

COSMOPOLITAN AMERICA: AFFECT, ATTENTION, AND THE NATION IN  
POST-COLD WAR LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation makes two key interventions in the fields of cosmopolitanism and contemporary American literature. First, I define cosmopolitanism as a way of organizing sociality in terms of affect, through how individuals pay attention to the world. Interactions with people and texts evoke affects and socialization trains individuals how to respond to them through the formation of feelings for particular forms of community. Rather than a set of actually existing conditions or some common identity, cosmopolitanism, as a potential outcome for ongoing processes of socialization, is one means of politicizing affect within political institutions like the nation, which remain grounded in material conditions and particular identities. Cosmopolitanism is not some state of affairs that our actions or intentions bring into being; it remains abstract and outside the present in the form of appeals to a nostalgic past or utopian future. For example, nationalist literature deploys the idea of cosmopolitanism as a reality or possibility to reconsolidate the political effects of affect around the nation-state. Second, I argue that recent literature about America reconceptualizes the nation's cultural and political value through appeals to cosmopolitanism as if it were a set of conditions or common identity that readers can use to construct a positive self-identity. This rhetorical move justifies a simultaneous vision of expanding cultural, political, and economic influence that accompanies American texts' visions of America as the center of cosmopolitan humanitarian or ethical interventions. Literary appeals to America as the center of cosmopolitan solidarity manage the formation of the nation within global space by encouraging readers to feel positively for their global presence.

The dissertation presents detailed readings of texts concerned with the identity of America rather than those emerging from it as the object of its inquiry to show how global literature situates the affective experience of America within a cosmopolitan sociability stratified across a number of solidarities including race, class, gender, and nationality. Analyzing texts by David Foster Wallace, Hari Kunzru, Joe Sacco, Aleksandar Hemon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Karen Tei Yamashita, and Dave Eggers, I elaborate on critical and philosophical deployments of cosmopolitanism as justifications for the management of communication, human rights, and aesthetic production alongside literary analogs that situate critical struggles to realize cosmopolitanism within America.

## DEDICATION

For Joy, James, and Elliot.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: AFFECT, ATTENTION, AND THE COSMOPOLITAN NATION

One of the most widely discussed media events of 2012 was the publication and viral explosion of Invisible Children's short film, *KONY2012*. The thirty minute film, which has seemingly redefined activism for the internet age, presents the organization's co-founder Jason Russell appealing to a presumably American audience to make Joseph Kony famous (or infamous) around the world by becoming aware of his actions, with the aim of inciting a U.S. military intervention against his organization within Uganda. He does so by first documenting the ordinariness of his own family life and then capturing the emotional reaction of his five year old son to a simplified account of what a bad man Kony has been and of a Ugandan youth responding to Russell's promise to rescue the country. The video addressed what nearly all commentators judge a worthwhile cause, to put an end to the decades-long reign of terror of Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army, even if evidence suggested that neither were currently active in Uganda at the time of the video's publication.<sup>1</sup> Despite a general consensus on Kony's criminality and the need to act against him, the video sparked predictable outrage for its oversimplification of Ugandan politics and its blatant move to characterize Africans as helpless victims in need of rescue from an evil villain by benevolent American viewers.<sup>2</sup> Still, many commentators were compelled by the effectiveness of a simple video to arouse the public to any form of action in what they characterized as an age of mass media information saturation, even if that action was only to register concern through the click of a mouse, or "slacktivism."

On a very basic level, Invisible Children's appeal suggests they understand their video as having real political and material effects on Joseph Kony by compromising or otherwise altering the quality of social and cultural capital associated with his name and face.<sup>3</sup> Paying attention to Kony's existence in this way does not have any particularly profound effect on his own capacity to convert social capital into financial resources or political power, though. Instead, the disgust viewers feel at his ongoing reign of terror accrues an unwanted form of social capital to U.S. policymakers, to whom the video appeals for military intervention. They have not lived up to their role as guarantors of human liberty in the past, the video accuses, and if they fail now to respond to the publicity Invisible Children generates, they will lose credibility in the face of those it outrages. As viewers' frustration erodes confidence in the efficacy of the state to ensure the quality of life they expect, it also transfers social capital and political power to NGO charities and other extra-national policy groups. Its ability to command the abstract resource of attention leads to a consolidation of more tangible forms of power.

As a call to claim individual entitlement to global diplomacy, *KONY2012* redraws America's boundaries as coextensive with its viewers' capacity to feel for others. In it, our feelings for others extend to what media renders visible, the whole of humanity, making America the hub of a cosmopolitan world of shared affect. The video's humanitarian appeal was not to a sense of compassion for others but personal empowerment, through the idea that the act of mere attentiveness is what bestows a figure, cause, or concept with value, and that the act of generating such value entitles those laboring individuals to a right over the formation and content of the objects of their

attention. Because the Africans in *KONY2012* made them feel badly, its viewers claim a right to remake their world for them just as they might also claim the right to develop an interpretation of a painting that evokes feelings of discomfort or to develop a neighborhood fallen into poverty. Like urban gentrification, its aim is not only a world in which children are not abducted and murdered or all people are equal, but one in which everyone is continually visible in order to maintain a state of constant affective scrutiny that minimizes the risk of global consumers' exposure to the pain of empathy. After all, to have feeling for others is to extend them some degree of community, and how we feel about them determines the character of that community. Ensuring that others evoke only positive, empowering feelings in ourselves limits the extent to which we become financially or politically liable for them and justifies neoliberal calls for others' self-reliance. Under such watchfulness, Africans no longer pose the threat of upsetting the bliss of daily American life because they no longer appear imperiled, and, consequently, also appear capable of bearing the consequences of their living conditions.

The message of the video is clear enough: as an innocent American child, Gavin, Russell's little boy, should not have to hear what he did. The threat *KONY2012* evokes is our distress at the deformation of his innocent vision of the world and the potential malformation of patriotic national identity our sight of his confusion might cause. To look upon Gavin's hurt is to question the basis for one's pride in the nation. The viral body of viewers the video encourages to question the value of the nation makes it in the state's best interest to adopt Invisible Children's policy recommendations. The film's Africans, through their suffering, make Americans feel uncomfortable with their lives.

The film defines pain as the shared occasion for the sentimental activism it elicits, in the form of Gavin's distress first, then the sight of benighted Ugandans, and finally in the empathy of viewers, which mirrors Gavin's own feelings.<sup>4</sup> Doing so, *KONY2012* creates the image of a unified world in which all people share the capacity for pain that demands America's intervention into its management. The cosmopolitanism of its appeal generalizes Gavin's pain, which hurts viewers' feelings with the possibility that he could be their own child. The potential to suffer is what we have in common and is what motivates political action, but the film's rhetorical structure also positions its Ugandan victims in an antagonistic relationship to its American viewers.<sup>5</sup> By not addressing a duty to alleviate pain, by giving one's attention in the form of views or likes to the work of Invisible Children, viewers allow not just Kony, but, more immediately, the Ugandan children he kidnaps and murders to threaten their own emotional well-being. Children, not Kony, are the cause of viewers' distressing empathy.

The children Invisible Children makes visible and their effect on viewers are the problem the organization's intervention must resolve to an equal degree as the actual violence it describes. *KONY2012*'s call to "cover the night" to make Kony famous in America claims the world in the name of an American right to positive feelings. Its deployment of cosmopolitan interest in the lives of others forms the ground for a reconsolidation of power within the nation in dematerialized terms of affect and attention value that displace older forms of domination like economy and manifest destiny. As it does so, the film participates in what Lilie Chouliaraki calls the "neoliberal commodification of solidarity" ("Cosmopolitanism as Irony" 78). Tellingly,

Invisible Children's concern is to make Kony, and not his victims, famous, and it does by enabling an army of empathetic youth to imagine themselves as champions of global justice when they spread the word. *KONY2012*'s viewers become empowered to regulate the production of emotion within a cosmopolitan world by witnessing the effects the suffering of others may have upon them. Their views create a public space in which America is responsible for the well-being of the world. By making viewers feel as if their fulfilling actions do make a difference in the world, while disguising the ongoing conditions that contribute to the need for wealthy individuals to become the humanitarian guarantors of basic conditions worldwide, projects like *KONY2012* produce a quiescent and self-satisfied public devoted to the production of a nation with global sovereignty. The video's call for cosmopolitan attentiveness actually risks producing a less cosmopolitan public.

While it is easy to dismiss *KONY2012* as naïve and short-sighted, I do not believe Invisible Children acts in bad faith. Its action points clearly serve American and personal interests primarily. However, the organization's investment in broadening Americans' awareness of the world, even if it fails to produce equality, does indicate a yet unrealized potential for cosmopolitanism in the very instability of affective bonds it so effectively mobilized. The tens of millions of views the video attracted in a matter of days suggests a different way of organizing political action that does not correspond to any set of tangible boundaries, but that rather emerges and dissipates according to need, sensation, affect. This dissertation takes up the link between affect and cosmopolitanism in order to examine how literature manages the social and political value of America and

defines its boundaries as flexible and action-based during the post-Cold War era. In it, I argue two major points. First, I define cosmopolitanism as a form of attentiveness that shapes our ongoing production of sociality. The production of sociality, in turn, gives us a sense of those solidarities that position us within the world, whether as part of a family, nation, or global community. All forms of socialization have within them a degree of cosmopolitan sociability. Second, I argue that recent literature reconceptualizes America's cultural and political value through appeals to cosmopolitanism in order to justify a simultaneous vision of its expanding cultural, political, and economic influence. What I focus on in the chapters that follow is how the assumption of America as the object of attention in literary works, including fiction and nonfiction, written words and images, affects the production of cosmopolitan attentiveness and how the understandings of what it means to be cosmopolitan influences the sorts of solidarities they envision. Thinking of cosmopolitanism as a mode of attentiveness directed toward the production of sociability allows me to critique the means by which world literature partakes in the extension of American liberal values to global space without devaluing the experience of American identity by individuals, either in the U.S. or abroad.

