i.e., for the aesthetizing encounters they provide rather than for other purposes such as social distinction, or even alleged educational benefits such as higher scores on mathematics tests.

best hermeneutic efforts, both their self-identity and the identities of others they encounter will escape interpretive closure? How can students be made aware that their "reading" of themselves and of others is mediated and shaped by the discourses in which they participate? My answer will lie in a pedagogy modeled on aesthetic education and, in particular, in training a *deconstructive regard*. Let me explain this term, which will play a central role in this chapter.

There are different ways of looking at visual art. I may, for instance, look at what is there, at what is visually *present* in the work: its colours, lines, shapes, texture, size, and so on. But I may also look at what is, properly speaking, not there, at what is visually *absent* from the work: the artist her or himself, the creation process, the social and cultural influences, and so forth. And I may look at what separates that which is present in the work from that which is absent from the work: the frame around a painting, for instance, or the information card with the title of the work and name of the artist.[33]

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[33] My use of terms such as "in the work" and "outside the work" begs the question: what is a work of art? More traditional philosophies of art typically fall in one of two categories: essentialist theories such as Clive Bell's formalism, which locates the criteria for art-ness in the work itself, and non-essentialist theories such as George Dickie's institutional theory, which locates the criteria for art-ness in the culture and society in which in the work is made and/or judged (Werhane, 1984). These theories of what constitutes a work of art are ontologies of art: they theorize the nature of being-art (Battin, Fisher, Moore, & Silvers, 1989, p. 10). The works of art to which I will refer as examples are works which have been exhibited in public galleries, hence have met the criteria of cultural institutions charged with judging the art-ness of art. But although by describing them as such I am voicing a non-essentialist perspective, I am much less interested in defining what works of art *are* than I am in what they *do*, especially in how they provide occasions for concentrated perception and thought, and for reflection upon the nature of that perception and thought, their inclusions and exclusions, and what separates the two.

This attention to what is present in and absent from a work, and the border between the two (the frame), is what I call a *deconstructive regard*. A deconstructive regard is a way of looking which does not merely take in what presents itself, but which sees its object as dependent upon and related to a past and future which are – by definition - not present, but which have left traces. A deconstructive regard understands that what presents itself is dependent on a border or frame which distinguishes it from what absents itself. It is a self-aware way of looking which recognizes that what is perceived cannot be separated from the perceptual framework of the perceiver, and that is what is perceived is dependent upon what is not perceived.

Two concepts play a central role in the pedagogy I will propose, and I have organized this chapter around them. The first is the *parergon*, the surroundings of the work (of art). By learning to attend to the *parergon*, students can learn to attend to the borders around human artifices. The second is the secret, the fundamental alterity of the work (of art). By learning to leave a place for the secret, students can learn to leave a place for the alterity of the other.

Deconstructive regard: Recognizing borders and parerga

In order to explain a deconstructive regard as a way of looking which pays attention to presence, to absence, and to the border between the two, I now turn to the concept of the *parergon*. In *The Truth in Painting* (1978/1987), Derrida discusses "the

insistent atopics of the *parergon*" (p. 9).[34] Derrida examines Kant's use of the term

"parergon" as that which surrounds (*par*) the work (*ergon*) and stretches it, opens it up,

interrogates its boundaries, "for not every milieu, even if it is contiguous with the work,

constitutes a *parergon* in the Kantian sense" (p. 59). Kant identified clothing on (around)

statues, columns on (around) buildings, and frames on (around) paintings as *parerga*,

but Derrida asks, "Where does a *parergon* begin and end [?]" (p. 57). The frame, title and

signature of a work can be theorized as *parerga* – but also the museum or archive in

which it is housed, the discourse surrounding this work and works of art more

generally, the market in which it is evaluated, and so on.

The *parergon* is a supplement, a concept which deserves some closer scrutiny. At

first glance, a supplement is an addition – like the frame and title are additions to the

painting, that which is considered "the work itself." But Derrida (1967/1976) observes

that "the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates

itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" (p. 145). The supplement is both

complementary and compensatory (*suppléant*); it is not merely an exterior addition, but,

as Charles Bingham (2002) points out, something that "instills itself as a *natural* part of

that which it supplements" (p. 269).

The *parergon* is a specific case of the supplement. In the case of the work of art,

the title is not an addition to the work *that can be taken away without affecting the work.*

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[34] *Atopics*, from the Greek *atopos*, strange; from the Greek *a*, not, and *topos*, place.

Although the "work itself" is considered complete, once it has been supplemented with a title, this title completes the work and if it is removed, it will leave the work incomplete. The frame, the signature, the museum wall on which the work is displayed all function as *parerga*, as supplements in this double way.

Let me give an example of what it might look like to pay attention to the *parergon*. In March 2004 I saw George Sawchuk's sculpture *The Bride* (1991) in the Two Rivers Gallery in Prince George, B.C.[35] Grey stone had been sculpted into an oval, abstracted facial form. From what I took to be the nose, a large round ring of thin metal was suspended. On this ring dangled a small metal cross. Although the sculpture itself was striking enough, it was especially its shadow that caught my attention. The way the sculpture had been positioned on the white gallery wall, and the way the light shone on it from above, created a shadow of the stone face, the ring and the cross, with the oval shadow of the face visually touching the bottom of the ring.

The shadow can be considered *parergonal* – and indeed, where does a *parergon* begin and end, for if the shadow is *parergonal*, so is the light. The shadow supplemented the work; although the shadow was not part of the "work itself" as it was made by Sawchuk, it was more than a mere addition to the work. Functioning as supplement, the shadow completed the work *as if* the work had previously lacked it, and if I saw *The Bride* again elsewhere, without this shadow, the work would seem incomplete to me.

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[35] By permission. Original work © George Sawchuk, 1991. Photograph © Glen Patterson, 2004.

All this is to say that it is not so easy to establish where "the work itself" ends, or to separate what is present in the work from what is absent from the work. Concepts such as the *parergon* and the supplement help theorize the act and area of separation – for the border between inside and outside is never a single line.
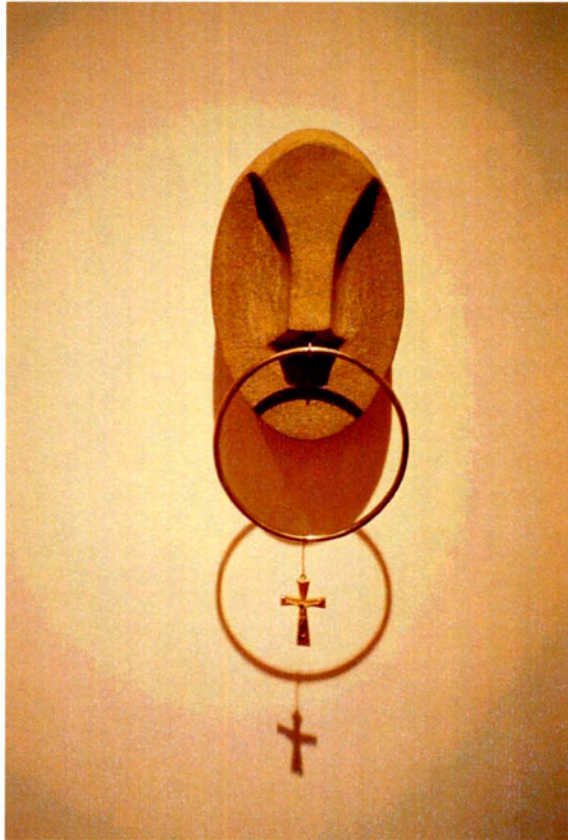
Figure 1: George Sawchuk, The Bride

Recognizing a *parergon* when the *ergon* is a work of art can help us recognize a *parergon* when the *ergon* is an other human artifice. Take, for example, the human artifice of the country. The act of delimiting a country actually constitutes that country; there is no country if there is no border separating the inside (domestic) from the outside (foreign). The border of a country is never a single line; for instance, without the

proper transit visa, a traveller may be held in a transit office at an airport, a non-place

inside the very country to which admission has been refused. Or take the example of

the conceptual artifice of gender, for which, I would argue, it is equally important to

recognize the constitutive interdependence of the concepts of "man" and "woman",

and the fact that there is a liminal zone rather than a clear demarcation between the

genders. Given the strong influence of educational practices on the construction of

gender identity, this last example is especially salient. Encouraging students to consider

the *parerga* around "masculinity" and "femininity" is a step in the education of

hospitable identities.

Who framed the experience?

In the previous section I have spoken mostly about factors affecting the

experience of a work of art that border directly on the work, such as the frame of a

painting or the shadow of a sculpture. But where does a *parergon* begin and end? Or,

put differently: where does the work end and do I as experiencing subject begin?

Salman Rushdie (2002) writes, "The way we see the world affects the world we see" (p.

375). My "subjective" way of seeing becomes part of what I perceive to be the

"objective" seen. And, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, my "subjective" way

of seeing is very much shaped by the culture into which I have been thrown, the

(visual) discourses in which I participate. And so the *parergon* is insistently atopical,

always already once removed from the *ergon*. Let me examine the *parergonal* qualities of

the viewer's interpretive framework by means of a fictitious example. In this example, I will suggest an experience of a work of art according to very deliberate perceptual steps that move from the work itself to the work's *parerga*.

Imagine I am standing in a gallery in front of a work of art, speaking by cell phone with a friend who is elsewhere and cannot see this work, but asks me to describe it. The following conversation ensues.

What do you see?

I see… blue.

What do you mean, "blue'? Blue paint?

Well, kind of, but not paint as you're used to seeing paint, more…
powder, pigment. Yes, pigment, it's almost as if pure pigment of the
deepest, most saturated cobalt blue has somehow been attached to a
surface.

What kind of surface?

It's a rectangle of, I estimate, about a meter high and just over half a
meter wide. The surface is not smooth, but has all kinds of blobs and
bumps on it. There are eleven big blobs and lots of small bumps scattered
over the surface. The blobs are not smooth either; they look like some
sort of porous rock, like the lava rock I found in the pocket of my stone-
washed jeans, or a coral of some sort. Or maybe they're sea sponges.

I guess you're not allowed to touch it?

No, I'm in a gallery and moreover, this thing is in a Perspex showcase
mounted on a wall.

Too bad. Do you like it?

Yeah, it's really mesmerizing. When I look at it intensely for ten seconds
or so, it's as if I'm being sucked into this vortex of blue, into space, and
I'm surrounded by meteorites…

Who made this thing?

Let me see… it says here "Yves Klein." Oh, and the title is "Untitled blue sponge relief." He made it in 1960, and it's "dry pigment in synthetic resin on sponges, pebbles, and wood panel." Ha, so they *are* sponges!

Who is this Yves Klein character?

Was. It says here he died in 1962 – and young too, he was only born in 1928. But my battery is dying – I'll call you back.

Figure 2: Yves Klein, Untitled Blue Sponge Relief

The telephone conversation is fictitious, the work and me seeing it are not. I saw

the 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief" in the exhibition *Yves Klein: Leap into the void* in

the Hayward Gallery in London, in the spring of 1995.[36] The conversation is fictitious, as my experience of the work was not built up from the perceptual steps I suggest, and it is not likely anyone's experience would proceed according to such steps, because viewers bring their experience of a work of art what they already know about the work. For example, I knew that Yves Klein was the maker of the works I was going to look at, from the moment I bought my admission ticket. And if my friend had asked me, What do you see? I would likely have looked at the title card beside the work and told him, "One of Yves Klein's blue sponge reliefs," or something to that effect.

My point here is that all kinds of things that are not present in the object itself, such as the artist and the title, would have inserted themselves between me and the work. My perception would not have been built up the way I suggest in the conversation above: seeing pure colour, then seeing texture, and size, and physical context, and only then reading the name of the work and of the artist who made it.

Parerga commonly precede and intervene in the perception of the *ergon*. It takes some very active un-seeing of the white wall on which the work is hung, of the Perspex showcase, of the title and name of the artist, and so on, to be able to see what is commonly considered "the work itself". Once I become aware of that, I can reflect upon the way in which things that are not present in "the work itself" not only frame but in

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[36] By permission. Original work in Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. © Estate of Yves Klein / SODRAC (Montreal, 2005). Photograph © Walter Klein.

fact co-constitute the work, make it possible for me to see the work, as well as how these things which are absent from the work affect how I see the work.

When I reflect not only upon what I see, but also upon *how* I see what I see, I become aware of other factors mediating my perception. For instance, the fact that I am in a city I don't know very well, speaking a language which is not my mother tongue, visiting a gallery I have never visited before, may reinforce the alienating effect of the saturated blue colour. The fact that I have visited other museums and have seen other works of art affects the string of associations I have when seeing Klein's work – to mind come Mark Rothko's colour-field-paintings, the blue of Henri Matisse's Blue Nudes, the textures in the works of Antonio Tàpies. Before reaching this "Untitled blue sponge relief" I have passed and read information about Yves Klein's life, his judo training in Japan, the development of his "International Klein Blue" paint, his fatal heart attack at age 34 – and all those bits of information enter into the mediating forces that affect how I see the work.

Once again, I am claiming that aesthetic education is paradigmatic for a pedagogy that stimulates the kind of attentiveness necessary for seeing the cracks in an identity that presents itself like a coherent whole, for seeing absences, discontinuities and fragmentations in personal identity. So what pedagogy will stimulate awareness of the forces mediating perception of, say, the 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief"? And how would this pedagogy work in stimulating students' awareness of the forces

mediating the conception of their and others' identities? Of course "seeing" the blue

sponge relief and "seeing" my identity are two different kinds of seeing – the blue

sponge relief being a physical object I can see with my physical eyes, and my identity

being a concept, a mental object I can "see" only with the mind's eye. Yet the meta-

awareness, or awareness of awareness, that is required for "seeing" how I see a work of

art is not very different from the meta-awareness required for "seeing" how I see my

identity – especially when one considers that identity, narratively or otherwise

structured, is a human construct and artifice. Moreover, where does perception end and

conception begin, or vice versa? Mental conceptions (in)form what and how one

perceives with one's senses, and likewise sensory perceptions (in)form what one

conceives with one's mind.

Developing a deconstructive regard and becoming aware of the factors

influencing my perceptions and conceptions is the first step towards recognizing that

others might see things differently, and that, perhaps, I myself might come to see things

differently. When Rushdie (2002) writes, "The way we see the world affects the world

we see," he provides the following two examples: "As our ideas of female beauty

change, so we see different sorts of women as beautiful. As our ideas of healthy living

change, so we begin to look at the things we eat differently" (p. 375). And there are

other examples. As our ideas of hospitality and justice change, so we see refugees at our

borders differently. As our ideas of love and family change, so we see same-sex

partnerships differently.

Through aesthetic education I can develop the ability and habit of double awareness – of awareness of the work of art as well as awareness of what frames and constitutes my perception of that work. That perceptual ability is necessary for seeing that my identity is never a closed and monolithic construct, for seeing the cracks and openings as well as the traces left behind by the histories of the identity categories I inhabit. Just as I can learn to see that and understand how my perception of the blue sponge relief is affected by all the other works of art I have seen, I can learn to see that and understand how my perception of my being a woman is affected by all the other instances of womanhood I have encountered. And just as I can learn to see and reflect upon the border between what is inside the work and outside the work, and the border between what is considered art and what is not considered art, I can learn to see and reflect upon the border between what is considered "woman" and what is considered "man".

An identity category is an artifice, a human construct, just as a work of art is an artifice, a human construct. And an identity category can be the object of perception and reflection, just as a work of art can be. By first developing the habit of looking at works of visual art, seeing and contemplating not only the "work itself" but also what constitutes its borders, it is easier to make the next step: developing the ability to see human artifices and their borders. Once students have practiced carefully considering works of art, by looking at what is present in the work, what is absent from the work, and how the border between presence and absence is constituted, they can be invited to

consider their identities by asking themselves similar questions. What is present – what do "blackness" or "masculinity" mean in the here and now? What is absent – what traces from the past do the identity categories "black" and "masculine" carry, and what is excluded from these categories? What is the nature of the frame, of the border around my identity? Could it be a wide frame, a liminal zone, rather than a simple line dividing who or what I am from who or what I am not? Concepts such as the *parergon* and supplement have pertinence not only to works of art that are accessible through sight, hearing, touch and other senses, but also to conceptual "works" that are accessible through thought.

Substituting the example

In the preceding section, I proposed examining the *parergonal* qualities of the viewer's interpretive framework "by means of a fictitious example." I proceeded to describe the aesthetic experience of one particular work of art, Yves Klein's 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief." This painting thus functions as an example of works of art that can be used for the kind of aesthetic education I have sketched. But the use of an example raises questions about the substitutability of that example. As Derrida (2002d) points out, "an example is always a kind of substitutable substitute: when I say 'for example,' I immediately say that I could substitute an other example ..." (p. 409). On the one hand, saying that Yves Klein's 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief" is "just an example" does violence to the work, in denying its singularity and implying that any

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work could take its place. On the other hand, saying that Yves Klein's 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief" is not substitutable means that it cannot function as an example, and that I am really writing about the experience of this one particular work rather than aesthetic experience more generally.

There certainly are qualities particular to the 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief" and the artistic intentions of its maker that suggest this work is especially well-suited for the kind of aesthetic experience I have described. Stich (1994) notes that "Klein's entire creative energy and all his art projects were aimed at expanding and intensifying human awareness of the actualities of existence. Above all, he wanted to awaken an individual's sensibility – one's capacity to see, feel, and think ..." (p. 7). Are works of art which were not made with the purpose of stimulating sensibility, of being the object of intense spatio-visual experience, as suitable for the kind of aesthetic education I have described? In certain works of conceptual art, for instance, the power of the work is considered to be primarily in the thought that went into the artistic process, rather than in what is perceptually available in the resultant object. However, I would argue that this does not make them less suitable for aesthetic consideration or a deconstructive regard. Rather, it means that the balance and tension between what is present in the work itself, what is absent from the work, and what is *parergonal* to the work is different. Yves Klein's 1960 "Untitled blue sponge relief" offers one particular experience of, and raises one particular set of questions about, what is "inside the

work," what is "outside the work" and what can be considered the border between inside and outside.

To give an entirely different example, Marcel Duchamp's (1917) work "Fountain" also offers an aesthetic experience of, and raises a set of questions about, what is "inside the work," what is "outside the work" and what can be considered the border between inside and outside.[37] For "Fountain," Duchamp took a regular, mass-produced white porcelain urinal, turned it ninety degrees, and signed it "R. Mutt 1917" with black paint. It was not the urinal *as urinal* which Duchamp submitted as a work of art for the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, but rather a urinal rotated ninety degrees (hence made useless as urinal!), signed with a mysterious pseudonym, and given as title the name of an object spouting rather than receiving fluids (this "fountain" would get the urinator's shoes wet). The signature "R. Mutt" is an interesting supplement to the urinal, and there has been much speculation about this name. It is believed that Duchamp wanted to disguise his identity as the one submitting the work to the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists because he was a member of the Society's Board of Directors (Betacourt, n.d.). It is also said that Duchamp borrowed the name from the "Mutt & Jeff" comic strip that appeared daily in the San Francisco *Chronicle* from 1907, originally under the title *A. Mutt* (Markstein,

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[37] By permission. Original work © estate of Marcel Duchamp / SODRAC (Montreal, 2005). Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, 1917 (private collection, France). © Estate of Alfred Stieglitz / SODRAC (Montreal, 2005).

2000-04). Personally, I was struck most by the name's phonetic similarity to the German word "Armut," which means "poverty."

Although title and signature of a work are often considered *parerga*, in this case one could argue that the title and signature are the work (*ergon*) itself, and that the porcelain object is *parergonal*. The location of the object is another *parergon* which functions as a supplement: although the "work itself" can be moved to various locations, each location becomes part of the work itself, as the display of the urinal outside of a men's bathroom, unconnected to further plumbing, is part and parcel of the presentation of the object as work of art.

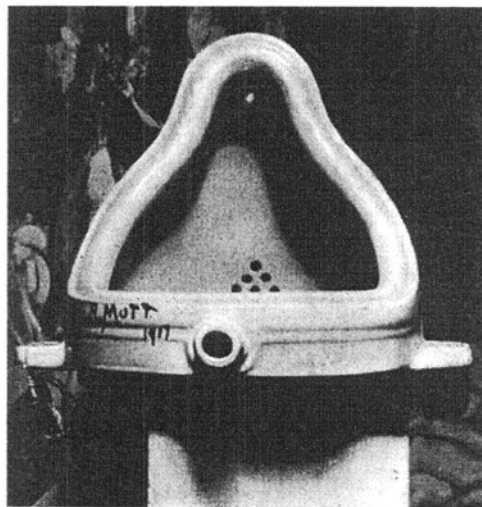*Figure 3: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain*

Both "Untitled blue sponge relief" and "Fountain" are unsubstitutable because each work offers its own aesthetic experience and raises its own questions. But both are substitutable, because all works offer some aesthetic experience or other and raise some questions or other about the *ergon* and *parergon*. This does not mean it might not be

reasonable to suggest a gradual training of the aesthetic regard (and patience) of

viewers who are not yet habituated to sustained attention to a work, its content and

parergonal structure. One could build the student's visual stamina, as it were, beginning

with a work such as Yves Klein's "Blue Sponge Relief," which offers an intense viewing

experience, and gradually move on to other works which may not hold the viewer's

attention as easily.

However, students should not be given the impression that a work, even if it

seems accessible, will ever give up all of its secrets. In the next section, I will elaborate

the *secret* as the second central concept which will help me explain the pedagogy that

stimulates students' attentiveness to the constructedness of (narrative) identity, and to

its absences and discontinuities. The secret is at the heart of the work of art and is

threatened by demands for clarity. The work of art defies attempts at translation and

transparency, and summons the viewer to what I would call a non-consumptive

hospitality, a hospitality that takes the work in without fully consuming its meaning or

absorbing it into the world of the host.

Clarity and the secret

No matter how long or how intensely I look at Yves Klein's blue sponge relief,

and no matter how much I read about his life and his other works, there will remain at

the core of my seeing a not-knowing. For starters, I do not and can never know all that

happened when Klein made the work, what he intended, what was going through his

mind. Also, and perhaps more interestingly, I do not and can never know what other

interpretations of this work are yet to come. The meaning of the 1960 "Untitled blue

sponge relief" is never clear or completed, always left ajar, open to meanings and

interpretations yet to come. Likewise, the meaning of Duchamp's "Fountain," including

the "R. Mutt" signature, is never clear or completed. This is not a failure on the part of

the interpreter, nor is it a weakness on the part of the work or its maker. The

multiplicity of meanings, and the possibility of future meanings yet to come (*à venir*), is

a structural feature of all works of art (and, more generally, of all signs).

Derrida (1997/2001) has said that he writes with "a certain 'I hope that not

everyone understands everything about this text', because if such transparency of

intelligibility were ensured it would destroy the text, it would show that the text has no

future [*avenir*], that it does not overflow the present, that it is consumed immediately"

(p. 30). For example, Derrida admits that there is in his own writing "the demand that a

sort of opening, play, indetermination be left, signifying hospitality for what is to come

[*l'avenir*] ... (p. 31). The demand that a text (or a work of art) reveal its secret does not

do justice to its necessary incompleteness of meaning, to the multiplicity of meanings

that stretches out into past and future. The demand that a person reveal her or his secret

is not only a profoundly inhospitable demand, but also presumes an impossible self-

transparency on the part of this person.

> For me, the demand that everything be paraded in the public square and
> that there be no internal forum is a glaring sign of the totalitarianization

of democracy. I can rephrase this in terms of political ethics: if a right to the secret is not maintained, we are in a totalitarian space. (p. 59)

This totalitarian demand runs counter to an ethic of hospitality, in which room for alterity and acceptance of the unknowability of the other are central. I will discuss the totalitarian demand for clarity later in this chapter.

Ontological difficulty

The alterity and secrecy Derrida speaks of can be understood as "ontological difficulty," a term I am borrowing somewhat disrespectfully from George Steiner (1978). Steiner uses the term "ontological difficulty" for one of four "modes of difficulty" commonly encountered in post-Renaissance Western poetry (p. 19). His purpose with this typology of modes of difficulty is to provide a better understanding of what readers may mean when they call a certain poem or poetical passage "difficult." *Contingent* difficulty is the most common mode of difficulty and can be overcome by looking up the word, phrase or reference which at first escapes our understanding. Once we have looked up the archaic word, the technical jargon or the etymology of a word, we can get on with our reading and interpretation. *Modal* difficulty tends to be more serious, and may at times even be impossible to overcome. It arises when the work reaches our rational understanding, but escapes the reach of our feelings. We can study a poem, understand the meaning of the sentences, but "we cannot coerce our own sensibility into the relevant frame of perception" (p. 33). *Tactical* difficulties are, for all kinds of reasons, intentionally created by the poet. Poets may need to hide the meaning

of the poem for political reasons. Or they may want to rejuvenate and intensify language itself. *Ontological* difficulty arises when "the contract of ultimate or preponderant intelligibility between poet and reader, between text and meaning" is wholly or partly broken (p. 40). The reader runs into ontological difficulty when the poem ceases to be a poem accessible with traditional hermeneutics, when the poet lets the language be all there is. A poem of ontological difficulty cannot be 'read' as that word is commonly understood.

Where Steiner reserves "ontological difficulty" for particular kinds of poetry, I would argue that all poetry, all art, and even all discourse pose ontological difficulty. Not all discourse wears its ontological difficulty on its sleeve as does, for example, the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, but all discourse suffers (or enjoys, depending on one's perspective) slippage and excess of meaning. Any "contract of ultimate or preponderant intelligibility" between author and reader, painter and viewer, or speaker and listener, is ultimately bound to fail. Derrida has nicknamed this phenomenon of meaning and intelligibility sent on a detour, "destinerrance" and "clandestination" (Derrida & Ewald, 1991/2001, p. 63). This does not mean that communication is no longer possible, or that all speech and writing amount to gibberish, but rather that the confidence with which traditional hermeneutics approaches discourse must be relinquished. Works of art are not gibberish, nor are the identity categories which I inhabit for my social visibility and functioning – but in both cases a final and stable meaning will elude both the external and self-interpreter, and both in seeking an understanding of a work of art

and in seeking an understanding of my own or someone else's identity, I will run into

ontological difficulty.