### **Cosmopolitanism, Affect, and Attention**

Cosmopolitanism has a long and contentious history. While everyone has a general sense of what the term means, no one agrees on the range of its application. Beginning with Diogenes the Cynic, who proclaimed himself a citizen of the world, there has been disagreement about what cosmopolitanism involves. Many critics have interpreted Diogenes's words pessimistically, as a refusal of one's responsibilities in favor of self-indulgent invention.<sup>6</sup> In the modern era, beginning with Kant,

cosmopolitanism's association with shared reason and identity comes to prominence. Kant's cosmopolitan vision of a world united under shared space introduces an ethical component to the term in the form of demands for and limits to hospitality (105-114). More recent discussions of the term defend its relevance by qualifying its scope and purpose with a seemingly endless array of modifiers. Some follow Kant's ethical and rational imperative, and theorize cosmopolitanism as an ideal toward which humanity works. Most notably in this camp are the much-decried patriotic, even nationalistic, cosmopolitanisms of Martha Nussbaum and K. Anthony Appiah. Nussbaum frames cosmopolitanism as a project of self-enlightenment in which by reading, individuals come to understand themselves as the center of a shared humanity. This realization burdens them with the responsibility of bringing the rest of the world to a similar state of enlightenment by helping them to shed attachments to irrelevant local values (9). Likewise, Appiah treats cosmopolitanism as a pleasant adventure in which the world's privileged consume images of foreign difference through real or imagined travel ("Cosmopolitan Reading," 202-208). The result of Nussbaum's and Appiah's liberal cosmopolitanisms is that, too often, cosmopolitanism is reduced to a celebration of universal identity at the expense of local conditions, beliefs, and practices as well as the historical conditions that have produced them. Taken in such directions, cosmopolitanism becomes a means to reach and sustain consensus in the face of difference. The problem with their cosmopolitanisms is not that they identify some common toward which humanity ought to work in the name of peace and mutual understanding. Instead, it is that they adhere to the assumption that their own sense of

the world is unassailable, forcing the outside to bend to its beliefs to reach an understanding of them.

Pheng Cheah objects that cosmopolitanism is conflated with neoliberal imperialism through the liberal tradition on the grounds that critics excited by cosmopolitanism's potential to unify humanity and to usher in an era of global harmony make the indefensible assumption that because their own circumstances enable them to extend the boundaries of human community to people everywhere, people elsewhere must also entertain similar feelings. To these utopian proclamations, he counters that material reality does not support notions of universal equality. To Cheah, "the ethico-political work that nationalism and cosmopolitanism can do at any given moment depends on how either formulation emerges from or is inscribed within the shifting material linkages and interconnections created by global capitalism at a particular historical conjuncture" (31). American writers' cosmopolitan claims to transcend the oppressiveness of corrupt national regimes and cultures are the product of U.S. stability in the global economy, and the strength of their vision of humanity is the product of the dehumanization of those whom they hope to address. This is especially the case at the intersection of humanitarianism and cosmopolitan literature. Concern for humanitarianism is important given the direction America's nation building work has taken on the global stage since the end of the Cold War. Chouliaraki argues that humanitarianism is split between appeals to solidarity as salvation from inhumane conditions and as calls to revolutionary action that address the underlying conditions of inequality (*The Ironic Spectator* 10-15). Humanitarian cosmopolitanism, she suggests,

typically, and lately increasingly, falls to the side of salvation-styled appeals in which the Kantian recognition of common reason or the kernel of universal humanity of liberal theories justifies intervention, as it does in the case of viewers who feel moved to demand action on behalf of Ugandans when they witness how Gavin suffers when he learns of humanity's potential for cruelty. At the same time it emphasizes the humanitarian's feelings over issues of justice, Chouliaraki argues, "by unequally distributing the quality of humanity across the globe," between sites of pity and sites of empathy, cosmopolitan humanitarian discourse "perpetuates the historical relationship of the powerful West and the developing world, under the guise of cosmopolitan solidarity" ("Cosmopolitanism as Irony" 79).

As a politics of consensus, liberal cosmopolitanism serves the interests of hegemonic neoliberal capitalism at the present, a point Timothy Brennan is quick to note. He argues that "cosmopolitanism ... can be understood as referring to the national specificity of the United States in which a New World pluralism adapted from nineteenth-century Latin American liberation movements joins a fledgling U.S. imperial project" (216). Concern regarding collusion between American patriotism and cosmopolitan utopianism also motivates Bruce Robbins's recent work on pragmatic cosmopolitanism. In *Perpetual War*, he proposes that although cosmopolitanism once was an idealistic philosophy determined to find some point of solidarity unifying humanity, it has strayed from this mission in U.S. discourse. In the midst of a culture driven by an escalating tendency to "organize the world of nations, often with great subtlety," according to the outlook he memorably summarizes in the phrase "I'm great,

you stink,” cosmopolitanism has become yet another casualty of patriotism (*Perpetual War*; 4). Cosmopolitanism, as a project for which America should be concerned, can either detach “Americans from their nation” in its current atmosphere of patriotic nationalism, or “it is not worth getting very excited about” (2). His provocative claim invites the conclusion that far from being over, cosmopolitanism has yet to begin properly. Yet, the exciting departure from the usual impediments to America’s cosmopolitanization that Robbins finds is the film *Three Kings* (1997), which shows the first Iraq war as pointless and devastating while also depicting American soldiers as “decent” because they are capable of empathizing with the Iraqis whose suffering they have caused (1).<sup>7</sup> While not quite the absolutism and inflexibility of extreme patriotism, the cosmopolitanism Robbins champions in the film means neither a detachment from identification with the nation nor a departure from the American exceptionalism. Instead, it aims to use positive feelings situated in our critical valuation of America’s actions abroad to restore a differently patriotic feeling for the nation. The film redeems national pride through a cathartic recognition of shame – the war was unconscionable but its American soldiers have good hearts and viewers can be proud Americans to feel bad about what is done in the name of the nation. The film creates feelings of cosmopolitan solidarity tied to nationalist politics. A cosmopolitan outlook makes for loyalty one can stomach, actually restoring the grounds for exceptionalist narratives.

While there certainly is some truth to Brennan’s conclusion that “[c]osmopolitanism is the way in which a kind of American patriotism is today being expressed,” given Robbins’s inability to escape the linkage between the two projects, it

is not the case that what he describes is the limit or spirit of cosmopolitanism (227). As Peter Sloterdijk points out, Diogenes's declaration of world citizenship should be read as a willful and subversive abstention from the life of the polis and the protections it offers. This does not, however, equate to an absolute and anti-social rejection from social life itself. For him, Diogenes's cosmopolitanism means that "[one] is no longer a narrow-minded citizen of a random city-community," whose "melting pot of absurd customs" is really only "a hollow political mechanism" to begin with. Until the impossible moment when the global actually does coincide with the local, it is the duty of the cosmopolitan to "remain the biting conscience of every dominating self-satisfaction and the affliction of every local narrowing" (164). Diogenes's decision to identify with the anarchic world rather than the ordered city-state that could guarantee his rights meant for him a life of intense vulnerability, exposed to absolute precarity, in order to draw attention to the ways in which the false inclusiveness of the city, another form of cosmopolitan universality, reduced human diversity to homogenous identity. Diogenes's words, far from the care-free and irresponsible declaration of self-centered detachment from local commitments or a desire to play freely with his sense of self that they are often taken for, founds cosmopolitanism as a mode of continuous, and agonistic political dissent opposed to facile declarations of humanity's common identity. Cosmopolitanism is an act of critique and a form of protest rather than a vision for an efficiently managed world. It is a posture of attentive curiosity toward that which is given little repute in the official order of things within the city, an insistence upon paying attention to humanity in ever shifting and expanding ways. Cosmopolitanism is an attitude of continually

refashioning those forms by which we take the measure of our relationship to others and determine the boundaries and limits to our loyalties. It is in this spirit that I develop my own critique of cosmopolitan discourse in literature concerned with America's place in the world today.

I understand cosmopolitanism as an always yet-to-be-realized potential to conceive sociality in differently inclusive ways rather than as something that is or is not. It is a particular way of ordering attentiveness that can become associated with any number of forms of solidarity.<sup>8</sup> It does not actually exist but does exert a pull over how individuals understand themselves and their situation within temporally and geographically fluid worlds. As a form of attention, cosmopolitanism is one basis by which individuals continuously process affect into sociability in order to establish their relationships with others. Nationalism can feel cosmopolitan without producing a political system that unifies humanity across the globe, just as people can work together for a common cause without feeling loyal to a shared identity. Any political structure transforms sociality from the potential to organize into organization itself, and as it does so, moves through the exercise of power according to principles of exclusion and difference, implicitly setting the limits of humanity. Cosmopolitanism is instead what might emerge from a particular way of attending to feeling. It has an effect on how we organize and live in the world without being reduced to a manifest state or condition.

Likewise, an emotion is not something that has an objective existence. Instead, emotions are means of transforming affect into symbols that we can then manage. Take the common experiences of feeling troubled but of remaining uncertain as to why or of

feeling something but being unable to determine what. The purpose of analysis or therapy is often to enable the production of signs linking affect to objects or experiences in order to resolve such situations. When we do manage to give a name, like remorse, to whatever troubles us, we can resolve the tensions such a feeling or experience is likely to cause by connecting them with social traditions explaining their source, but we also reduce the effects of whatever we name to those commonly associated with whatever it is we decide to call it. Affect is the unnamed sensation producing the compulsion to name the relationship between experience and its psychological effect upon us is affect. The transformation of affect into emotion is highly dependent upon socialization and marks the influence of others on the ongoing and always incomplete process of individuation. The sensation of affect indicates our potential to form a sociality otherwise than what exists. Cosmopolitanism is one particular way of attending to affect and organizing its potential into social structures within a specific and limited time and space. A particular instance of cosmopolitanism becomes visible politically through its circulation within public space as the object of attention.