Art as enigma

In order to explain the ethical implications of the secret at the heart of works of

art and other human artifices, I turn briefly to Levinas's (1965/1996) essay "Enigma and

the Phenomenon." In this essay, Levinas discusses the Other's resistance to

manifestation, to absorption into an existing order.

> This way the Other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his
> *incognito*, disdaining recourse to a wink-of-the-eye of understanding or
> complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself,
> we call enigma – going back to the etymology of this Greek term, and
> contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a
> *phenomenon*. (p. 70)

Levinas also writes that "the enigma extends as far as the phenomenon that bears the

trace of the *saying* which has already withdrawn from the *said*," and that "all speaking is

an enigma" (p. 73). A work of art is an object that bears the traces of the artistic creation

process; when the artist removes herself or himself from the object and ceases the

creation process, the object faces the viewer by itself. Thus, I believe it is helpful to

theorize the work of art as Levinas's Other. The work of art indeed seeks recognition, in

that it appeals to my senses. It demands to be seen, heard, touched. At the same time, it

preserves its *incognito*, defies being decoded and understood, keeps its secret. The

appearance of the work of art is not victorious, but rather always incomplete. Levinas

writes that "the Other (*Autrui*) can ... not appear without renouncing his radical alterity, without entering into an order" (p. 68). And since the Other never renounces her, his or its radical alterity, s/he or it can never fully appear. The work of art never becomes fully present, never gives itself up to the viewer.

The inevitable next question is how to respond to the call of the work of art, the demand for recognition-without-cognition. Here Levinas answers, "The response to the Enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the known and the unknown, without calculation, for going on to infinity" (p. 76). But what does "generosity of sacrifice" mean in response to a work of art? It seems to me generosity of sacrifice first of all means generosity of time (which many truly seem to experience as a "sacrifice" today). It means not turning away, not turning one's back, continuing the perceptual relation despite the work's refusal to yield unequivocal and closed meaning.

I do not know whether Levinas would have gone as far as to say that the otherness in works of art summons and appeals as much as do the face and speech of the human other. However, rereading Levinas's assertion that "the enigma extends as far as the phenomenon that bears the trace of the *saying* which has already withdrawn from the *said*" (p. 73), and siding with Derrida's view that speech does not have a privileged status among discursive acts, it would seem that the enigma extends as far as each phenomenon that bears the trace of the discursive act which has already withdrawn from the discursive product. The painted bears a trace of the act of painting,

the text bears a trace of the act of writing. In a culture which demands economic

performativity and communicative clarity there is not much time or space for either art

or persons refusing to yield their secret. Hospitality is a gift, and respect for the secret

or enigma requires, as Levinas writes, "generosity".

The postmodern condition

The pedagogy I advocate is important especially in the context of a

contemporary postindustrialist society, or, to use Jean-François Lyotard's (1979/1984)

words, a "postmodern condition." So what is it about postindustrialist societies that

makes them so inhospitable to the kind of attentiveness and deconstructive regard that

is required for seeing the constructedness of (narrative) identity, including its materials,

seams, cracks and patches?

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard

(1979/1984) analyzes the changed status of knowledge and the dominance of standards

of efficiency and productivity in postindustrial societies.[38] Lyotard observes that

increased availability and use of technology, and especially "information technology,"

affects what counts as knowledge in postindustrial "information" societies.

> It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-
> processing machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an

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[38] Lyotard wrote this "report on knowledge" at the request of the president of the Council of
Universities of the government of Quebec. Thus, he is not analyzing the status of knowledge in a
theoretical, epistemological sense only, but is reporting on the status of knowledge as it affects
educational institutions.

effect on the circulation of learning as did advancements in human circulation (transportation systems) and later, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media). The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. (p. 4)

The postindustrial (postmodern) society, according to Lyotard, is not a society in which several language games can be played and in which various kinds of knowledge are recognized as knowledge, but rather an "information" society in which the economic/technological language game dominates and in which only pragmatic knowledge is recognized. "[Knowledge] can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned ..." (p. 4).

According to Lyotard, knowledge is increasingly commercialized, and is recognized as knowledge only if it contributes to the system's (economic) performance. In the postindustrial information society, the dominant view is that "society exists and progresses only if the messages circulating within it are rich in information and easy to decode" (p. 5). The prime measure for the value of discourse is its functionality, its effective communicative force, rather than its value in terms of truth, ethics or aesthetics. "The operativity criterion is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just [or beautiful]" (p. xxv).

Lyotard analyzes how the postmodern condition is one in which "the production of [scientific] proof ... falls under the control of another [i.e.,

technological/economic] language game, in which the goal is no longer truth, but … the

best possible input/output equation" (p. 46).[39] Not only the production of scientific

proof but also other moves in other academic language games, for instance in the

humanities, fall under the control of the technological/economic language game and its

criteria. This explains why difficult and critical texts such as Patti Lather's (1995)

Troubling Angels or Judith Butler's (1993) *Bodies That Matter* are denounced: reading

these texts takes considerable effort (input), whereas the output in terms of contribution

to the optimum performance of the existing system is questionable. It also explains why

works of art are often understood only in terms of their market value, their decorative

purpose (i.e., contribution to the pleasure derived from a physical environment), or the

information they provide about historical events. As Blake et al. (1998) affirm, dominant

standards of efficiency and productivity obscure

> [qualitative] differences, requiring everything to be commensurable with
> everything else, so that things can be ranked on the same scale and
> everyone can be 'accountable' against the same standards. This in turn
> entails the disvaluing … of what cannot be ranked. (pp. 1-2)

Questioning the social construction of categories that make the current system's

performance possible at all slows the system down and takes valuable time and

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[39] Lyotard refers to this "best possible input/output equation" as "performativity." This use of the term "performativity" differs considerably from my use of the term in the previous chapter. Where Austin, Derrida and Butler use the term "performativity" to describe a discursive phenomenon, Lyotard uses it to describe a norm or criterion. In other words, Lyotard concentrates on performativity's prescriptive force. To prevent confusion, I have avoided the term altogether in reference to Lyotard's ideas.

resources away from "getting on with the job." Likewise, studying works of art and examining one's ways of perceiving may be seen as a frill that one should indulge in only after one's "real" school work is done. In the postmodern condition as sketched by Lyotard, discursive acts, whether in the form of informal utterances, academic writing, or artistic production, are judged for *what* they communicate – for the quantity and clarity of their information-content. However, "it is clear that what is important is not simply the fact that they communicate information. Reducing them to this function is to adopt an outlook which unduly privileges the system's own interests and point of view" (p. 16). Discursive acts not only have an information-content, they also have a form and a context which cannot be neatly separated from the information-content. Moreover, the message is not unequivocal, that is to say, its information-content cannot be extracted from the message in a way that leaves no remnants, or in a way that forecloses future "extractions" and interpretations.

Defying the demand for clarity

In the previous section I noted that standards of efficiency and productivity demand of discourse easily accessible information-content, and are intolerant of texts, works of art and other human artifices which demand "disproportionate" input. Because the demand for clarity hinders the development of a deconstructive regard, and seriously limits the generosity and hospitality that are extended to an other who will not yield her or his secret, I now turn to Patti Lather and Douglas Aoki, whose

critiques of the demand for clarity in contemporary western societies help explicate this pervasive climate.

In her essay "Troubling Clarity" (1996), Lather addresses the demand for texts that yield easily to interpretation along familiar structures. She begins by performing "an oppositional reading within the confines of a binary system, by reversing the binary accessible/inaccessible" (p. 526). In other words, rather than assuming that accessibility is the desirable quality in text, the ideal every text should strive for and by which inaccessibility is measured, Lather works from the assumption that every text is more or less inaccessible, and that claims of accessibility hide inevitable inaccessibilities. She sides with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose work is based on the view that "to speak so as to be understood immediately is to speak through the production of the transparent signifier, that which maps easily onto taken-for-granted regimes of meaning" (p. 528). Both Lacan and Lather "trouble" the possibility of transparency for any signifier. Clear, immediately accessible speech is no more innocent than difficult speech that is hard to access, and like any other form of speech "is part of a discursive system, a network of power that has material effects" (p. 528). Derrida (1978/1987) observes,

> Each time you read 'they are clearly...,' 'this is clearly...,' 'are evidently...,' it does not signify that it is clear or evident, very much the contrary, but that it is necessary to deny the intrinsic obscurity of the thing, its essential crypt, and that it's necessary to make us believe that it is clear because the proof will always be lacking. (p. 364)

In other words, the utterance "it is clear" is not so much a constative utterance, describing an actual situation of clarity, but rather a performative utterance, seeking to call into being a clarity that is not intrinsic to the object. "It is clear," tends to be constative shorthand for the performative "I declare that this is clear."

In a later essay, Lather (2000) says about her own writing, which is frequently critiqued as elusive or inaccessible,

> I do not need people always to like my work. My sense of responsibility is not to seduce or persuade some audience as much as it is to implicate by setting up the obligation to *see how we see*. Such a text is doubled in imposing radical complications that enact the desire for interpretive mastery while surrendering the claim to simplicity of presence. (p. 305, emphasis added)

Lather's text, because it has not been smoothed out for easy consumption, requires attentive reading. The reader has to tread carefully, as it were, aware of uneven ground and potholes. Such careful (t)reading encourages awareness of one's (t)reading process. Not only is the reader obliged to see, in Lather's words, s/he is also obliged to see *how* s/he sees. This ability to perceive not only the direct object of one's attention, but also the contexts and traces that condition the way one perceives, is what I have called "deconstructive regard."

Douglas Aoki (2000) contends that the widespread institutional demand for clarity in both written and spoken word, "the idealization of the thing speaking for itself[,] also legitimates a radical refusal to teach" (p. 349). He observes that a common

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interpretation of teaching in the academy is what he considers "a dentistry of the text –

an extraction of argument, meaning, and ideas" (p. 352). Such teaching equates the text

with its content, and glosses over the fact that "something remains after the dentistry of

the text because language is crucially more than meaning" (p. 352, n. 10). Blake et al.

(1998) criticize the kind of English teaching that assumes its ends are "given by the need

to participate (effectively, of course) in a democracy, to cope with tax returns and

manuals for the installation of washing machines ..." (pp. 135-136). When language,

any language, is taught merely as a tool for "effective communication," other forms of

reading and writing atrophy. Students are taught intolerance toward texts that do not

readily give up their secrets, texts that require attention not just to their content, but

their form. As Blake et al. have observed in the British National Curriculum, "literature

is consistently marginalized by a view of English that foregrounds the skills of

communication" (p. 137).

In a regime of clarity, dentistry of the text is required to facilitate a conception of

teaching as "translation to plain language" (Aoki, 2000, p. 354). If the teacher has pre-

extracted the central ideas of the text, there is less need for students to take the long

detour through the text itself. Plain language is seductive, Aoki points out, because it

enables "instantaneous uptake" (p. 354), a mode of ingestion befitting a consumer

society. No translation, however, can ever fully represent the translated text – and

moreover, no translation ever is ever finished or definitive. "Even plain language must

be translated; even teaching must be constantly reread, rewritten, reinterpreted, and

relocated; even clear writing cannot avoid being further translated, which is why it cannot avoid leading elsewhere" (p. 355).

A related problem is that the elimination of language deemed too difficult, language often referred to as "jargon," "requires someone to decide *what* or *whose* language is jargon, which immediately entails the juridical problem of deciding *who* the judge will be, especially when that decision will ostensibly be made on behalf of many others" (Aoki, p. 357). A skeptical reader of this dissertation may observe that I lean towards the kind of texts that are considered unclear and obscure by those who typically clamour for clarity: texts by Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida, for instance. But opinions do vary as to what qualifies as "clear," as is illustrated by Samuel Wheeler (2000):

> One might suggest the following criterion for defining analytic philosophy: clear writing. This criterion, however, is relative to one's training. In the interest of 'communication across a schism,' I once gave Derrida a copy of Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, which I regard as a nearly transparent text, absolutely clear and brilliant. Derrida said he had tried to read this before but had not been able to understand what was going on. In contrast, he said, Heidegger was very clear. So: You are an analytic philosopher if you think Kripke writes clearly; you are a continental philosopher if you think Heidegger writes clearly. (p. 2)

Clear, accessible language is efficient if all one expects language to do is *communicate in the present*. In the postmodern condition, the quality of language is assessed by the effects it brings about in the here and now. "You catch my drift? You see my point? That's the bottomline." Thus, what Lyotard calls the "operativity

criterion" and what Lather (1996) calls the "politics of accessible language" reinscribe the metaphysics of presence that I discussed in the previous chapter. Language carries traces from the past and it has effects beyond those that can be seen in the present, but past and future are excluded from the calculation of operativity and productivity in the present.

Clarity's obscenity

Earlier in this chapter I noted that as a viewer, I can focus on what is present in, bordering on, and absent from the work of art. By emphasizing these three foci for the attentive perception of the viewer, I aim to disrupt what Derrida (1978/1987) calls "the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation" (p. 292). I know from experience that "the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation" is a habit that may be formed early in life and may be hard to break. In elementary school, I used to like visiting my friend Daniel's house, because it was full of strange images and objects. His stepfather Peter was (and is) an artist. One day, Peter saw me frowning at an abstract work in their hallway. It was a small work, with a simple black line, dot and hook against a white background. "What is it?" I asked. Peter called Daniel to explain it to me. "It is a line, a dot and a hook," Daniel replied. "Well yes, I can see that," I said indignantly, "but what is it supposed to mean?" "It is supposed to mean a line, a dot and a hook," Daniel said. Instead of being aware of *what I saw*, I wanted to get away from the actual looking as soon as possible, to *understand* the meaning of the work.

Jean Baudrillard (1988) contends that contemporary post-industrialized societies are obsessed with meaning, with the signified, and have insufficient attention for the signifier. He writes that "we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us. As more and more things have fallen into the abys [sic] of meaning, they have retained less and less of the charm of appearances" (p. 63). In a culture where "being superficial" is not a compliment, and one is expected to look for "deeper meaning," this statement is counter-intuitive. What Baudrillard is getting at, however, is that in today's information and communication society, one is encouraged to pay attention only to the information content that can be extracted from a message or other discursive act. The appearance (form) of the discursive act is largely disregarded, although this appearance is itself meaningful. Baudrillard calls this tendency to decode and denude everything until it is fully exposed, "obscene." "Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when every-thing becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication" (pp. 21-22). The demand for clarity is, in this sense, a demand for obscenity which is decidedly inhospitable – for who would imagine the strip-search as a gesture that is hospitable and generous to the stranger?

Someone who has developed a deconstructive regard sees the constructedness of whatever presents itself as clear. S/he sees not only the proclaimed clarity, but also the obscurity on which this clarity rests, and the borders which have been drawn between the two. And even seeing itself, the seeing facilitated by clarity, can be

understood to be dependent and touching on not-seeing. Derrida writes about the connections between seeing and blindness in *Memoirs of the Blind* (1990/1993). Blindness may result from seeing too much, both literally, when one has looked at the sun, the source of light that makes all seeing possible, for too long, but also in the sense that if one sees too much, one ends up perceiving nothing. The expression "he can't see the wood for the trees" points to that, and so does the story of the seer Tiresias who "goes blind for having seen what must not be seen" (p. 17).

In the preface to *Memoirs of the Blind*, translators Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas draw a connection between *Memoirs of the Blind* and Peter Greenaway's (1982) film *The Draughtsman's Contract*. In this film, set in late 17th century England, Mr. Neville, a draughtsman, is invited by Mrs. Herbert to make twelve drawings of her husband's house and gardens. After he has produced six drawings, Mrs. Herbert's daughter Mrs. Talmann suggests to Mr. Neville, that he may unwittingly have been drawn into a plot. She points out to him that certain "innocent items" in his drawings may, when taken together, suggest that Mr. Neville has been a witness, or even an accessory to "misadventure." She suggests that Mr. Neville, the one who has been explicitly invited to look and draw, has looked so hard he has not seen very well. Mrs. Talmann says,

> I have grown to believe that a really intelligent man makes an indifferent painter, for painting requires a certain blindness – a partial refusal to be aware of all the options. An intelligent man will know more about what he is drawing than he will see, and in the space between knowing and

seeing he will become constrained, unable to pursue an idea strongly, fearing that the discerning, those who he is eager to please, will find him wanting if he does not put in not only what he knows, but what they know as well. You, Mr. Neville, if you are an intelligent man – and thus an indifferent painter – will perceive that a construction such as I have suggested could well be placed on the evidence contained in your drawing. If you are, as I have heard tell, a talented draughtsman, then I could imagine that you could suppose that the objects I have drawn your attention to form no plan, stratagem or indictment.

Seeing and not-seeing are not opposed to each other, but rather constitute each other. A deconstructive regard must begin with a certain deconstructive blindness, a turning away of one's regard from that which is deliberately displayed for me to see, that which screams "Look at me!" In Baudrillard's (1988) terms, I must learn to un-see the obscene in order to see that which will not reveal all, that which maintains at its core a secret and opacity which I cannot see but must respect.

Deconstructive regard and an ethic of hospitality

The purpose of developing a deconstructive regard is not merely to *see* the borders and constitutive processes of my own perceptions and conceptions, but to *act* differently because of it. Borrowing Salman Rushdie's (2002) words once again, the way I see the world not only affects the world I see, it also becomes the world in and on which I act. "Our dreams of our own and our children's future shape the everyday judgments we make, about work, about people, about the world that either enables or obstructs those dreams" (Rushdie, p. 375). If we see the world as naturally occurring or divinely created in clear and indisputable binaries of good and evil, man and woman,

friend and enemy, we may believe that "you are either for us or against us" and act

upon that belief. But if we see the categories with which we organize our understanding

of the world as humanly and contingently constructed, and if we see the boundaries

between those categories as internally divided and unstable, then different imaginings

and actions become possible. Developing a deconstructive regard makes it possible to

see the world as organized with humanly and contingently constructed categories,

without destroying or negating the fundamental enigma and alterity of the other.

I must emphasize that different imaginings and actions become *possible*, not that

they become *necessary*. David Hume (1888) observed that many philosophers

"imperceptibly" shift from statements about what "is" to statements about what

"ought" to be (p. 469). He argued that prescriptive statements can never be derived

from descriptive statements without introducing an external reason. In other words, if I

believe the world *is* a certain way, that, by itself, does not tell me how I *ought* to act. A

deconstructive regard may be a condition for hospitality, but in and of itself, it does not

guarantee that I will act hospitably. It is theoretically possible that I develop a

deconstructive regard, see the world as organized with humanly and contingently

constructed categories which depend upon, rather than neatly exclude, one another –

and that I shrug my shoulders and say, "So what? I'll just continue to act as if this all

weren't the case, because it serves me better." Or that I say, "That's horrible! Now I'll

just have to work harder at making the boundaries between myself and others as secure

and impermeable as possible." In Chapter 1, I articulated that an important aim of

education should be to shape students' identities in such a way that they have *a capacity* for hospitality. My conception of identity, the way I see my *chez-soi*, affects my capacity for hospitality. No conception of identity, however, can guarantee that I will, in fact, extend hospitality. Nevertheless, I follow Derrida in speaking of an "ethic of hospitality" and posit that one ought to be open to the incoming of the other. Whence do I derive this *pre*scription, if it cannot be from the *de*scription of the world as humanly and contingently organized?

The simplest answer is that I do not derive this prescription. Hume argues that it "seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation [of 'ought' or 'ought not'] can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it" (p. 469). The crucial word here is "deduction": Hume points out that no prescriptive statement can be logically deduced from a descriptive statement. But in the philosophical tradition in which I have positioned myself, no such deduction takes place. Very much along the lines of the is/ought problem Richard Kearney asked Levinas (1986), "How does one *distill* the ethico-religious meaning of existence from its natural or ontological sedimentation?" (p. 25, emphasis added). Levinas replied,

> But your question already assumes that ethics is derived from ontology. I
> believe, on the contrary, that the ethical relationship with the other is just
> as primary and original (*ursprünglich*) as ontology – if not more so. Ethics
> is not derived from an ontology of nature …. (p. 25)

Ethics is not derived from or reducible to ontology, it speaks a different language, and carries a different inheritance. Levinas goes as far as to argue that "man's ethical

relation to the other is ultimately prior to his ontological relation to himself (egology) or

to the totality of things we call the world (cosmology)" (p. 21).

Moreover, Hume's observation about the impossibility of deducing prescriptive

statements from descriptive statements without the introduction of an external reason is

based on a view of ethics as a system of prescriptions guaranteed to lead to the good.

The ethic of hospitality as I have advocated it here is not at all a system of prescriptions

with any guarantees. As Derrida notes,

> the application of a rule by a conscious subject identical to itself,
> objectively subsuming a case to the generality of a given law, comes ... to
> *irresponsibilize*, or at least to miss the always unheard-of singularity of the
> decision to be made. (Derrida & Ewald, 1991/2001, p. 70)

The ethic of hospitality is not the law of hospitality; it does not posit a rule or a set of

rules that should or can be applied to situations in their particularity. On the contrary,

hospitality is an ethical ideal – not an *eidos* but rather a specter, or what Caputo calls "an

absolutely unforeseeable prospect" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 132) – which demands a

decision in and for every encounter with the other, but does not solve the dilemmas this

encounter poses. Derrida described this ethical demand posed by the unforeseeable

prospect of hospitality as an "invention" rather than a rule:

> The event being singular each time, up to the measure of the alterity of
> the other, each time one must invent, not without a concept but by
> exceeding the concept each time, without any guarantee or certainty. ...
> Each time one must *invent* in order to betray as little as possible both the

one and the other – *with no* prior *guarantee* of success *whatsoever*. (Derrida & Ewald, 1991/2001, p. 70)[40]

This means that in each singular encounter with the other, and in each situation in which the other may arrive, I must "invent." I must do so in order to betray as little as possible my gift of hospitality to the other in the here and now, but also to betray as little as possible the preservation of my *chez-soi*, which will enable me to extend hospitality to the other in other times and places.

In this chapter I have argued for the development of a deconstructive regard through (radically hermeneutic) pedagogies modeled on aesthetic education. A deconstructive regard enhances one's capacity for hospitality, but gives no guarantees about the invention that will take place in each singular event. Through learning to see and reflect upon the *parergon*-border, students learn to see and reflect upon the way it constitutes the work of art or other human artifice it seems only to delimit, and the difficulty of delimiting the *parergon*-border itself. Through learning to respect rather than turn away from a work of art that refuses to yield its secret, students can learn to contemplate otherness as commanding an ethical response rather than as a problem to be solved. Aesthetic experiences such as I have described in this chapter disrupt simplistic understandings of borders and frames, and of the decodability and

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[40] And not only is there no prior guarantee of success, elsewhere Derrida has pointed out that there is no posterior guarantee or satisfaction of success either: "I cannot know that I am just. I can know that I am right. I can see that I act in agreement with norms, with the law. ... But that does not mean that I am just" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 17).

translatability of works of art. Such experiences can be used to impel students to

contemplate the human construct of their personal identity and the boundaries drawn

around the identity categories which they inhabit. Holding identity in deconstructive

regard is an important condition for hospitality – without guarantees.

CHAPTER V
EDUCATING FOR HOSPITABLE IDENTITY

Unless your life is going well you don't dream of giving a party. Unless you can look in the mirror and see a benign and generous and healthy human being, you shrink from acts of hospitality. (Shields, 1997, p. 287)

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation I have argued for a poststructuralist conception of identity as a conception that would enable educating for hospitable identity. In the previous chapter I have shown how the training of deconstructive regard can serve as a paradigm for a pedagogy aimed at facilitating hospitality. In this, the final, chapter, I consider several educational questions which might benefit from analysis in terms of hospitality and, in particular, in terms of hospitable identity. Where in previous chapters, I have discussed the concept of identity more generally, in this chapter I will specifically address those axes of identity that are salient in educational contexts, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Also, where in previous chapters I have emphasized the hospitality of student identities, in this chapter I will also consider the hospitality of teacher identities.

In educating for hospitable identity, particular pedagogical and curricular questions and issues may arise which are related to the tension between, on the one

hand, closing off one's identity-home and, on the other, abandoning one's identity-home altogether. Hospitality requires that one have a home, whether it is a private dwelling or a communal area, into which one can invite the guest, but if one is concerned primarily with protecting this home from intruders, one's hospitality will be quite limited. This tension will surface in several of the areas I discuss in this chapter: hospitable curriculum, hospitable assessment, hospitable pedagogy, hospitable teacher identity, and hospitable school discourse.

Hospitable curriculum

There is no school subject called "identity construction," nor would I suggest there should be. Identity construction is affected by every formal subject and informal school activity. The development of hospitable identity depends on the development of habits of perception and thought under the influence not only of pedagogical practices, but also of formal and hidden curriculum. In making curriculum – in the widest sense of the word – hospitable, one of the most important things is considering its cultural context and genealogy. Both the formal curriculum and other social practices from and by which people learn, and to which Henry Giroux (1999) refers as "public pedagogy" (p. 4), need to be understood as culturally specific and historically constituted.

In the previous chapter I have highlighted an approach to aesthetic education that trains a deconstructive gaze. But in other subject areas educators can also pay attention to the way works read are framed, to what constitutes the *parergon* of

curriculum. In all subjects, the knowledge presented can be contextualized and its

dependence on the traditions that produced it underscored. I have argued that

understanding the inherited traditions in which one's identities are rooted is not stifling

if one learns to approach the past genealogically and to see that no tradition is

monolithic. This not only applies to the inheritance of personal identity categories, but,

more broadly, to the inheritance of all knowledge and categories of disciplinary or

curricular identity. The traditions that constitute disciplinary or curricular areas such as

"the sciences," "home economics" or "English literature" are as multiple and internally

divided as the traditions that constitute identity categories such as "femininity,"

"deafness," "the working class" or "Jewishness." This has implications for the approach

to curriculum I advocate in the larger project of educating for hospitable identity.

Again drawing on the metaphor of the home, a hospitable curriculum is a

curriculum that both has a home, and is willing to open it up to the other. In other

words, a hospitable curriculum offers a delimited "course" of knowledge into which

students can be invited, but also recognizes the permeability and openness to change of

its own boundaries. A hospitable curriculum is open to being changed by the incoming

of students, and of others who may contest what have been constructed as curricular

centre and periphery.