One becomes cosmopolitan, “the kind of person who chooses” which affiliations define one in public, as Rebecca Walkowitz puts it, through investing attention in a particular style of expression (40).<sup>9</sup> Cosmopolitanism attains social capital as a valid way to organize the world through its circulation within an economy of attention. Hardt and Negri describe the process by which feeling takes on meaning and establishes the basis for sociability as “affective labor” (292-293).<sup>10</sup> The work involved in the transformation from sensation to affect to feeling and finally to sociality constitutes

affective labor (*Empire* 292-3; Terranova “Attention, Economy and the Brain 10). Prior to such work, an affect has no communicable content. Instead, it provokes labor that does make content that we can then attribute back to affect, as in the phrases “it made me feel this way,” or “I feel this way about it.”

Paying attention to how an object affects us sends that object circulating in public space as the signs we know as feelings. Sara Ahmed defines affect as economic because what we know as feelings reside neither in us nor beyond us but come into being through labor as we transform unrepresentable affects into communicable signs. A moment of contacts leave those party to it with a trace she defines as “stickiness.” Stickiness marks the effort of a transition from inside to outside, a binding of public and private (*Cultural Politics* 10). In a similar way, Bernard Stiegler argues that “attentive forms” make up the intellectual scaffolding developed as we engage with collective experience, finding points of identification in others and using what we find in others as the materials of ongoing individuation. According to Stiegler, the act of communicating private experience renders bits of information subject to generalization; communication always becomes evidence for some sort of social rule for others. As individual experiences are stylized, they become socially visible as what Stiegler calls “external memory.” “Culture,” he explains, is “the intergenerational transmission of attentive forms invented in the course of individual experience which becomes collective because psychosocial memory is technically exteriorized and supported” (4).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, private experience is the result of internalizing educational experiences, others’ attentive forms. What we define as most intimately interior is the product of our absorption of the

outside; the local and unique we feel as such because of our continual and cosmopolitan traversals of the boundaries we have given them. In order to be understood, we attach some object to the sticky points movement and contact leave, and in doing so, define that object as the source of our feeling. Doing so makes it, as a mediated object of private experience, an attentive form out of which others continually reconstruct sociality. For example, the sight of Gavin crying is a sticky point that becomes the site of affective labor resulting in redrawn political boundaries within *KONY2012*'s viewers that locates individual security in humanitarian intervention in the name of the nation. Interaction with his pain trains viewers how to pay attention to the pain of others and what value the sight of pain has for politics. Likewise, Robbins recalls the unpleasant feelings we associate with the ubiquitously familiar images of Abu Ghraib to amplify positive ones from the accessible but less familiar *Three Kings* in order to redirect his readers' attachments toward an affectively renovated nation. In both cases, by making the consumer of the text feel, these works transform sociality. Attention is affective and affect functions economically.<sup>12</sup> Cosmopolitanism is a way of symbolizing affect's circulation within global economies of attention.

It may be second nature to think of one's attention as a private resource, as the faculty by which an individual consumes experience in order to produce a sense of self. While it is the case that attention does this, individuation is not its sole function. In addition to what our attentions produce on our behalf, they also produce abstract speculative value for others to whom we pay attention or who elicit our attention in the form of a promise of social prestige, political influence, or financial investment. In any

mediated presentation of another person or people, that other can be either the author or source of the text or the subject represented in it. A principal investment of attention in some product or idea is often necessary to its economic success. We evaluate the way attention is paid to a subject according to a complex hierarchy to determine its net attention value. Georg Franck suggests that one way we determine attention's worth is in terms of "the duration and concentration of its expenditure" ("The Economy of Attention"). Sustained focus is significant, but attention also becomes valuable as a result of the object toward which it is directed, from "our own esteem for the person from which we receive it." If a cause or good can secure enough of the right kind of attention, its success is all but guaranteed. Franck argues that in the current economy, the attainment of power is not dependent on birth, talent, or material wealth. In attention economies, according to Franck, one becomes powerful through prominence and prominent through nothing more or less than "somehow finding one's way into the media." By his analysis, "everything increasing the medium's attention income will be promoted, published, and cultivated by it," and anything garnering such attention from the media itself is "by definition prominent." So, while media attention does convey power to its objects, it does so only within the economic context of that object's exponential reflection of attention back onto the broadcasting medium and its interests.

What a medium makes prominent must promise a good return to hold its place in the public eye. To do so, it must command a degree of power. This holds true across all media. Unlike material wealth, attention is continually consumed as it becomes available; it cannot be stored or reinvested. As Richard Lanham explains, "Art is the

attention that makes stuff meaningful” (43). The act of aesthetic production directs its consumers’ attentions upon an object in order to transform it continually into something that speaks value. Art facilitates the economic utilization of attention for politics. Individual works of art create what Lanham alternately calls “attention fields” and “attention traps.” The expectations we bring to a text, informed by experience, knowledge of the subject matter, author, or genre, determine how we understand the sorts of labor we are meant to work upon it in order to extract from it the correct form of meaning. Art tells us how to evaluate the value of those to whom we pay attention. “The more commonplace and physical the object teaching the lesson,” which is taken to an extreme degree in cosmopolitan literature, in which people different from oneself are the objects of art, “the more [the art-object] taught the final insignificance of physical objects” (43). Being the object of extensive mass-media attention effectively guarantees the abstract productivity of its subject, which, in theory, can radically redefine one’s political, social, and economic standing, but the lesson these objects seem to teach is that humanity resides all around us, devaluing any individual’s humanity, and especially those placed on display.

Attention is the means by which affect produces sociality and sociality, as the basis for political power, is the value-product of our consumption of works of media as they circulate within public space. In the case of *KONY2012*, the attention of viewers appears suspect and childish to its critics because the video’s valuation of this attention challenges corporate and class-based political structures that govern the international economy with a radical new model centered on the feelings of individual consumers.

The new attentive form by which it communicates also implies a new process through which social and cultural capital convert to economic capital and political power. The appeal to feelings rather than ideas, productions, or actions diverts attention from one channel of distribution to another. At the same time, the video invests its challenge in renewing exactly those sites of power that its most likely supporters have compellingly identified as sources of global inequality, racism, exploitation, and imperialism. It represents a moment of the potential for difference, which I argue is cosmopolitan, one that is reincorporated immediately into existing structures of power upon its realization as a social action capable of mobilizing economic capital.

While America is not becoming cosmopolitan, in the banal sense expressed in phrases like “we’re all just human,” in either reality or representation, Americans and American institutions do desire to make both appear as such. In order to change its image, America must first change those feelings individuals tend to attach to it. This process can occur through textual consumption. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the novel became the dominant form of narrative precisely as the modern nation came to prominence. Anderson proposes that a community is defined in terms of the way it interacts with media. His print capitalism created a network of cultural consumption that was regulated according to a particular bounded space. A set of people interacting with a shared set of texts will likely share the perception that they share a set of values, or an identity, that may or may not actually be expressed in what they collectively read. The novel could serve as the primary means by which the nation was imagined as endowed with particularity and boundedness because it enables the

circulation of specific ways of encoding affect within a circumscribed population and norms that population's affective response to specific events in time using those codes it renders legible. As the "imagined" of Anderson's title suggests, the commonality that emerges from consumption is not objective, but rather exists only within an individual's perception. Likewise, the content of a community, or its identity, is not static, but rather changes in accordance with whatever makes an individual feel in a particular moment. Solidarity is a response to affective stimuli within a set of texts that are, or are perceived to be, shared.

My understanding of cosmopolitanism as dependent upon sustained attention relies upon a key distinction between a public and an identity. Identity has what Michael Warner calls "manifest positive content" (75). As such, its legibility relies upon its locus of production more than any attention paid to it by those who claim it. Identity is not a matter of circulation. Whatever an identity's content may be is determined and given fixed value through the power of some independent institution (75). Identity is the currency of social capital. One has identity regardless of individual attention or activity. Identity transfers from an institution to an individual. A person either is or is not a particular race and a nation "includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose" and, we might add, willing to belong or not (87). One does not acquire identity through effort or devotion but the possession of an identity does provide an individual with a source of social capital.<sup>13</sup> A public is a different matter. As Warner explains, to belong to a public requires "active uptake." Publics are a matter of attention. They exist only "by virtue of address" (87).

A public is a “virtual entity” that commences “with the moment of attention ... and cease[s] to exist when attention is no longer predicated” (88). A public generates cultural value through attention; it has no value of its own. As such, membership to a public does not normalize an individual’s sense of self. Instead, one becomes a member of some public by bringing into proximity those attentive forms and private experiences that define oneself with those of others through paying attention to specific discourse communities.

One reason cosmopolitanism has become a topic of interest recently may be that our attention has shifted from the novel and other forms of print media, along with the sorts of publics they sustain, to more widely and rapidly transmitted digital media. These new media redraw the temporal and spatial boundaries within which expressions hold currency. With the emergence of new media, which circulate across different networks, it makes sense that individuals committed to the novel would also express concern for the nation that, to some extent, is its project. While not all contemporary American novelists use the novel to defend the traditional identity or purpose of the nation, the future of the nation is a topic of constant attention in recent literature.