The critique of curricular and disciplinary centres and peripheries requires,

however, that one receives and attends to the curriculum or discipline whose

construction one contests. The work of Derrida illustrates this well. Derrida has often

been considered a heretic student of Western philosophy, who does not respect any

boundaries or traditions of the course of study on which he has embarked. This view is

not only inhospitable to Derrida's ideas (and indeed his work is often not admitted into

philosophical curricula), it also forecloses worthwhile discussion of the insights Derrida

has to offer about the hospitality of curriculum, canon, and tradition. For example,

Derrida (1997/2001) says about his own writing,

> Even when I take liberties that some people find provocative, I do so
> with the feeling – justifiable or not – that I do in fact know the rules. A
> transgression should always know what it transgresses.... And I feel best
> when my sense of emancipation preserves the memory of what it
> emancipates from. I hope this mingling of respect and disrespect for the
> academic heritage and tradition in general is legible in everything that I
> do. (p. 43)

In other words, it is important to learn the histories of academic subjects, just like it is

important to study the histories of the identity categories one inhabits, not in order to

reify them, but in order to see the breaks and metonymic shifts that have occurred and

that offer spaces for transgressive uptake today. Derrida (1997) emphasizes that

> we have to go back constantly to the Greek origin, not in order to
> cultivate the origin, or in order to protect the etymology, the *etymon*, the
> philological purity of the origin, but in order first of all to understand
> where we come from. Then we have to analyze the history and the
> historicity of the breaks which have produced our current world out of
> Greece, for instance, out of Christianity, out of this origin, and breaking
> or transforming this origin, at the same time. (in Derrida & Caputo, p. 10)

A hospitable curriculum is aware of its history, not because the history of ideas

tells us exactly how they should be understood in their current manifestation, but

because both the emergence of ideas and the changes they have undergone over time

have become inscribed in the body of knowledge that forms the curriculum. Take the

word "canon" itself, for instance. When I speak of "the canon" in the context of school

curriculum, I am referring to a group of works that are generally accepted as

representing a field. I may mean a collection of literary works that are generally

accepted as representing the field of English literature, or I may mean a collection of

paintings and sculptures that are generally accepted as representing the field of

Western visual art, or I may mean a collection of philosophical treatises and other texts

that are generally accepted as representing the field of Western philosophy. But before I

get lulled into comfort by the term "generally accepted," it helps to know that this

meaning of the word "canon" is a broadening of its earlier, narrower, meaning of the

group of biblical texts officially accepted as "Holy Scripture." This earlier meaning

points more clearly in the direction of "official acceptors," those people who got to

decide which texts did and which didn't qualify as "Holy Scripture."[41]

In an interview with Ferraris, Derrida (1997/2001) explains how questioning the

canon requires knowing the canon. Therefore, notes Derrida, his teaching is always

based on a rigorous academic discipline,

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[41] The ancient Greek word *kanón*, from which the current "canon" is derived, meant ruler, yardstick.

and on trying to transmit a respect for it: close reading of the texts, reference to the original, to the letter, patience, slowness. In short, a respect for the classical virtues of teaching (which, alas, are not widespread) and of the reading of the canonical – or canonized – texts, even though this does not stop me from reading other texts, or from continually problematizing the authority behind the process of canonization. (p. 48)

The composition of the curriculum, and the place of literary and other "canons" therein, is contested terrain. Derrida's respect for the canon, both voiced explicitly and demonstrated in the selection of his objects of study, may concern those who believe that it is time to shift attention from the canonized works that have been powerful voices for many years, to the voices that have been marginalized. Through the work of Derrida, however, it becomes clear that one can problematize the workings of power in and through the process of canonization, *and* question the possibility of clear boundaries of a canon, *and* read works from outside what is considered the canon, *and* continue to study the canon itself.

I find it painful to see that many people who address the question of the canon think they have to make a choice between reading Plato or other "great white males" and reading black woman writers. But why should we choose? Even before the question of the canon became so visible, no one in the university could be simultaneously a great specialist in Plato and in Aristotle and in Shakespeare. The choices had to be made, and that is the finitude of our condition. ... At least as regards deconstruction, it is interested in what is considered the great canon – the study of great Western works – and open at the same time to new works, new objects, new fields, new cultures, new languages, and I see no reason why we should choose between the two. (Derrida, in Derrida & Caputo, 1997, pp. 10-11)

As Zelia Gregoriou explains, if one takes heritage as transmitted, a passing on of "what has always been ours/theirs," one fails to recognize the heterogeneity and multiplicity that was always already part of it. One can also take heritage as *translated* rather than transmitted, as internally heterogeneous, hence never "ours/theirs" in any simple way (personal communication, March 29, 2003). It is this latter sense of heritage which I believe should play a larger role in developing a hospitable curriculum. It is important to give students the opportunity to study "the canon" in disciplines such as English literature or Western philosophy, but this study should include not only the unmistakable influence this canon has had, but also the voices that have been excluded from the canon and the effects of their absence.

A hospitable curriculum recognizes that it always offers more than it suggests. There is an excess, something that cannot be absorbed or consumed by a learner. Curriculum never exhausts itself, and hospitable curriculum welcomes this openness to future reinterpretation, to shifts in its boundaries, to new inhabitants of the canon.

> One begins by listening to the canon because the canon always gives us more than we imagine, more than we could have expected, because the canon always gives us, in its folds, something noncanonical, something that can never be simply included in the curriculum. (Naas, 2003, p. xxix)

In K-12 education, this means, for instance, that the history of science is not taught as a linear, celebratory narrative of European progress from Aristotelian cosmology and Ptolemaic geocentrism to the enlightened discoveries of Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, but

that questions are raised about the dead ends of scientific pursuits, the influence of scientists from outside of Europe, the absence of women from the story, the power of the church and other institutions, et cetera. By teaching the history of science this way, the identity of science as a discipline is made available for questioning: its boundaries are shown to be human constructs, and as women and people of colour are less absent from this discipline today, it can be shown that, over time, the range of topics and approaches which find a "home" in science has shifted.[42] Moreover, if the identity of a discipline can shift, so can the identity of members of that discipline: in this case, the identity of "scientist." When certain epistemological perspectives and research practices are included in or excluded from the domain of what is considered "scientific," then certain practitioners will be included in or excluded from the domain of who can be considered "scientists." And where the identity of "scientist" was, in the past, reserved for white men of particular class backgrounds, it has now become (more) inhabitable for women, people of colour, and people from working class backgrounds.[43]

If curriculum is hospitable, this also means that language is not taught merely as transparent medium for effective communication, but as carrying a past of meanings

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[42] In this context, it is cause for concern that the homes of "science" and "research" now seem to be becoming *less* hospitable. The definition of "scientifically based" educational research by the United States federal government is a case in point: in section 9101 of the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001, the US federal government specifies that for educational research to qualify as "scientifically based" (hence qualify for funding) it must use "experimental or quasi-experimental designs," and be empirical, objective, and replicable.

[43] See, for example, Elizabeth A. McKinley's (2003) doctoral dissertation *Brown bodies, white coats: Postcolonialism, Maori women and science.*

and uses that trouble its apparent clarity and that produce meaning beyond the intentions of any author. In English language classes, students need to learn *both* that "hysterical" is used to mean emotionally out of control, and extremely funny, *and* that it carries a sexist history. (The word "hysterical" comes from the Greek *hystéra*, womb, and reflects the former erroneous idea that uncontrollable outbursts of emotion were caused by disturbances in the womb, hence that only women were susceptible to such outbursts.) Students need to learn *both* that "denigrating" is used to mean putting down and speaking ill of, *and* that it carries a racist history. (The word "denigrate" comes from the Latin *denigrare*, to blacken, and reinscribes the racist idea that black is inferior to white.) And they need to learn that these examples are not exceptions, but that in language the ideas and beliefs of the past have become sedimented, flaws and inconsistencies included, and that 'how we talk [and write] and see our situation is a product of the kind of language we have' (Blake et al., 1998, p. 152).

The hidden curriculum, in the values implicitly suggested by the curriculum, is just as canonical, and its boundaries are at least as much in need of questioning. When I attended grammar school, Latin and Greek were mandatory subjects. On the one hand, learning these languages was a wonderful opportunity to see the lasting influence of these languages on contemporary European languages such as Dutch and English. On the other, the textbooks used to learn basic Greek and Latin were, themselves, products of other traditions that were left unquestioned. I will never forget the first paragraph in my first Latin textbook: "*Marcus et Cornelia in horto ambulant. 'Marce! Marce! Serpentem*

video!'" These two lines introduced the story of Marcus and Cornelia, brother and sister,

who are walking in the garden, when Cornelia exclaims: "Marcus! Marcus! I see a

snake!" What I was taught explicitly was to observe the difference between *"Marcus"* in

the *nominativus* and *"Marce"* in the *vocativus*, or between *"video"* in the first person

singular and *"ambulant"* in the third person plural. What I was taught implicitly was

that girls are helpless damsels who are afraid of snakes and need to call a male for help.

Through implicit messages such as these, I was silently inducted into a tradition of

gender normation. I could have been taught, instead, that the signifiers "girl" and

"woman" in the Netherlands in the 1980s came with a particular set of meanings based

on layer upon layer of discursive inscription and reinscription, that it is instructive to

trace these inscriptions and reinscriptions, and that future reinscription is possible.

There may be a tradition or canon of "feminine" attributes and behaviours, but when I

receive this canon, I can also critically receive the "structures of reception and mastery

that it hands down so as to reflect, reflect on, question, and interrupt them" (Naas, 2003,

p. xxvi).

Religious curriculum

Religious texts and practices have played an important role in the

circumscription of identities, and for the students of religious curriculum, whether in

religious schools, at home, or elsewhere, this poses particular challenges. Without

entering into theological debates, I would like to give one example of the possibilities of

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a deconstructive regard for questioning the inhospitable delimitation of identity categories by religious texts and practices.

The documentary *Trembling before G-D* (Dubowski, 2001), about Hasidic and Orthodox Jews who are gay or lesbian, provides poignant examples of what it might look like to examine and open up identity-boundaries set by religious texts and practices. Although they are confronted with religious texts that tell them they are ill or evil, at any rate not as a "good Jew" ought to be, leaving their Hasidic or Orthodox faith and community is clearly not an option for the men and women featured in this documentary. Rabbi Steve Greenberg, the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi, talks about how he advises parents who come to him with concerns about a gay or lesbian daughter. One of the main concerns of the parents, in his experience, is that their children will feel rejected by, and in turn reject, the Torah. He tells them, "There are other ways to read the Torah – let's learn."

These "other ways" of reading the Torah are not mainstream Orthodox ways of reading the Torah – but neither are they outside Orthodox Judaism altogether. Steve Greenberg is a courageous person who has explored the boundary that separates what fits inside Orthodox Judaism from what does not, and he has discovered that by lingering on this boundary and creating a liminal space for others who do not fit in mainstream interpretations, the boundary may slowly shift.

Striking also is the portrait of David, an American Orthodox Jew who demonstrates a profound understanding of radical hermeneutics of the self. David first became aware of his homosexual desire some twenty years before being interviewed for the documentary. He traveled to a rabbi many miles away from his hometown, to ask advice without the immediate risk of others in his own community finding out. The rabbi advised him to eat figs, try aversion therapy (flicking an elastic band on his wrist every time he felt attracted to a man) and go to a psychotherapist – all to "cure" him of these inadmissible feelings. After more than a decade of such attempts, David realized his feelings were not going to change.

The documentary shows David in his current struggle to reconcile his homosexuality with his Judaism – no longer through attempts to overcome his homosexuality, but through ongoing interpretation of Torah, Talmud and Jewish Law. It is through his understanding of the living nature of Judaism, of the centrality of interpretation and reinterpretation (rather than reification of the text), that David finds small "cracks" for himself to live in. It may seem that David will never free himself from the oppression of the condemnation of homosexuality in Leviticus until he steps out of Orthodox Jewish discourse altogether, but for David this would not be a liberation: it would be an annihilation of a very important part of the configuration that makes up his personal identity. David acknowledges that his "tools" are Orthodox Jewish, and that, to quote Butler (1999) once again, "there is only a taking up of the tools

where they lie" (p. 185) – but he also sees that he does not need to put the tools back in exactly the same spot from which he took them.

Trembling before G-D illustrates for Hasidic and Orthodox Jewish curriculum how curriculum is not merely representative, but constitutive; how it not only describes and refers to, but produces and shapes persons and phenomena. Secular curricula play a similar role in constituting the persons and phenomena they seem merely to describe. It is important to acknowledge that this shaping influence of curriculum itself has a cultural context and a genealogy, that it contains internal contradictions and fragmentations. Showing how curriculum can be hospitable is one step towards showing how the identities shaped by curriculum can be hospitable.

Hospitable assessment

The ethic of hospitality has profound implications for thinking about assessment. Different ways of assessing students' learning, performance, and behaviour model different degrees and modes of hospitality to the students. I use "assessment" in the widest sense of the word, including not only formal moments of assessment but also ongoing evaluation and judgement.

Assessment of presence

The first requirement of offering hospitality is letting the guest arrive. Yet students who get to school late commonly find they may arrive in the classroom only

after reporting to the office and getting registered as "late." An ethic of hospitality offers a different lens for thinking about responses to students who arrive late. Let me illustrate with an example described to me by a colleague visiting an elementary community school in Saskatoon. Every day, the school offers breakfast to all of its 180 or so students. Breakfast starts at 9:00 a.m., classes start at 9:20 a.m. When my colleague was observing the grade six physical education class around 10:15, there was a knock at the door of the gym, and when the teacher opened, two of her students were waiting. The first question the teacher asked was "Have you had breakfast?" The answer was negative. Because the teacher knew the girls often walked their younger siblings to school as well, she asked, "What about the little ones?" Negative again. The teacher then suggested the students go to the grade one class, get their younger siblings and go to the nutrition room to have breakfast together. There were no questions as to why they were late, or orders to report to the office.

Hospitality is not indifference, and letting the guest arrive does not mean that the host might not inquire with a late guest whether everything is alright. But a good host offers this inquiry without judgement. I will never forget how one of my undergraduate students told the class how she had, many years ago, been "welcomed" into her elementary classroom. Her teacher knew that her parents' marriage was in trouble, and when the student came late for class, the teacher asked, in the middle of the class, "So, were your parents fighting again?" Although this student had evidently been sufficiently successful in her education to have entered university, she still

remembered those words that marked her lateness and set her apart from the other students. She was permitted into the class, but it was not a welcoming space.

The stricter the conditions imposed on how and when students may arrive, and the narrower the bandwidth of identities students may inhabit as they arrive, the less hospitable the reception. Are students welcomed when they dress Goth, when their navel piercings are showing, or when they dress counter to gender norms? Letting the guest arrive means letting her or him arrive as s/he is, up until the point that the guest's appearance or demeanour threatens the hospitality that can be offered to other guests. What that point is will depend on the situation and, in particular, on the guests. In some situations, hospitality may require that conditions be placed on the guests, but those conditions should be context-specific, and not aimed at excluding guests or behaviours for the comfort of the host.

Letting the guest arrive is, by itself, not sufficient for a truly hospitable gesture. The host must also be prepared to let the guest leave, for the guest who cannot leave does not experience hospitality but rather imprisonment. And the guest must be able to leave in her or his own time, and on her or his own terms. Some guests leave physically, others mentally, but if the host is serious about offering hospitality, about not wanting to program the guest, but rather to leave a place for the guest to come if s/he comes (Derrida, 1997/2001, p. 83), the guest should be free to go. As Henri Nouwen (1975) writes, "When we think back to the places where we felt most at home, we quickly see

that it was where our hosts gave us the precious freedom to come and go on our own terms and did not claim us for their own needs" (p. 72).

Having grown up in a culture saturated with exchange models rather than models of hospitality, I recognize in myself a tendency to expect reciprocity in my relationship with students. If students leave classes early, or do not attend all classes, I may interpret this as a personal affront: after all the work I have put into preparing the class, the least they could do is show up and pretend they are interested! But when I pause and ask myself who or what is being affronted, I discover a rather inhospitable and controlling teacher. If, by contrast, I conceive of myself as host whose teaching is an unconditional gift, I can open the door and create a space for students to arrive and partake of what I offer, without forcing them through the door. I remind myself that this kind of hospitality is an ongoing openness, not a single gesture at the beginning of the term. Regardless of whether students have been present in previous weeks, I must welcome them when they do arrive.

In educational contexts, there are circumstances in which a guest's frequent coming and going ought to be curtailed – not for the sake of the teacher-host's ego, but for the sake of the other guests, and the space that can be offered to them. When students work together on group projects, or when students' discussions are enhanced by a level of trust and familiarity, one student's infrequent attendance can be quite disruptive, and in fact limit the hospitality than can be received by other students. In

that case, conditions may be placed on the guest's arrivals and departures, as long as the host remembers that the ethical demand to extend hospitality to this guest also, remains.

Assessment of learning

The current emphasis on standardized testing reinstates or reinforces what Paulo Freire (1970/2000) calls the "banking model" of education: the teacher makes knowledge deposits in the students, and assessment takes place in the form of withdrawals of these, largely unaltered, knowledge deposits (p. 72). In an ethic of hospitality, by contrast, education is conceived as gift given without particular requirements as to its reception. In other words, what the student should take from the curriculum offered is not prescribed. This does not mean that no evaluation of student learning can take place, but it does mean that the expectation that students will receive the curriculum in particular ways, and the testing of that expectation, are dropped.

Another way of phrasing this is to say that hospitality requires that the guest can keep secrets. If the main purpose of education is that students learn to connect and navigate between "the specificity of intimate relations and the generalities of the public world" (Grumet, 1988, p. 14), then the emphasis in educational activities should be on facilitating this learning rather than on producing evidence of it. What students actually learn from a particular class may not, in fact, be what the teacher planned under "course objectives" or "anticipated responses," but that does not necessarily make the

learning any less valuable. The increasingly common standardized tests not only tend to exclude assessment of non-quantifiable and non-standardizable learning, but also tend to assess learning only shortly after a particular course or module. The long-term effects of learning tend not to be evaluated.

A currently common way of assessing learning is through the journals students are asked to keep, or the stories they are asked to share. The confessional element of such activities can certainly be critiqued from a Foucauldian perspective, but from the perspective of hospitality also, the assessment of the student's ability and willingness not only to reflect upon personal experiences, but to share these reflections with the teacher, or even with the entire class, is troubling. The demand that the guest reveal her or his secrets is an inhospitable demand. To mind comes the experience of a colleague who attended a mandatory doctoral seminar in which participants were expected to share their stories of progress. Through telling the others about conference papers accepted for presentation, articles sent out for publication, and strides made in the dissertation writing, the doctoral students would begin to narrate themselves into an academic identity. My colleague was very uncomfortable with this expectation, especially because of the way it habituated students to narrating themselves in terms of individual achievement and competition. Although it might seem that the seminar offered a way of welcoming doctoral students into the academy, it was clearly a welcome on the host's terms, and it was clear how the "good guest" was expected to behave.

Hospitable pedagogy

As educators attempt to encourage hospitable identity, they (we) are likely to encounter student resistance. Two forms this resistance may take are the reification and the abandonment of an identity ("disidentification" (Mayo, 2000)). Identity-reification takes place when a student declares (at least) one of her or his identities absolute and untouchable. Disidentification takes place when a student declares (at least) one of her or his supposed identities entirely irrelevant. The tension between reification and disidentification is one of the manifestations of the tension between entrenching oneself in one's identity-home and abandoning one's identity-home. In the educator's response to these types of resistance it is especially important s/he practice hospitable pedagogy.

I remember an example of resistance in the form of identity reification from early in my doctoral program, when I was a teaching assistant in a graduate course in Multicultural and Race Relations Education. The instructor gave me the opportunity to present my thoughts on conceptions of identity to the class. I talked about various metaphors that have been used to understand the concept of identity: the essentialist notion of an innate or divinely inspired core or kernel of identity, to be discovered; the notion of identity as narrative, written over a life-span; and the notion of identity as web or network of socially constructed nodes, the configuration of which is always in flux. After the presentation, I am sure several students asked great questions – I don't really remember. What I do remember is one female, Aboriginal student responding with indignation that no matter what any theorist said, her Aboriginal identity was real

and absolute and central to her being. Questions of social construction and shifting

networks might be interesting theoretically, but would not touch her Aboriginal

identity.

I don't remember how I responded – I may not have said anything, I may have

simply listened and have been saved by other questions or the timely suggestion of a

coffee break by the instructor – but I vividly remember feeling torn. On the one hand, I

felt there were good reasons for thinking about identity through the metaphor of the

web; on the other, I was very aware of the difference between the social and historical

positions of the student and myself. Analyzing this situation through the metaphor of

hospitality, I would observe, first of all, that the classroom is typically a space in which

the teacher is positioned as host, the students as guests. But not each classroom holds

the same kind of gathering. A graduate seminar is not a tea party, where the guests are

expected to sit up straight, nibble at their scones and make polite conversation. It is a

different kind of party, more like an intellectual cocktail hour, where guests are

encouraged to discuss and challenge each other's as well as the host's ideas. Let's not

forget, however, that the host is in her or his own space. The host is at home, in her or

his comfort zone, and the guests will have to feel comfortable before they will engage in

the kind of conversation that challenges the host's ideas.

In the situation I sketched above, I was a teaching assistant, not the instructor,

and I had been asked to give a "guest" lecture. Straddling the positions of guest and

(assistant-)host, I was challenged by another guest. This party clearly had a good host: the guest had been received well and had become comfortable enough to challenge the assistant-host/special guest. How could I, who had temporarily been positioned as host, respond? If I wanted to encourage the student to develop more hospitality in her identities, I should first of all model hospitable identity. In my presentation on identity metaphors, she felt her aboriginal identity was at stake. In her response to me, I felt my identity as theorist and academic was at stake. The easiest response for me might be to remain comfortably ensconced in my theoretical and academic home, and ignore or expel the guest who has challenged it. But I might also use this feeling of discomfort to ask myself more questions.

Why, for example, was my theoretical home perceived as inhospitable by this student and what could I do to make it seem more inviting and welcoming? bell hooks (1994) notes, "a totalizing critique of 'subjectivity, essence, identity' can seem very threatening to marginalized groups, for whom it has been an active gesture of political resistance to name one's identity as part of a struggle to challenge domination" (p. 78). My theoretical home may well have been perceived as "totalizing," and closed off rather than hospitable. Had I prepared myself well for the arrival of a guest? Had I paid any attention to where the guest might be arriving from, and how that might affect her needs? Here was an Aboriginal-Canadian student, responding to a presentation by a white European recent immigrant to Canada. Perhaps the student was not speaking from an inhospitable identity, but rather from an identity that had been too hospitable

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for too long, that had been forced to receive misbehaving guests for a long time, so that it needed to be "closed for repairs." It is important to note that the student could have chosen not to speak up, and rather disagree in silence, or ignore me altogether. But she chose to engage my words, interact with the assistant-host/special guest, invite me into her perspective.

I am not entirely sure what the best way would have been to respond to this student, and if there is a "best way." But I would suggest that an understanding of discourse and discursive effects such as identity as inherited and translated offers starting points for a response. One of the educator's tasks is to show students that identity categories are inherited, and that heritage is not one solid, unchanging block of culture but that it contains many different components which change all the time. Rather than teaching students that a heritage is off-limits to change, we can teach them that heritage remains alive through translation and iteration, processes that have left layer upon layer of change within the heritage itself.

I can't say whether it would have been appropriate to pursue this collectively or with the student individually, but I could have invited the student to tell me more about what her Aboriginal identity meant. We could have talked about different First Nations, Métis and Inuit identities, and about the changes that those identities have undergone over time. I could have asked her if there are any qualities she would consider part of her Aboriginal identity today that her grandmother or great-

grandmother might not have included if she had been asked about her identity many years ago. In other words, I could have let her arrive *as she was*, as she conceived of herself, and I could have made the theory a more welcoming space for her to explore this conception of her Aboriginal identity

Personal experience

One of the ways in which identity-reification can take place in educational settings is through the introduction of personal experience. Diana Fuss (1989) questions "the way in which essence [i.e., essential identity] circulates as a privileged signifier in the classroom, usually under the guise of 'the authority of experience'" (p. 113). Like Fuss, I have observed that appeals to personal experience can stall classroom discussion. If a student interjects, "As a lesbian, it is my experience that ...," or "As a black male, it is my experience that ...," or something to that effect, other students will often remain silent. The reliance on personal experience to argue a point can be heard as a warning: "If you do not share the identity to which I lay claim and on which I base my view, don't try to argue with me." bell hooks (1994) critiques Fuss for suggesting that "it is always a marginal 'other' who is essentialist" (p. 81). In fact, students inhabiting privileged identity categories can often effectively exclude others without even making explicit reference to their essential experience. "The politics of race and gender within white supremacist patriarchy," for instance, can make white male

students assume they have the right to speak and be heard "without their having to name the desire for it" (p. 81).

Let me return to the metaphor of hospitality to analyze the effects of bringing in personal experience. It is indeed possible that a student relies on the "authority of personal experience" in a way that forecloses discussion and critical examination of the student's identity claims. In that case, the doors and windows of the "identity-home" (*chez-soi*) are firmly shut, and the student can be said to inhabit her or his identity inhospitably. However, educators ought to be aware of the subject-positions that in educational institutions have traditionally been assigned to the students who are now accused of being inhospitable: this may well have been the position of unwelcome intruder, or the position of reluctantly received guest, the type of guest who should not forget s/he is dependent on the generosity of the host. "Students from marginalized groups," writes hooks (1994), "enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed ..." (pp. 83-84). Educators cannot expect a student to "know her or his place" as a guest, and act as a hospitable host at the same time. Although the development of hospitable identity is relevant to all students, educators need to be mindful of the socio-cultural and historical context in which they expect students to demonstrate hospitable identity. Denying someone a place to live – whether a physical shelter or an intelligible subject-position in a discursive web – and then accusing her or him of being a bad host is adding insult to injury.

Moreover, hooks' observation that it is not necessarily a marginal 'other' who

deploys essentialist identity-claims deserves more attention. Boler (2004) notes that self-

disclosure by students speaking from privileged subject positions can function as

"thinly disguised hate speech" (p. 9). She quotes Judith Roof (1999), who points out that

"disclosure can transform a centrist or dominant position into a victimized, marginal,

oppressed slot that competes loudly for attention against the more traditionally

marginal and oppressed voices that are emerging ..." (p. 49, as cited in Boler, 2004, p.