Cosmopolitanism, unlike Anderson’s nationalism, is not bound to a place or time. As such, cosmopolitanism is not a condition materialized according to easily regulated circulation of cultural artifacts. Following Tiziana Terranova’s articulation of network culture, I define cosmopolitanism in terms of a set of principles useful for living within a multiplicity of provisional cultural networks. The technology in which media is encoded or distributed is not what matters to the organization of community or culture so

much as a shift in our perceived relationship to those media. What I would like to suggest here is that we are more frequently utilizing texts as a way to gauge our relationship to others, in terms of how we feel about them, their conditions, their histories, and their ideas, rather than as a source of information about their and our own identities. Terranova gives a useful example of the significance of this shift using a contrast between journalism and marketing. A journalist wants to know his or her subject in order to create an accurate and comprehensive, ethically responsible representation, whereas a PR rep handles the same content in a way designed to generate maximum affective response. While our gut reaction may be to side with ethics and journalism over sleazy marketing, and while this feeling is largely justified on the basis of marketing's monetization of any and all content, Terranova points out that in order to create the journalistic, objective portrait, one must impose stasis upon the social and political scene and claim the power to generate knowledge about the other. To the contrary, a subject in motion cannot be known as such. Its meaning can only be captured by creating an artificial vantage point. Journalistic representation, then, only depicts what Terranova calls life on a macro-scale, or averages, generalizations, and stereotypes that cannot account for the dynamic connectivity of life. The guise of ethical sensitivity, within a networked society, is a justification of an unacceptable regulation of the formation of culture.

The perspective indicated in PR addresses a provisional relation that does not aim for comprehensive knowledge of the other. It is attuned to shifts, changes of state, and the “constant *reinvention of life*” (*Network Culture* 37). It does not capture a single

point, but traces the development of relationships in order to anticipate shifts in the social environment.<sup>14</sup> As a further example, Terranova considers the effect of the Internet upon politics. A critical perspective identifies digital networks as imposing homogeneity upon humanity (a form of negative cosmopolitan identity) because it enables the global distribution of an information set. This conclusion is the logical extension of Anderson's thesis regarding print capitalism and the modern nation. Terranova objects that the Internet subverts such efforts to produce macro-scale images of life because it is not a homogeneous global network, but a "network of networks ... entailing the interoperability of heterogeneous systems" (53). In it, people can come and go, take on new personas, change locations, add and modify content, and all nearly instantaneously. It is a set of principles guiding an ever-changing set of dynamic interactions without having to reduce such interactions to an exhausting quest for knowledge. The Internet never materializes into a static thing, or a place where relationships are firmly established. It is, instead, a model for a continually becoming cosmopolitan sociality.<sup>15</sup>

Every society has its own paths to individuation, or attentive forms, and the value of any bit of information or potentially sticky sign, when circulating globally, communicates differently depending on the attentive forms cultivated at its site of reception, not its site of production. Signs legible as cosmopolitan, or pertaining to any other subject position, take on social value not by merit of the ideas they convey, their information, but by the fact of their capacity to attract and hold attention. If our individual acts of attention are what give particular narratives about belonging their

social capital, they form the basis for a globalized attention economy. The sociability that is the ultimate good of work involving human contact and care enables Empire, a metaphor for neoliberal capitalism, to regulate populations within an abstract, deterritorialized system. What Empire accumulates, Hardt and Negri argue, is not material commodities, but rather attentions, which alter fundamentally as a result of their direction upon a particular object. This seems to hold true for Invisible Children's interventions into U.S. affairs and Ugandan sovereignty. The accumulation of biopower through attention is not imperialistic, Hardt and Negri suggest, because as networked power expands, the sovereignty deriving community from it "does not annex or destroy the other powers it faces, but on the contrary opens itself to them, including them in the network," just as *KONY2012* builds a cosmopolitan network by inviting viewers to feel for the world (166). However, the decentralized network of Empire appears more as a way of dematerializing the image of imperialistic management than as any meaningful redistribution of power. The way attention accrues value within the immaterial economy Hardt and Negri describe also operates according to the logic of identity. Attention to information cements the link between individual experience and externalization. Their affective labor effaces the economic inequality underlying globalization; it enables an object to seem as if it were the source of a feeling that circulates globally just as ordinary commodification involves the effacement of ordinary labor. Empire appears other than imperial only because its expansion is the product of labor performed upon a text at the site of its reception. What Empire represents, then, is not a norming of identity or values, but rather, and more insidiously, of the attentive forms that allow values to take

shape through affective labor. Further, as Terranova observes, one consequence of conceptualizing attention as a scarce economic resource is the cognitive impoverishment of those who bestow value upon information through their affective labor (“Attention, Economy and the Brain”13). For example, by paying attention to American mass media, global consumers are hypothetically unable to attend to local culture and American consumers cannot notice global media. This is another common objection to *KONY2012*’s methods. Instead, the economic results of attention, “sociality as such,” cannot be regulated (10). To the contrary, localized acts of attending to American cultural texts transform them into something different than whatever message they might have created in any other context. Paying attention is the ongoing process of individuation that gives people a sense of self, however unstable that may be. The act of paying attention brings to bear the subject’s myriad attachments and loyalties upon any text within a complex matrix of social values.

Take a final example from Robbins, this time, in his “Introduction” to *Cosmopolitics*. There, he suggests cosmopolitanism involves our actual material connections with people around the world. The fact of my ownership of a television produced in Asia constitutes this sort of cosmopolitan network. I think, to the contrary, that this is not quite the case. The error he makes is in reducing the presence of the TV in my living room to a sign of a single social network that establishes a stable relationship upon which I can then erect something like cosmopolitan or global culture by becoming aware of it. My personal act of awareness solidifies my place in the world, anchoring it upon the also solidified place of the imagined third-world worker who

becomes an iconic sign for whatever affects prompt my production of cosmopolitan sociality on his or her behalf. This invisible sign of the worker burdens me with the responsibility to make that relationship one I can feel good about. I agree with Robbins that the television and its presence in my life do inspire a moment of attentive awareness. However, what makes the phenomenon Robbins identifies a cosmopolitan moment, and not merely “actually existing cosmopolitanism,” is my recognition, or laboring, within it that a life that exists or existed had a hand in something that is now a part of mine, along with the empathy that occurs when I pay attention to the human means by which objects circulate in this way. The TV does not radiate cosmopolitanism, as if it were an appeal to a particular mode of political organization. My understanding of the TV as cosmopolitan indicates my internalization of a specific structure of attention and subsequent production of social value in a particular direction.

The way I pay attention to the TV’s presence in my life informs how I situate myself within a complex global community. My reading of the TV as an indication of cosmopolitan possibility indicates a particular interpretive strategy. My interpretation of its presence in my life does not have to result in cosmopolitanism, but it can. Likewise, my attentiveness may produce a variety of cosmopolitanisms in response to the TV in a number of moments or may begin as cosmopolitanism and then become something else. The work of being attentive transforms my understanding of a global sociality, effectively producing a state or relation contingent not only upon the continuation of my attentiveness, but also of the affective tenor of that attention. Cosmopolitanism does not transcend the moment it makes perceptible, but is endlessly remade according to

different affective needs through our attention to real or imaginary others. Even when it feels most substantial and efficacious, a cosmopolitanism does not constitute an identity or something out of which people can construct an historicized sense of solidarity. Instead, cosmopolitanism is an effect of intentionality and attentiveness to a specific cause and its temporality. Being cosmopolitan in Robbins's example of the television means not simply possessing a good that has moved across the world; this is an indicator of global economy and requires nothing of the person in front of the TV. Instead, it means having a feeling regarding distant peoples and places as a result of how one has stylized life. It is an action directed upon the organization of sociality in response to affect. Cosmopolitanism enables moments of potential solidarity produced through the work of feeling. This feeling makes visible those structures whereby the exercise and movement of political power and economic capital link affective labor and attentiveness to immobile forms of cultural capital like nation, race, or ethnicity to produce solidarity. Cosmopolitanism is a form of attentiveness to power that calls into question the production of loyalty to identity from affective labor as well as loyalty as the basis for ethical sociality. It does not necessarily mean a turn from those forms of solidarity that become the objects of its interest in the movement of power.

Thinking of cosmopolitanism from the perspective of affect and attention allows me to approach my second point, that American literature is renegotiating its place within a globalized world along cosmopolitan lines by recasting affective responses to its public image. The texts I consider reterritorialize American claims to power previously invested in narratives of manifest destiny, American exceptionalism, and

superpower status that have become unappealing with the popularization of post-modernist and post-colonial critiques of economic globalization and identity. As this process of negotiation is born out in literature, and as the example of *KONY2012* shows, cosmopolitanism, despite its historical connotations, does not necessarily suggest progression towards or realization of material or political equality. Instead, it indicates movement toward a society in which all people are potentially in contact with all others at any given moment, even if that contact occurs largely at the level of fantasy through interaction with carefully staged narratives and images. Cosmopolitanism of this sort may or may not actually result in a more open or equal society and may or may not involve actual challenges to how the boundaries of the world are drawn.

Cosmopolitanism, from this angle, is more concerned with the sources of identity, their political and economic management, and the potential value of identity as it moves across space and time than with the conditions it may or may not actualize, at least in the short-term. The texts and authors I consider are invested in the ongoing value of America as an identity both nationally and globally relevant, its ongoing maintenance through shifting media contexts, and its justification as the basis for international affairs.

In Chapter 2, “Nationalist Cosmopolitanism, Mediaphobia, and Attention’s Forms,” I argue that while the production and distribution of texts does condition the limits in which individuation occurs, individual acts of consumption bring to bear an indeterminable multiplicity of factors upon a text such that consumers always appropriate the materials of mediated networks to unpredictable ends. Particular media are not responsible for specific types of individuals or communities, but do affect the

limits within which both are elaborated. Theoretical speculation on the effects of particular media upon our capacity to pay attention and on the relationship between specific attentive forms and forms of sociability and solidarity limits individual attentiveness to its potential to contribute to local political economies. It does so by managing public discourse about acceptable feelings for nationalism and cosmopolitanism and by positing a causal link between media consumption and socio-political habits. Tracing the concern for media's forms, attention's forms, and society's forms across philosophical and literary texts, I reveal how critical discourse on attention and the effects of its various forms consistently theorizes attention in terms of its potential to produce economically quantifiable effects that are linked to specific forms of solidarity. Because individual thinkers consistently prefer one form of attention over others, these discussions neglect the potential for subjects within mixed economies of attention, or of cosmopolitan attentiveness, to restructure productively the relationship between national and global solidarity as cosmopolitan. My critique of the debate between N. Katherine Hayles and Bernard Stiegler demonstrates how their production of a hierarchy within attention's forms, linking what Hayles calls deep attention to reading and hyper attention to electronic media, identifies emergent forms of attentive labor as qualitatively different from existing or normative forms, treats that labor as a threat to the affective basis of the imagined community of the nation, and attempts to reincorporate affective and attentive labor performed upon new media within the nation. I suggest this process is analogous to the overtly nationalist concern David Foster Wallace expresses in his essays, which similarly relate the emergence of television and

the internet to a perceived decline in civic virtues. By contrast, Hari Kunzru, who claims Wallace as an influence, engages with the transnational cinema to show how deep attention, the flip-side to Hayle's hyper attention, is equally problematic for the way it filters out the world's unique contexts and depreciates the value of difference.

Chapter 3, "Humanitarian Interest and Interesting Humans," turns from issues related to specific forms of media and their role in making the boundaries of America to rationalizations for American representations of its own involvement in global conflicts. Working with a mix of ethical philosophy, especially the work of Emmanuel Levinas, critical theory, novels, and comics journalism, I argue that humanitarian discourse operates within a complex attention economy founded on the production of human interest in foreign bodies whose labor must reward American readers who pay attention to representations of their suffering. The economic dynamic of human interest creates an impossible demand for the cosmopolitan writer, who must both exhibit self-conscious awareness of embeddedness in uneven political relationships, attempt to overcome political or cultural differences, and exploit representations of conflict and poverty to inspire the economically productive feelings in readers. Where the Levinasian ethical encounter is based on what Chouliaraki describes as humanitarianism of "salvation from inhuman conditions," I argue that *Palestine*, Joe Sacco's first work of comics journalism, sets up a complex meta-journalistic critique of American and humanitarian journalistic production of human interest as a means of attracting consumer attention. The interest aspect of journalism determines the character the represented world may or may not take as it appears in American journalism. While this critical stance is evident in Sacco's

work, he also ends up replicating its structure through his very attempt to steer clear of typical journalism by creating a more intimate portrait of ordinary, real-life Palestinians. He does so by reducing them from figures of violent political spectacle to bearers of everyday life for whom readers may take sympathy, and consequently feel affinity. I contrast the humanitarian dynamic at work in Sacco's graphic narrative with a reading of Aleksandar Hemon's novel, *The Lazarus Project*. Hemon's work concerns a Bosnian American attempting to cope with the trauma of missing out on the experience of civil war while also struggling to make a space for himself in America. Where Sacco cannot but make his Palestinians interesting on behalf of American readers and potential responsibility-takers, Hemon's Brik needs nothing so much as to escape the notice of American philanthropists who demand he perform to their expectations of a refugee. Human interest, by my reading of Hemon's work, is an attempt to manipulate relations of power for individual purposes. From my comparison of the ethical construction of representation and intervention, I suggest that cosmopolitan solidarity inevitably requires some sort of ethical grounding, but, as is the case with its political formation, becomes ethically unjustifiable the moment it shifts from a case of abstract potential for representation or interaction to either in concrete flesh.

My final chapter, "American Fiction, Testimony, and Cosmopolitan Trauma," engages further with trauma theory, humanitarian discourse, and novels by Jonathan Safran Foer and Karen Tei Yamashita. In it I argue that humanitarian literature's turn toward sentimentality, in an effort to effectively position itself within a globalized attention economy, redirects the attentiveness it elicits from calls to act on political

conditions sustaining transnational inequality toward moments of pleasurable self-reflection that confirm the value of the nation to a pitiable world. My central claim in this chapter is that by incorporating the authority and appearance of nonfiction to fictionalized accounts of U.S. concern for international atrocity, American fiction represents global sites that feel autonomous but remain dependent upon American affective infrastructure to decode history. Foer and Yamashita package their texts as fictional, lowering the stakes of their works' interventions into the representation of the Holocaust and Japanese immigration policies, respectively. Nonetheless, both texts make strong affective claims about their geopolitical and historical subjects and do so in order to elicit political reactions from American readers. By making a fictional account something for which American readers can feel equally moved as direct encounters with foreignness, these texts circumvent Americans' need to pay attention to the world in order to feel a part of a cosmopolitan society. I argue that Foer's and Yamashita's deliberate blurring of the difference between fact and fiction, historical record and personal feeling allows them to manipulate the mechanisms through which affect adds value to specific forms of solidarity that align the feeling of cosmopolitan solidarity with a politics of American exceptionalism.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Josh Kron and J. David Goodman noted in the *New York Times*, "Not until halfway through the film does Mr. Russell mention that "the war" he describes is no longer happening in Uganda, where he sets the documentary." In fact, as they explain, "The Lord's Resistance Army left the country years ago, migrating to more fragile nations like the Democratic Republic of Congo," which receives no notice in the video, and thus no benefit from *KONY2012*'s viewers. Dayo Olopode goes as far as to suggest that the "Kony video is a ... distraction" from the problems Ugandans are actually concerned

with and Mark Kersten of *Salon* condemned the video as encouraging a bland variety of “slacktivism.”

<sup>2</sup> Its many and vocal critics readily noted the organization’s participation in what was frequently described as an emerging “White Savior Industrial Complex,” citing its imperialistic discourse and Invisible Children’s use of donations for executive salaries and media production rather than direct investments in the community it claimed to help. Jamilah King elaborates on this trope in her article, “There’s Money in the White Savior Complex.”

<sup>3</sup> Social and cultural capital are concepts first developed by Pierre Bourdieu in “The Forms of Capital.” Cultural capital is value that one possesses as a result of personal cultivation, emblemized in the conferral of official educational titles. Social capital results from an individual’s more or less permanent ties to institutionalized forms of visibility. Both depend on the individual’s embodiment and are generally expressed in terms of race, class, gender, and nationality (243-255). Bourdieu argues that the exclusive basis by which we evaluate life according to economic capital depends on economic capital’s ability to present cultural and social capital as disinterested. Doing so effaces the extent to which an individual’s opportunities to accumulate economic capital are largely conditioned by his or her possession of class markers. Social and cultural capital facilitate the production of economic capital and the work of paying attention to embodiment is what sustains the value of particular forms of social capital. Consequently, attention is a productive, economic activity with wide-ranging political consequences.

<sup>4</sup> This dynamic is what Hannah Arendt describes as a “politics of pity.” A politics of pity divides those who suffer from those who do not, and, as Luc Boltanski explains, identifies the sight of suffering, or images of suffering, as the source of pity (3). A politics of pity calls viewers to feel moved by what they see whereas an opposed politics of justice calls them to take action. Boltanski suggests “the urgency of the action needed to be taken to bring an end to the suffering invoked always prevails over considerations of justice” (5). The result of pity is the production of unpleasant emotions and any action arising is motivated by the need to resolve them. Humanitarian action is a means to eliminate the power of the image of the other to produce negative affects in oneself and to return from a state of agitated discomfort to one of passive contentment.

<sup>5</sup> Luc Boltanski describes this paradigm of humanitarian appeal, following Hannah Arendt, as a “Politics of pity.” I engage with Boltanski’s use of this term at greater length in chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Walkowitz observes that by the twentieth century, cosmopolitan had become a derogatory term, simultaneously implying “a lack of positive identity” that comes from rooted citizenship and “a surfeit of abject identity” associated with the Jewish diaspora. Further, for the national, cosmopolitanism posed a threat that “foreigners were passing as locals” and worse that “foreigners might *become* locals by learning to be natural or by changing the conditions of nature.” (35). Where Walkowitz’s emphasis on

cosmopolitanism's potential for inventiveness frees the cosmopolitan subject from the limitations of birth, Bruce Robbins describes Diogenes's cynical brand of cosmopolitanism as a refusal of "particular political obligations ... declaring loyalty instead to a more universal common, however hypothetical" (*Perpetual War* 11). As Robin Hard explains, such negative readings of cosmopolitanism are largely tied to Renaissance England's "rediscovery" of cynicism and the interpretation at the time of Diogenes's performances as outright misanthropy rather than the political critiques they were (ix-x).

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Beck argues that globalization evokes developments without consequences for first world residents while cosmopolitanization involves neoliberal capitalism's forced inclusion of people around the world in its globalizing vision and emphasizes globally distributed effects. To clarify, Beck describes Europeans who purchase organs from Third World "donors." Their literal inclusion of Third World bodies within their own constitutes cosmopolitanization (643-5). Cosmopolitanism is a set of ideals describing global unity that serves as the vehicle for a nationalist tenor within appeals centering the nation within globalization. Cosmopolitanization reflects the material reality of interconnectedness, whether acknowledged or not. Departing from Beck, but retaining his useful terminology, I prefer to think of cosmopolitanization as requiring an active investment of attention to the ways in which one incorporates or is incorporated into translocal and global forms of community.