10). A white, male, able-bodied student commenting that, in his experience, it is

impossible these days to get a decent job if you are not a person of colour, in a

wheelchair, or at least female, is an example of the use of essentialist identity-claims by

a person inhabiting privileged identity positions.

A related issue that may arise when students bring in personal experience, is

that marginalized identities are overemphasized and privileged identities

underemphasized. Educators Russell and Rice (1997) note that,

> students often forget they come from positions of both relative power
> and powerlessness. ... Moreover, some students learn to use the 'victim'
> status of their identity position to sway the group while ignoring the
> ways they experience power in the world. It is extremely important in
> these situations that facilitators problematize dichotomized situations by
> pointing out such contradictions and find other ways to gently diffuse
> student entrenchment. (p. 23)

The victim narrative may be reified and used to override others. The task for educators

is then to discuss that one cannot randomly pick and choose the subject positions from

which one wishes to speak at a given time. Whether or not one can credibly locate oneself in the subject position of "marginalized other" depends on the historical contexts of the identity categories which one inhabits, and of the discourses that have shaped those identity categories.

In the face of the various forms of resistance, how can students be moved to inhabit their identities in more hospitable ways? I would say that they can be invited to move themselves, but they cannot and ought not, in the name of hospitality, be forced. Through training a deconstructive regard, teachers may help students understand that their identity is not bound up with one narrative; that they can and do live various identity-stories which, moreover, are not fixed. Teachers may offer hospitality and create a space for the student to arrive, but despite the best intentions and efforts, the student may not arrive.

When Russell and Rice encourage educators to find "ways to gently diffuse student entrenchment," they are encouraging educators to offer such a hospitable space, in which students may feel welcome enough to work on expanding the hospitality of their own identities. "Gently diffusing student entrenchment" means removing or at least lowering the level of the threat perceived to be posed by all that lies outside the identity categories in question. hooks (1994) argues that prohibiting or devaluing the personal stories students wish to draw on in the classroom is

counterproductive. When students find their identity-homes recognized and respected, they are more, not less, likely to offer hospitality in turn:

> Often when professors affirm the importance of experience students feel less need to insist that it is a privileged way of knowing. ... Usually it is in a context where the experiential knowledge of students is being denied or negated that they may feel most determined to impress upon listeners both its value and its superiority to other ways of knowing. (p. 88)

Students' accounts of personal experience can be affirmed in order to make them available for questioning. With the exception perhaps of rare moments of perceptual clarity reached in meditation, *all* experience is mediated or, in Fuss's (1989) words " ideologically cast" (p. 114). That which we refer to as empirical evidence of a particular identity and social reality, is experience *mediated by* the language, concepts, and categories that underpin one's very ability to think. This means that the lived and narrated experience of inhabiting identity categories has a place in educational contexts such as the classroom, but not a privileged place. As Mimi Orner (1998) writes, "However attached to [our] stories we may be, it is important that we resist seeing our own canon of stories as the 'truth' about ourselves, as unmediated reflections of reality – past or present" (p. 284). Lived experience needs to be told and heard, written and read, *and then* it needs to be examined: for the narrative form, for the absences and discontinuities, and for the frameworks mediating its content.

Disidentification

So far I have discussed how and why students may reify their identity, but the

opposite response is not uncommon either: students may declare (at least) one of their

supposed identities entirely irrelevant. Cris Mayo (2000) observes that, not infrequently,

female students disidentify as women. "As we try to bring poststructural concerns

about identity into our teaching we run the risk of encountering students who, whether

through liberal individualism or postfeminism feel that the old problems of [gender]

identity are no longer theirs" (p. 357). Female students (in high schools or universities

in postindustrial cultures) may feel that the time that gender mattered has passed, just

as students of working class backgrounds (in high schools or universities in

postindustrial cultures) may feel that the time that class mattered has passed.

Disidentification does not mean that one denies one's gender, race, class, and so on, but

rather that one believes that these collective identity categories no longer have any

bearing on the individual choices one makes in one's life. As Mayo notes about some of

the female students in high schools or colleges she has encountered,

> While they do not deny that they are women exactly, they do deny a
> need to worry about gender-related bias, ostensibly because they are 'not
> that kind of girl,' that is, the kind of girl who is not capable of defending
> herself or thwarting socialization. (p. 356)

I agree with Mayo that "the refusal of the salience of gender in the lives of all

students ... is mistaken" (p. 362), and I would argue that the same holds for the salience

of race, class, and other identity categories. "Students who contend that they are

transgressing expected boundaries of gender behavior by refusing gender are thus

missing the play of power that encourages them to view themselves as unmarked,

liberal subjects" (p. 362). It is the responsibility of the educator to make clear that it is

both impossible and counterproductive to extricate oneself from the identity categories

into which one has been thrown.[44] One denies oneself agency by claiming to abandon

altogether the identity categories one inhabits, because these identity categories confer

positions in the discursive web from which one can speak and act, possibly in

transgressive ways.

Hospitable pedagogy and inhospitable guests

Let me return, once again, to the example of "Vince," the student in the

curriculum theory course about whom I wrote in Chapter 3. It was a colleague, a few

years ago, who told me about her classroom discussions and email correspondence with

him. As mentioned, Vince first vocalized his resistance when asked to consider Peggy

McIntosh's (1990) article "The Invisible Knapsack." His comments, made in class,

amounted to a complete denial of the relevance of racial, ethnic and gender identity in

questions of educational success. He did not wish to consider his own racial and gender

identities, because he did not believe these identities had any salience for the

discussions in the class. Later in the course, he emailed my colleague to let her know

that he did not appreciate not being given a chance to speak when he indicated he

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[44] The notion of "thrownness" is based on Heidegger's (1927/1962) *Geworfenheit*.

wanted to, nor did he appreciate being asked not to carry on private conversations when another student was speaking.

In terms of hospitality, this situation poses some interesting questions. If the classroom is conceived as a gathering in which the instructor is positioned as host and the students are positioned as guests, Vince's demeanour might be interpreted as that of a disgruntled guest who has lost his VIP status. Apparently used to being able to sit in the most comfortable chair in the house, he was unpleasantly surprised by the host's request he move over and make room for other guests. The host practiced what Boler (2004) calls "affirmative action pedagogy": a pedagogy which "seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices" (p. 4). But this leaves me with the following question: if the teacher as a host has a duty to receive guests hospitably, how can the host justify reducing the hospitality extended to one guest, to increase the hospitality extended to other guests?

The main consideration, I would argue, is that the host should act *in order to leave a place for the other*. This means that if the teacher is tempted to curtail Vince's speaking time out of a defensive attitude towards her own pedagogy and curriculum, it would behoove her to examine the hospitality of her own identities as teacher, theorist, and/or social justice activist. But if the teacher is concerned about the hospitality that she and others will be able to extend to other students in current and future classrooms, it seems justifiable to me that affirmative action pedagogy is practiced. This does not mean, I

should point out, that Vince should not be allowed to speak at all. On the contrary, the classroom debate is enriched by his opinions and by the ensuing discussion. Student resistance is student response, and if that response is entered into the classroom discussion, it can invite other response. Vince did not physically or mentally leave the course, which would have been the easiest way to keep his identities out of harm's way.

Knowing one's identity-home

Vince's refusal to acknowledge the salience of his inhabiting the identity categories "man" and "white" for questions of educational success amounts to a refusal to acknowledge the effects of history. This is why Mayo (2000) distinguishes transgression of identity categories from disidentification. She points out that

> transgressing requires an understanding of the persistence of the categories that are transgressed and presumes that one needs an audience and that one's audience will understand the transgression. In other words, transgression plays within codes that are understood to be social and historical. Disidentification, in contrast, is a refusal of history. (p. 361)

Vince's stance amounts to saying, "Sure, I can see that *in the past* women and people of colour had fewer opportunities to succeed in education, but that is no longer the case. Today we all have the same opportunities and I will take full credit for my success." The unwillingness to see one's own privilege is an unwillingness to see the historicity of one's identity-home. As I have argued in Chapter 3, identities are the cumulative effects of discursive iteration, and although change and transgression are possible, they

require an understanding of *what* it is one is changing and transgressing. No one builds their own identity-home from scratch; at best, one renovates an inherited identity-home. As anyone who has renovated an old home will confirm: failing to acknowledge the existing structure of the home, as well as changes made to it in previous renovations, will hinder or even jeopardize the current renovation.

The purpose of this historical grounding of the identity-home is *not* to reify it, but rather to make its history, boundaries, exclusions, and discontinuities available for interrogation. Both the identity categories and the discourses through which they emerged are inherited – even where the two have an antagonistic relation, for example in the case of masculinist discourse and the constitution of the collective identity "woman," or Euro-centric racist discourse and the constitution of the collective identity "black."

One of the questions educators face is *when* to promote this understanding of historicity, discursive iterability, and the permeability of boundaries. On the one hand, students first need some sense of the identity whose genealogy and cultural context are being examined. Students cannot open the door of an identity whose relevance to their lives they do not yet know, or which they deny. But if the educator waits until students have developed a sense of identity, the risk is that it has been established too firmly, and that the students will not want to open it up. Mayo (2000) recalls how "a colleague

in women's studies used to say, 'I spend the first half of the term teaching them that they are women and the second half of the term deconstructing that identity'" (p. 357).

In Chapter 1 I discussed that hospitality "simultaneous requires both having a home and risking it" (Caputo, 2000, p. 57). Paradoxical as it may seem, students need to understand their (heterogeneous) traditions as a home from which they can welcome otherness. Author Anne Michaels once attended a celebration of foreign literature in the small Italian town of Castel Goffredo, and suggested that those who truly feel at home in their traditions have the confidence that those traditions will not be destroyed by an openness to the incoming of the other. She notes,

> It could be that their awareness of the past is so engrained that's it's a given, so that they're not threatened by bringing another culture right into their heart in that way. … [T]hat sense of openness seems to come from a profound knowledge of one's own place. (as cited in Allemang, 2002)

I can only receive the other hospitably if I perceive myself to be in the position of host, if I feel at home, *chez-moi*; if I feel that I have a sense of who I am and that I can afford to expose that identity to the incoming of the other. Nothing can guarantee that I will indeed extend hospitality, and there is no way to measure when a *chez-soi* is sufficiently established to receive the other. Thinking about identity in terms of hospitality heightens my awareness of the *aporias* inherent in hospitality as ethical ideal, and of my own inevitable inadequacy as host.

So how might one respond to Vince's refusal to acknowledge the effects of history? Boler (2004) has found that "one of the most effective ways to demand accountability for the 'opinions' students feel 'free' to express in the classroom, is a homework assignment that requires students to trace the source of their views" (p. 8). My aim, however, is not to demand accountability, but rather to find a way that might move Vince towards a more hospitable inhabitation of his identity. I do believe that it would benefit the hospitality of his identity if Vince considered, for instance, the European heritage of his family, their status as immigrants into Canada, and the set of cultural norms and assumptions that make up "masculinity," but I would rather issue an invitation than a punitive response. Such an invitation should not be extended in a way that singles out Vince as "the one who doesn't get it." Rather, the educator might privately suggest such a genealogical inquiry as a choice for an existing assignment, or s/he might invite the entire class to conduct such a genealogical inquiry into salient aspects of their identities. In this way, Vince might learned to see his own identity-home as having a genealogy and cultural context.

Hospitable teacher identity

One very important element in the conditions that encourage students to develop a hospitable identity is the extent to which the teacher herself or himself models hospitable identity. When parents and teachers tell their children and students, "do as I say, not as I do," they acknowledge it is more likely their children and students

will do as they see their parents and teachers do, rather than as they hear them say. A teacher's ability to model hospitality in her or his own identities is an important part of educating for hospitable identity.

One elementary school principal in a small town in Saskatchewan practices hospitable teacher/administrator identity by riding the school bus every morning. As he sits with different children on the bus, they excitedly show him what's in their lunch, or tell him what they dreamt, or what tricks their dog did that morning. The bus ride is not school time, and the principal is not in his office; the bus driver is in charge, and just as the children traverse the passage from being "son" or "daughter" to being "student," the principal traverses the passage from being "husband" or "father" to being "principal." The principal enjoys the interactive possibilities opened up in the liminal space of the school bus, and doesn't feel his identities of either husband/father or principal are threatened. By the seemingly small act of riding the school bus, the principal shows the children that he does not always foreground the same identity and implicitly teaches the children that they need not either. Sometimes, he is first and foremost "principal" and the students are first and foremost "student." At other times, they are all "passenger," and other identities remain in the background. The principal also shows that identities can change, be open to influence by other identities, and not be attached to one narrative. In the past, it might have been inconceivable that a school principal would voluntarily ride the school bus. Being "the principal" meant occupying a clear position in the hierarchy of the school, and ideas about authority and leadership

prescribed that the principal not mingle informally with students outside the school. As this principal shows, it is possible to leave the narrative of what it means to be a principal ajar.