<sup>8</sup> If Robbins' effort to redeem American nationalism by cosmopolitanizing it characterizes one variant of cosmopolitan discourse, then another is that of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homi Bhabha, and Walter Dignolo, whose critical cosmopolitanisms put the term to work to produce post-colonial solidarities.

<sup>9</sup> Walkowitz argues that we should think of cosmopolitanism as a style. There are many advantages in thinking of cosmopolitanism as a style rather than a state of things. A style has no set content, but is a sign we use to signal our participation or interest in particular fields of discourse. If we think this way, cosmopolitanism becomes something with which to accessorize oneself in order to express affiliation with or feeling for some cause, belief, or way of being in the world. Like any style, what makes a particular way of adorning oneself legible as cosmopolitanism depends upon the ways in which the public attends to an individual's expressions. As such, cosmopolitanism, like language, is transformed through the individual's act of paying attention to it, of elaborating a style of expression, but also exists both prior to and beyond the individual. To achieve the status of stylization, however, a way of being need only attain legibility. One makes expressions legible by trafficking in institutionalized signs that create a pragmatic stability. We find a telling example of the shortcomings of style as the basis for conceptualizing cosmopolitanism, particularly as a form of action, once again, in the *KONY2012* video. In addition to spreading its message through word of mouth, the video's major action plan encouraged viewers to purchase and wear its red rubber wristbands and t-shirts with a distinctive inverted pyramid logo, which would signify insider knowledge of its policy points. The problem with this technique is that

transforms action into membership and defines membership in terms of stylistic choices that require the viewer/wearer nothing beyond the construction of a message-bearing surface: the message becomes directed toward the purchase of clothing rather than changing international policy. It does attract attention, which is the impetus for forming a public, and even converts attention to material value, but does so without focusing either, or their attendant affective labor, on political action.

<sup>10</sup> As Hardt and Negri understand it, affective labor now forms the pinnacle of capitalist production within a networked information economy. Michael Goldhaber makes a compelling case that the reverse is more accurate. As he writes, “economies are governed by what is scarce, and information ... is not only abundant, but overflowing.” Instead, he proposes the attention paid to a particular object of information is what holds value within the system of immaterial labor Hardt and Negri describe.

<sup>11</sup> By technically, Stiegler means it is supported through the technology of mediation, in our era, in the form of the printed word.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan goes so far as to suggest we think of attention as a rough synonym for love (32).

<sup>13</sup> Cultural capital is a matter of maintaining identity-based power structures. As Ghassan Hage explains, “[the] field of national power is ... a field where people’s position of power is related to the amount of national capital they accumulate” (61). This national capital is defined in terms of racial markers like skin color, ethnicity, and more mutable attributes like accent and beliefs. Within any social space there are a variety of bases for cultural capital, existing within hierarchies of relative power and prestige, ranging from dominant to aspirant. For Hage, “while the naturalisation of the dominant capital works to undermine the legitimacy of any other aspiring capital, the naturalisation of the privileged hold the dominant group has on the dominant capital aims at creating symbolic barriers to its accumulation by the less capital-endowed groups” (62).

<sup>14</sup> Brian Massumi makes a similar claim in *Parables for the Virtual*. He argues that within a framework of identity, one can only occupy a set, predetermined array of static positions, each of which is always-already ideologically determined. While one can change points of identification systemic change is invalidated by identity’s emphasis on stable starting and ending points of meaningfulness. From this perspective, a project like vernacular cosmopolitanism goes about the underlying causes of the issues of injustice that cosmopolitanism generally seeks to address from the wrong angle because, while it does validate the indeterminacy of identity and emphasize its fluidity, it does so by simply substituting a different set of possible points amongst which individuals may move (3-8). What Massumi would have us consider in place of identity is instead the ongoing process of becoming that he compares with physical trajectory. Becoming constantly changes in light of ongoing events in the surrounding environment but is also informed by its current and previous locations. At the same time, a present location

exists only as a convenient abstraction for information gathering. It can only be gained by ignoring the movement itself.

<sup>15</sup> Paulo Virno makes a similar case for the way people are organized in the world under post-Fordist capitalism, in what he calls the multitude. For Virno, the multitude exists in opposition to the state, which reduces a plurality of individuals to one unified political will. Unlike the state, a multitude is a many upon which individuality is continually, and provisionally, elaborated. In the multitude, he argues, “the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is in no way validated,” because the two are mutually productive and reliant upon a general capacity for becoming (25). What comprises the common of the multitude is not a determinate or specifiable quality that could form a clear boundary between individual and community, but rather a capacity Virno refers to as “general intellect” (40-41). In making his claim for the flexibility and expansiveness of the multitude, Virno draws upon Gilbert Simondon’s theory of individuation (78-9). Simondon argues that individuation is an always partial, never completed process that undergoes continual change in response to shifts in social and environmental milieus. Further, he suggests individuation emerges as an elaboration of what he refers to as the pre-individual. He gives the example of molding a brick from clay (Combes 5-6). Where we tend to think of the mold either as bringing out the clay’s inner brickness or of the clay becoming a brick through the act of being molded, Simondon argues we are wrong. Instead, he proposes that the clay “takes form in accordance to the mold” (qtd. in Combes; 5). As Muriel Combes explains, its matter “is never naked matter, any more than form is pure; rather, it is as a materialized form that the mold can act on matter that has been prepared” (5-6). Individuation, Simondon suggests, is similar. Under his system of individuation, the subject is the result of careful attention to an ever-changing environment. People share the common capacity to learn and shift through attention, but are not reducible to an identity that solidifies them politically, as in the Hobbsean state. We might define the common capacity to pay attention to localized and constantly shifting expressions of what it means to be human at the heart of Virno’s multitude as cosmopolitan.

## CHAPTER II

### NATIONALIST COSMOPOLITANISM, MEDIAPHOBIA, AND ATTENTION'S FORMS

In my introduction, I challenged the idea that a community's form, which is affected by networks of cultural distribution, can be regulated solely according to systems of production and from the side of distribution rather than consumption. My own claim is that while the production and distribution of texts does condition the limits in which individuation occurs, individual acts of consumption bring to bear an indeterminable multiplicity of factors upon a text such that consumers always appropriate the materials of mediated networks to unpredictable ends.<sup>1</sup> Given the global circulation of texts, people's feelings for a community, like the nation, are cosmopolitan, and not regulated by a central authority or limited to a clearly defined tradition. Particular media are not responsible for specific types of individuals or communities, but do affect the limits within which both are elaborated. These limits exist in a complex and fluid networked relation rather than a linear or bounded structure. By focusing on issues of media and individuation in this chapter, I trace the ways that speculation on the effects of particular media upon our capacity to pay attention and on the relationship between specific attentive forms and forms of sociability and solidarity limits individual attentiveness to its potential to contribute to local political economies. It does so by managing public discourse about acceptable feelings for nationalism and cosmopolitanism, posing a division between the two, and by positing too direct a link between media consumption and socio-political habits. I argue that because writing on

attention and the effects of its various forms consistently theorizes attention in terms of its potential to produce economically quantifiable effects that are linked to specific forms of solidarity and because individual critics consistently prefer the value produced through engaging in one form of attention over others, these discussions neglect the potential for subjects within mixed economies of attention, or of cosmopolitan attentiveness, to restructure the relationship between national and global solidarity as productively cosmopolitan.

Where critical discussion becomes mired in false dichotomies between national and global solidarities, old and new media, and various forms of paying attention associated with each, literary texts take up the concerns these relationships express in more complex ways. To show the centrality of critical concern for attention's vicissitudes and the role of media upon them to larger conversations about the state of America and its role in the cosmopolitanization of global spaces, I analyze texts by David Foster Wallace and Hari Kunzru. Both authors are intensely preoccupied with the ways in which America and American media structure the possibilities for individuation within a global attention economy. Like the critics I consider in the chapter's first section, Wallace's texts play off the fear of uncertainty and the belief that America's diversification of attentive possibilities, or what N. Katherine Hayles calls "hyper attention," dilutes the potency of Americans' sense of civic responsibility.<sup>2</sup> New media and the new ideas and peoples to which it exposes national consumers, cosmopolitanizing their visions of the world, are a plague to Wallace's nation. By contrast, Kunzru engages with transnational cinema and contract laborers to show how

deep attention, the flip-side to Hayles's hyper attention, is equally problematic for the way it filters out the world's unique contexts and depreciates the value of difference.

I understand the work of the critics and authors I discuss as negotiating between Jacques Rancière's concepts of consensus and dissensus. Each allows for media and consuming individuals to make visible ideas about humanity across varying ranges of geopolitical space. From Rancière's perspective, there is no natural means by which one person can claim the authority to rule over another. Democracy is the rule by those who have no qualification to rule and politics is the constant practice of disrupting given distributions or partitions of the social, according to which people and their capacity to express voice are given value (*Hatred of Democracy* 40-41). Consensus is the termination of politics through a reduction of the political to the policing of a normal or natural state of things that prevents a particular distribution of the sensible from coming under question. For example, one of my aims is to challenge the idea that the nation is a body unified by a coherent circuit of textual distribution and consumption. The idea that it is such prevents critical observations to the contrary, which note the influence of cosmopolitan and chaotic sources upon trans-individuation, from gaining cultural value. Consensus assumes the natural right of an order of power in which some have the capacity to produce effects upon others, i.e. that American authors should define the conversations in which America gains its identity by merit of their birth or citizenship. These ideas about natural identity are also caught up with race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Dissensus denies the validity of any foundation upon which a particular order of power or distribution of the sensible is grounded. It is not, Rancière explains, a simple insistence upon engaging in discussions of conflicting interests, or of the antagonistic democracy of Laclau and Mouffe, but in a more complex way, examining developing oppositions “between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways” (“10 Theses on Politics” 35). Dissensual politics challenge the institutional basis for forms of social capital and social capital’s linkage to individuals’ potential to earn economic capital and to enjoy basic rights. Democracy, Rancière argues, is a paradoxical institution of politics. On the one hand, democracy represents the anarchic potential for rule by those with no particular qualification to do so. In the Greek polis, democratic representatives were chosen by lot. Their values or positions were not taken into consideration. Any citizen had equal possibility of speaking for the community and this prevented the regulation of political representation by institutional power. On the other hand, we claim to spread democracy precisely by exerting the power to regulate its first manifestation. Recent neoliberal discourse characterizes democracy as a well-ordered society, free of conflict, but achieves this end through predictable succession within parties. The radical democracy Rancière envisions is not committed to any particular order or identity, even those of the oppressed, poor, or otherwise marginalized, as he qualifies. Instead, democracy is for the demos, whatever portion of humanity power excludes. As such, democracy represents a constant refashioning of the social according to provisional renderings of the human. In the readings I develop in this chapter, I trace the way each author moves from a recognition

of media's democratic potential for dissensual politics toward consensus, starting with the recent work on attention by Hayles and Bernard Stiegler and moving to Wallace and Kunzru, through the evaluation each makes of the politics of American commercial media and the value of various forms of paying attention.

### **Mediaphobia and Attention's Forms**

The main trend I am concerned with is the tendency to associate the proliferation of media with a transformation of people's psychological capacity to process reality within processes of individuation and the subsequent assumption that particular attentive forms exist in tension with one another within an ongoing struggle to determine the character of larger political bodies. In her influential article, "Deep Attention and Hyper Attention," N. Katherine Hayles elaborates upon this paradigm shift, providing the vocabulary I adopt for the remainder of the chapter. Stiegler also takes up Hayles's terms as he develops a phenomenological account of the role media plays in the production of structures of care that I described in the Introduction. I argue he mobilizes his theory of structures of care in ways that restrict humanity's development to established forms of communication and in the interests of traditional values associated with particular classes and national traditions. I situate Hayles's terms and Stiegler's methods within the context of an economy of mixed attentive forms in order to entertain the possibility of new media and new attentive forms as a form of cosmopolitan and democratic critique. Their strategies for integrating and managing emergent media according to the formalization of attentive strategies within an abstract economy is analogous to the literary concerns for the nation within globalization I identify in both

Wallace and Kunzru. While the comments both critics make on the value of particular forms of media, which are the materials real people use to make meaningful selves, are not necessarily always or directly tied to devaluations of particular types of persons, each invariably ends up making such appeals at some level. As the appeal to identity underlying these critiques shows, discussions of how to manage the effects of new media upon a community advance a politics of consensus (which according to Rancière is not technically politics anymore). Hayles's and Stiegler's theorization of attention as a community's economic resource in need of careful management creates a false dilemma between forms of political organization that is played out in polemics about forms of attention or types of media. This does not have to be the case. It is more productive to consider how the fluidity of the relation between media and the environment, the mind, and their end result of individuals and societies could ever be effectively managed by constraining individuals' consumption of particular forms of media.

As Hayles reports, recent studies in the fields of psychology and neuroscience suggest that people's brains are structured differently on a physiological level according to their childhood exposure to media environments (192). The kinds of media we consume does have an effect on how we interpret reality and the sorts of connections we form. Whereas traditionally we think of education as the pathway to maturity through the cultivation of what she calls "deep attention," or, the capacity to focus one's consciousness on a single set of stimuli over a sustained period of time without experiencing boredom, today's youth are coming of age in a distracting environment commanding a new paradigm of "hyper attention." Deep attention has the advantage, as

its name suggests, of depth of focus, but does not effectively process the richness of a dynamic environment, whereas hyper attention flits between constantly moving appeals from numerous and relatively superficial sources of stimulation to sustain a more flexible, mobile awareness (188, 194). Hyper attention is roughly what Jameson earlier referred to as postmodern schizophrenia.

The contrast Hayles sets up between attention's forms implies a connection between deep attention and political structures like the nation, which depend on deliberately cultivated institutional knowledge and bodies of tradition, and hyper-attention and provisional structures like cosmopolitanism, which encourage flexible attachments to unstable cultural sources. A community's form may be an effect of economic structures, as for example Benedict Anderson argues when he links the modern nation to print capitalism, but the development of new media economies result from biological changes in human composition arising from new forms of consumption; the two exist in tension with one another. The important thing to note is that for Hayles, the plasticity of the human mind is determined by the media it witnesses. The individual may labor upon media to form interpretations and impressions, but ultimately the presence of a dominant media structure determines the ontological results of this labor. Media that sustain attention for greater duration produce individuals with greater depth of commitment and those that require more varied focus result in fickle and shallow attachments. Such an orientation has profound implications for the political relationship between media and community, situating the latter as dependent upon, and thus bound to constrain the elaboration of, the former. However, as Hayles notes, the two forms of

attention always exist side by side in the mind, and the form a community takes on as a result of textual stimuli is a matter of balancing each rather than a simplistic binary opposition between the competing modes of socialization. The aim of her examination is to propose the incorporation of new modes of hyper attention into traditional models of education, thus including the sorts of subjectivity they produce in traditional political structures rather than dismissing one type of medium, attentiveness, or person as illegitimate.

The expansiveness of Hayles's consideration of the validity of new ways of being human in relation to media within her theoretical discussion of deep and hyper attention is, broadly conceived, cosmopolitan.<sup>3</sup> However, her practical application of inclusivity incorporates the cosmopolitan potential of the hybrid attention economy she documents within a national politics by maintaining the ultimate inadequacy of hyper attention as a basis for identity or political value.<sup>4</sup> She proposes that students accustomed to a lifestyle of hyper attentiveness learn the value of deep attention in courses whose assignments begin "with hyper attention and [move them] toward more traditional objects of study" (196). To do so, she has students write Facebook updates as Henry Adams and compare Faulkner's themes to those of more recent computer games like *Riven* (1996). The purpose of these exercises is to teach students that deep attention is just as fun and rewarding as the hyper attention to which they are accustomed, but they do not actually address how differing forms of attentiveness produce qualitatively different forms of observation. Rather, the assignment sequence is concerned with how observations are converted into publically circulating goods that produce economic or

cultural capital. Deep and hyper attention, so it goes, produce different insights and consequently lead to different views of the world and political structures to support them. They are different modes of gathering and evaluating the significance of information. They do not by necessity require different modes of representation. A Facebook post can be the product of either deep or hyper attentiveness just as a long paper or book can cover broad or narrow subjects and can do so in insightful or banal ways. The teleology she builds into the course she describes treats the two forms of attention as if they were of entirely differing economies, as if the goal of education is to make productive workers rather than informed or empowered citizens. Why not encourage students to take Facebook feeds as the subject of inquiry rather than the stylization for a deliverable product?

Where Hayles's incorporation of hyper attention and its attendant forms of sociality within a hegemonic deep attention economy and the nation state is relatively inclusive of hyper attentive subjectivity, Stiegler interprets her understanding of attention's forms according to a more explicitly nationalist appeal to the well-being of future generations.<sup>5</sup> Stiegler develops a philosophical approach to individuation through education that draws upon the formative role played by attention. The core of his thought is a three-tiered phenomenological system of retentions moving the individual from biological awareness of existence into an ongoing process of individuation, which always occurs across individuals and is a matter of trans-individuation.<sup>6</sup> Awareness of our possession of senses, or attention, comprises the primary level. The mind processes primary retentions, or sensation, which then become secondary retentions.

Communication, which is made up of secondary retentions that individuals desire to express to others, is the domain of tertiary retention. These in turn circulate as bits of received wisdom or indirect experience and become the materials for subsequent secondary retentions that complement the primary. Tertiary retentions are continually folded back into the secondary, whose constant, shifting negotiations encompass the individual's ongoing psychic individuation. Stiegler refers to the pedagogical social context in which tertiary retentions circulate and individuals learn to evaluate them as "structures of care."

The interdependence of the three levels of Stiegler's retentions means that structures of care are the product of chance encounters with the environment and individual labor upon conscious experience on both conscious and unconscious levels. The effect of a particular text or medium upon an individual and consequently, the social, depends upon how the individual works upon that text or medium within the ongoing process of individuation (*Taking Care of Youth* 24). From this, we should conclude that a particular medium is neither bad nor good, but can serve a variety of purposes just as the cosmopolitanism possible within a turn toward hyper attentiveness is ambivalent. It is surprising, then, that Stiegler is so deeply concerned with the negative effect television has on society's ability to produce inter-generational structures of care, and especially, that he characterizes television as exerting a necessarily demoralizing influence on its viewers. Stiegler's critical framework provides a useful means to challenge depictions of consumers as passive receptacles for the ideological content of

broadcast media; however, his application of his own framework attempts to depict them as wholly powerless.

To do so, he explains that structures of inter-generational care are transmitted exclusively through the patient cultivation of deep attention, which foregrounds the relationship between the social and the individual with its long-term investment in a single object of inquiry like the family or nation. The long-form print works that were hegemonic in the past did not pose the same threat to stable communities as does TV because the effort reading requires of consumers to extract meaning and value from a text cultivated deep attention, or what I prefer to think of in this context as tunnel vision. This argument suggests that although media are the problem, they are so because of the way they interact with the process of nation building rather than any particular values they may express. The late twentieth century individual faces an existential crisis because technological development has disrupted the smooth transmission of fragile deep attentive forms between tertiary and secondary retentions. Such disruption can now occur, Stiegler offers, because television encourages restless acts of browsing among stimulating channels that must compete for our attention in order to make cultural knowledge valuable. TV produces sociality without engaging essential inter-generational structures because it promotes short-term interest in ever-changing landscapes of cultural reference. It can do so successfully, according to Stiegler, because television operates under the assumption that if it can capture attention it can bypass the formative influences of primary and secondary retentions, injecting its own commercially motivated tertiary retentions directly into the psyches of its viewers. If

this were the case, the tertiary would overwhelm the primary in the production of secondary retentions driving psychic individuation and the formation of desires. The result, as Stiegler sees it, is a generation of passive consumers.