An interesting perspective on teacher identity comes from David Hansen (2004), who writes about the profession of teaching,

> a person does more than accept the gift of teaching but *receives* it, in the sense that the person *comes into* the place of teaching (as if passing through a reception hall). Teaching as a gift projects a kind of 'dwelling-place,' to draw upon [a] term from Heidegger. A dwelling-place constitutes more than a transient space in which to hang one's hat, just as teaching offers more than an occupational way station. To inhabit the terrain of teaching is also to take responsibility for it. (p. 139)

I appreciate Hansen's remark that inhabiting the space into which one has been invited (i.e., being a guest) entails taking on a responsibility: a responsibility which allows one, in turn, to become a host for future guests. But perhaps I can add something to Hansen's call for dwelling in the gift of teaching: taking on responsibility for the gift of teaching also means dwelling *hospitably* in the place of teaching. In its most obvious sense, this means contributing to making the place of teaching welcoming to others who wish to enter the profession. But it also means dwelling hospitably in teacher identity. The boundaries of what constitutes the identity of "teacher," as distinct from, say, "coach," "social worker," "elder," or "therapist" are worth examining. I do not argue that there should be no boundaries between teacher identity and other professional identities, but as with any other identity, the boundaries are not unequivocal or

impermeable. Is there a spectre of a "non-teacher" that is excluded to make the identity

of teacher intelligible? If teaching is a good home, can it be a home with porches,

balconies, and other liminal spaces, in which teacher identities and other identities

encounter each other and enter into exchanges?

bell hooks (1994), writing about her own university teaching, gives a wonderful

example of letting a student-guest roam around in her teaching-home, apparently

without being too concerned about what this roaming might do to her teacher-host

identity.

> I remember the day he came to class late and came right up to the front,
> picked me up and whirled me around. The class laughed. I called him
> 'fool' and laughed. It was by way of apologizing for being late, for
> missing any moment of classroom passion. And so he brought his own
> moment. (pp. 197-198)

How many teachers would have been gracious enough hosts to receive this student's

gift of "his own moment"? How many would have been unconcerned enough about

their teacher identity to let themselves be picked up and whirled around? How many

would have been able to avoid, as hooks did, telling the student, "I am your teacher,

young man, not your girlfriend, or your mother, or anyone else you might conceivably

wish to pick up and whirl around"? hooks demonstrates a hospitable identity as

university professor, as teacher, by allowing herself to explore the boundaries of what it

means to be in a teaching and learning relationship. She is firmly committed to this

relationship, and she does not for a moment cease to be "teacher," but she allows new meanings to come into the collection of meanings already inscribed in that identity.

When it comes to "teacher" and "parent" identities, the borders are particularly tricky territory. Recently I attended a research meeting at an elementary school. One of the people at the table was a mother several of whose children attended this particular school. She told us that she had been a single mother for ten of the past eleven years, and that she had raised many children, some her biological children, others who had joined the family in different ways. When she looked for a school for her children, she said, she looked for a group of people who would help her raise her children. In this school, the administrators and teachers had literally and figuratively embraced her and her children, and she had attended staff meetings and become involved in other school activities. As I listened to her account of the partnership between her and the school, I was struck by the absence of defensiveness in both her identity as mother and in the teachers' identities as professionals. There seemed to be a genuine hospitality, a willingness in both this mother and the teachers to receive and regard each other as equals in helping children grow and learn and succeed – regardless of whether a particular task would more traditionally be considered a parent's or a teacher's "territory."

Inhabiting her identity as parent hospitably, this mother could accept the help of others without feeling her parent identity was threatened. Likewise, inhabiting their

identities as teachers hospitably, the teachers could accept this mother's insights during

staff meetings without feeling their teacher identities were threatened. Both identity-

homes were sturdy and permeable, and their inhabitants willing to "linger a while on

the threshold" of their parent and teacher identities (Naas, 2003, p. 154). Examples such

as this show that hospitality can guide interpersonal relations and that when it does, the

persons in these relations are concerned with receiving and attending to the other,

rather than with defending their own identities.

Hospitable school discourse

Besides the formal curriculum, the pedagogical approaches, the assessment

methods, and the identities of teachers, the general discourse offered by and in an

educational institution may also model more or less hospitality. Weekly school

newsletters, the principal's address at assembly, student handbooks, a university's

three-year plan, the presidential address at convocation: all are examples of institutional

educational discourses that both represent and constitute the educational institutions

from which they emerge.

In elementary and secondary schools, some school discourse is found on the

walls and doors, in the signs that regulate students' and visitors' behaviour. Debbie

Pushor, university-based researcher and former elementary school teacher and

principal, speaks passionately about the proliferation of, often inhospitable, signs in and

around school buildings. "Visitors please report to the office," is a common example,

positioning parents (and grandparents, siblings and other caretakers of the children) as strangers who need to make themselves known to school administrators. The boundaries between who legitimately belongs in the school and who does not are clearly drawn, and parents often do not feel welcome in the school (personal communication, January 11, 2005).[45]

At the post-secondary level, a troubling example of inhospitable institutional discourse is presented by Judith Butler (2004) when she comments on a speech given by Lawrence Summers, President of Harvard University, in September 2002. The speech is not unique in its tone and message, but carries particular weight for Butler (as it does for my argument) because it is a presidential speech at an institution of higher education. In his speech, Summers said, ""Profoundly anti-Israeli views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities. Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent" (as cited in Butler, p. 101). Butler notes that Summers' speech contributes to the threat of being charged with anti-Semitism for both Jewish and non-Jewish persons who are critical of the policies of the Israeli government. "The threat of having to live in a radically uninhabitable and unacceptable identification with anti-Semitism if one speaks against Israeli policy or, indeed, Israel itself" is particularly

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[45] The reason behind such signs, it will be argued, is a concern for the safety of the students. This concern is legitimate, but the posting of inhospitable signs is not the most imaginative, nor the most effective response. Moreover, it teaches students that it is better to avoid encounters with strangers than it is to think about ways to respond to them.

powerful for Jews (p. xvii).

Summers apparently believes that the home of Jewish identity cannot

accommodate voices critical of the government or nation of Israel, and relegates those

voices to a space particularly uninhabitable for Jews: that of anti-Semitism. Butler notes,

> it seems that the very meaning of what it is to be Jewish, or, indeed, what
> 'Jewishness' is has undergone a certain reduction in the formulation that
> Summers provides. Summers has identified Jews with the state of Israel
> as if they were seamlessly the same, or he has assumed that,
> psychologically and sociologically, every Jew has such an identification,
> and that this identification is essential to Jewish identity, an identification
> without which that identity cannot exist. (p. 112)

Through Butler's analysis, dissemination of that analysis and, hopefully, other analyses

like hers, the boundary drawn by Summers and others who think along the lines

argued by him, can be shifted again, and being a "Jew critical of Israeli policy" can

remain or become again an intelligible and valid identity, especially within the context

of an educational institution.

A third example of inhospitable institutional discourse is discussed by Henry

Giroux (2002). Giroux notes that after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, there

has been a (further) narrowing of the teaching profession based on criteria of

patriotism. For example, the chancellor and trustees of the City University of New York

issued a statement condemning professors who criticized United States foreign policy at

a teach-in. And an organization calling itself the "American Council of Trustees and

Alumni" (founded by Lynne Cheney and Senator Joseph Lieberman) published the

report *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America, and What Can Be Done About It*. This report lists 117 comments made by faculty and students after September 11, 2001, and reveals the names of those academics who are allegedly "short on patriotism." "Patriotism," notes Giroux, "becomes a euphemism for shutting down dissent, eliminating critical dialogue, and condemning critical citizenship in the interest of conformity and a dangerous departure from what it means to uphold a viable democracy."

Institutional discourse, the discourse carried by personal and textual representatives of an institution, is influential in setting the parameters for more specific pedagogical and curricular practices. Whether individual teachers have the courage to address racist slurs in the classroom or hallway depends, in part, on the way the discourse of their educational institution explicitly supports or remains silent about such interventions. Whether academics feel comfortable expressing sexist opinions about female job applicants depends, in part, on the way the discourse of their university condemns, condones, or supports such opinions. And whether sports coaches decide to ignore homophobic comments depends, in part, on the way institutional discourses perpetuate, ignore, or actively combat homophobic prejudice. Educational institutional discourse shapes the discursive and other practices of students and teachers. It can strengthen or call into question the bandwidth of identities permitted and encouraged by the educational institution. In this way, educational institutional discourse becomes part of the curricular and pedagogical messages sent

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and read in concrete educational situations, and it can encourage those messages either to move away from, or to move towards, educating for hospitable identity.

Conclusion

My discussion of hospitality as a guiding ethic for education has provided examples of how curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, teacher identity, and school discourse can be left ajar. I have presented this ajarness not as a deficiency to be overcome, but rather as a necessary feature of discursive practices such as education and identity formation. Educating for hospitable identity begins with an understanding of ajarness as a shared condition for the formation of hospitable identities.

Every day, in the examples student-teachers give, in the curricular discourse I read, in the conversations I have with colleagues, I am reminded that the social institution of education is an undeniable force in the shaping of people's identities. What people, of all ages, learn about the identities that have social currency and what they learn about those that do not, what they learn about sameness and difference and about "how opposites attract," what they learn about trust and suspicion, entitlement and obligation, influences them in the kinds of identities they inhabit, and how they inhabit them. The implicit conceptions of identity that inform educators and educational discourses shape the kinds of identities students develop.

I have argued that educators and educational discourses should create the conditions in which students can become able and willing to inhabit their identities hospitably. I have posited an ethic of hospitality as an ethic guiding education. In this ethic, hospitality is not a gift to be given by those who can afford to give, a gift that does not affect the host in her or his comfort or status, but rather a gift given in recognition of one's own being-guest, of one's own indebtedness to the other.

Currently, the dominant way of conceiving identity seems to be that it takes the form of a narrative. From kindergarten to university, understanding one's identity as narrative is a pervasive practice and expectation; the ability to present one's learning, one's career, one's family past, one's life in coherent narrative unity is an implicit measure of success in many educational contexts. Conceptions of identity as narrative, however, are not commonly made the object of educational scrutiny. What is being taught by the emphasis on narrative? What messages does it send?

Understanding personal identity from within a narrative paradigm is not the most conducive to thinking about identity as more or less hospitable. Both within a folk conception of identity as narrative, and within a more richly theorized hermeneutical conception of identity as narrative, the attention is drawn towards continuity, direction, autonomy, and unity in human lives and subjectivities. Attention to the constitutive outside of one's identity, whether in the form of flesh-and-blood others, discursive

intelligibility, the Unconscious, or another form of otherness, may perhaps be accommodated, but is rarely invited into narrative paradigms.

Because identity is discursive through and through, I have turned to an analysis of discourse and its effects to propose a different way of understanding identity. In developing this alternative conception, my starting points have been absence rather than presence, and border rather than centre. Speech act theory, and, in particular, its theory of performativity, has helped me develop an alternative conception of identity which casts the subject as being produced by discourse, rather than as freely and purposefully drawing on discourse to compose a narrative identity. Within this conception, narration can be understood as one of the discursive acts that produce identity as effect.

Perhaps most importantly, understanding identity as such a discursive effect allows for an appreciation that one's identity is dependent on and indebted to the other and the other's discourse, that the borders of one's identity are never stable, and that they not only separate one's identity from others, but also join it to them. Understanding identity as discursive effect makes possible an understanding of identity categories as inherited. It moves one to a different consideration of the way one dwells in the world, of whether one dwells beside, against, with, or perhaps also for others. It enhances an awareness that one must have been received before one can receive, that one must offer hospitality because one has been received.

By proposing this alternative conception of identity, and by suggesting how it might inform education, my primary motivation is to make the call of the other and the demand of hospitality heard. I have written in the hope that attachments to the discursive constructs of identity can be loosened, and that an awareness can grow of the possibilities to participate critically in discourse, to make discursive categories more hospitable. For the conception of identity as discursive effect is not a form of cultural determinism; the discursively constituted subject is agentic and responsible, and agency is both constrained and enabled by discourse.

A subject with an inhospitable identity responds to the stranger: I don't want you inhabiting the same identity category I do; your inhabiting this category makes me feel uncomfortable. This subject might say, for example, "I am a Jew, and I feel offended if you, who express criticism of Israeli policies, want to inhabit this same Jewish identity-home." Or the subject might say, "I am a real man – if you want to know what a real man is, just look at me. I don't want you gay guys inhabiting this same category of "man" as I do. Your claim to inhabit this category makes a mockery of this identity category, and of me." A subject with a hospitable identity, on the contrary, responds to the stranger: come in, be welcome here, there is no reason that this identity category cannot accommodate you, even if we have to shift the boundaries a little. This subject is aware, moreover, that its welcoming gesture is possible only because it has been welcomed also, and that it has no entitlement to the position of host. The subject with a hospitable identity understands that no identity category is fixed or stable or

homogeneous; that the tradition which has sedimented into the identity category as it is today, is heterogeneous.

I do not advocate, of course, that all students should become "discursive activists," constantly living on (and pushing) the boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on. I do advocate, however, that students learn that it is possible to linger a moment longer, and to create spaces for others to linger, rather than relegating them to realms of discursive unintelligibility. Educating for hospitable identity is helping students understand that identity categories can and do change through iterative modes of inhabitation, that their own inhabiting is possible only because of the inhabiting of others before them, and that their inhabiting can make an identity category a more or less hospitable place for subsequent dwellers.

Hospitable identity, dwelling in a *chez-soi* open to the incoming of the other, means not ensconcing oneself within the boundaries of one's identity, but rather dwelling in the liminal zones, the fraying edges that remind us they are torn from and will easily become entangled with the fraying edges of other people's identities. Being ajar is not a limitation to be overcome, but rather a condition for hospitality, for the other to arrive.

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