In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010) Stiegler gives an example of his claims in action through a reading of a French advertising campaign for Canal J, a TV station marketed toward young viewers. The ads present images of children embarrassed by older men, presumably fathers or grandfathers, along with the slogan “They deserve better than that” (3). The children and adults depicted in each of the ads are white and the adults are always male. According to Stiegler, the advertisement suggests that older generations are not capable of preparing youth for today’s dynamic environment and substitutes for them a corporate voice. This move, he laments, delegitimizes the authority of traditional family figures as the source of an inter-generational educational structure of communication that produces mature, civically minded adults capable of responsible self-care. The advertisement undermines a community’s capacity to sustain education as such by placing an unreasonable burden upon older generations to reshape their desires according to what youth desire, to stay cool, rather than teaching the youth to look to their elders for models of responsible living. TV, Stiegler concludes, makes “children the infantilizing definers of adults” and children subject to a morally disinterested, vacuous culture industry (14). And because it operates according to a constantly shifting principle of hyper attention, television, which now occupies the site of education for Stiegler, radically destabilizes the nation-state

without investing in any alternative long term social structures or systems of care that could replace it.

According to his own logic, TV cannot exhibit the power of control he attributes to it. TV may come to dominate the cultural field by merit of an overwhelming presence, but, because media consumption does not constitute the entirety of an individual's experience and neither does an individual's consumption of media come from a single source or occur within a static homogenous context, the secondary retentions produced through interaction with various circulating tertiary retentions of commercial media do not inhibit the possibility of either deep attention or inter-generational structures of care. Instead, Stiegler's hyperbolic critique of the culture industry is a sublimation of his concern for the shifting racial and gendered makeup of the nation and a general anxiety regarding the reality of change. The advertisement he attacks undermines the authority of white men to define the foundations of society with a new, more cosmopolitan set of pedagogical models. In Stiegler's reading, though, the media become a homogenous figure embodying both a threat to the nation and of provisional values, positing a link between commercialism and cosmopolitanism on the basis of the moral difference between deep and hyper attention. The production of this link allows him to frame his critique as directed toward a compassionate expansiveness that protects defenseless children against a cosmopolitan media whose own expansiveness and disorder pose fundamental threats to the health of the individual, the family, and the nation-state. This move effaces the extent to which the crisis of inter-generational formation through education is as much the result of immigration and shifts

in the racial and ethnic makeup of France during the late 90s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is children who watch TV instead of listening to their grandparents' stories. What it really takes aim at is the influence changing media networks, including those involving face-to-face interaction, have upon the character of his inter-generational structures, which because of the very fact of constant transmission never had any sort of static identity to begin with.

According to Catherine Malabou, neuroscience shows that the brain develops according to a roughly standard pattern. All people use the same regions of the brain to process the senses, to regulate bodily functions, and to perform other basic vital tasks. However, once these structures are in place, the individual brain unfolds according to a plastic process of “progressively effac[ing] the significance of originary structures in the elaboration of the self” in response to unique environmental stimuli (12). Structures that appear intergenerational are, in fact, the result of improvisation. At first glance, her observation seems to confirm Hayles's and Stiegler's contentions that media's forms condition attention, which in turn produces the unique difference of an individual. However, Malabou makes a compelling political distinction between cybernetic metaphors of mental formation and regulation and neoliberal capitalism. Cybernetics, which understands the brain as a centralized structure of control, deploys a concept of flexibility in order to maximize an individual's mental output and to produce socially and politically efficient subjects, as in the case of Hayles's classroom. Flexibility, for Malabou, entails a tendency to accept a given form out of necessity. Flexibility is a posture of docility, of mental receptiveness lacking political capacities for subversion

and invention (12). Under neoliberal capitalism, individuals attempt to maximize the flexibility of their identities because to do so also maximizes their mobility and employability. Flexibility, rather than a cosmopolitan expansion of human interest in difference, is a subordination of personal commitments to a given state of affairs. Flexibility is the adaptation of the self to a state of overwhelming consensus. Plasticity, by contrast, is dissensual in that it implies both the capacity of the mind to continually take on new forms, but at the same time, a constantly active, explosive resistance to any and all constituted forms it might receive in the process of consumption. The crisis that occupies both Stiegler and Hayles is precisely that new media initiate a shift in the way people produce social capital through the work of attention. With multiple viable possibilities, individuals can become plastic, rather than disciplining themselves according to the demands of an economy that values only one set of products associated with deep attention because it is economically necessary. Another way to put the issue is that we are becoming more interdisciplinary in our inquiry. The potential for individuals to refuse received inter-generational structures clearly poses a threat to the political structures governing the financial economy along with long-standing social institutions, but the opportunity to make of them something different does not, as Stiegler laments, mean that people are no longer engaged in valuable or worthwhile activity. Rather than dismiss new media and new forms of attending to the world as inherently destructive, I consider them a way of cosmopolitanizing its makeup.

Thinking of the brain as plastic brings the problem of the media for the nation into the foreground. The nation relies on its capacity to sustain a state of flexible

interpretation in which it remains the center of people's sense of well-being. A set of patriotic texts ought to produce a common core of political values. By becoming a subject of the nation, an individual reader obligates him- or herself to conform interpretation to the demands of the nation. This is not a sustainable premise given the global circulation of texts within digital networks, if it ever was under any other form of distribution. Individuals who recognize the brain as plastic are not as readily subjected to demands for flexibility, becoming something more like cosmopolitan in their formation. What remains is the possibility that individuals identify with the nation, as a much more pragmatic object, as a means of actualizing individual desires. The idea of the plastic brain suggests the mass cultural tertiary retentions of Stiegler's system are much less pernicious than he claims because they never correlate directly to new secondary retentions, but always pass through the primary, taking on unpredictable and locally specific shades of individuality. Structures of intergenerational care exist across the media spectrum and come into being regardless of the form of attention. Sometimes they may change shape more quickly than others, and sometimes that change is driven by factors beyond the control of those in whose image such structures are traditionally communicated. Perhaps an occasional explosion within processes of social formation is not always the end of humanity as we have known it. For America and American writers, plasticity means letting go of the belief that the nation is a good we can protect, nurture, or manage through literary production. To hold onto such notions, as I show in my reading of Wallace, is to deny the democratic potential of emergent media in favor of narcissism, xenophobia, and hopelessly outdated visions of America as the boundless

and homogenous face of the world.

**David Foster Wallace's Anxiety of Attention: American Fiction, American Television, American Cosmopolitanism**

The unease Stiegler feels for television and his impulse to represent it as the agent of cataclysmic social degeneration are fairly common responses to what Leo Bersani describes as the “experience” of being modern (47). Change is an inescapable facet of identifying one’s own time as modern that by definition positions it in contrast with a lost past and an uncertain future. Stiegler’s fear, although reactionary, is plastic in that it attempts to refuse to acquiesce to the changes he identifies. Instead, he sets out to redeem the present. As Bersani explains, the culture of redemption, of which Stiegler is a part, operates according to the assumption that “a certain type of repetition of experience in art,” Stiegler’s intergenerational structures within deep attention, “repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience” (1). Like Stiegler, David Foster Wallace feels his claim to the nation’s identity slipping away from him. America is in a state of unprecedented political and moral decline, he opines, because its youth, immersed as they are in a commercial culture of ironic detachment (which detachment should alert use to the problem of national and cosmopolitan commitments), have lost the capacity to care genuinely for anything requiring complex thought or sustained energy, and the most immediate consequence is a population of self-obsessed, short-sighted narcissists. TV, of course, is to blame: stereotypical descriptions of Generation X apathy, Wallace clarifies, merely highlight a “’90s’ version of frugality” brought on by a devastating and misleading perception that “attention [is] our chief commodity, our social capital” (*E*).

*Unibus Pluram* 64). For him, the increasing viability of an idea like attention economy is an important indicator that American society is coming to believe that individuals consuming television do not solely make their own identities; who they are is in part made by the culture in circulation around them. Television is so pernicious for Wallace because it influences cognitive structures responsible for the formation of the private self and public civic institutions by fulfilling its commercial mission of pleasing viewers rather than edifying them. Television not only hijacks the process of individuation here, it does so by desensitizing viewers to human experience and enslaving them to its own centralized channel of political value and affective stimulation precisely by defining that experience in terms of sensual pleasure.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. television audience's "attention span and appetite for complexity have *naturally* withered a bit after years of high-dose speculation" (57, emphasis added). A society dominated by a television monster of its own making is doomed to failure because it feels for and through television alone and television keeps them watching by telling them they should feel good about themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Faced with this grim assessment of the state of American mass culture and politics, Wallace burdens the prose writer with the monumental task of rewiring the American psyche. His writer redeems a fallen America addicted to commercial television through a willingness to "sort of die in order to move the reader" to look at one thing long enough to care for it deeply (McCaffery 149). The writer's mission is to subvert a dominant tendency of TV to excite hyper attention with a return to boring deep attention. Many critics have received Wallace's challenge to make Americans feel as a broadly cosmopolitan appeal to compassion for humanity in all its forms, for generosity

toward the world's suffering, and for attentiveness to those most frequently overlooked in the hectic marketplace of global capitalism. To describe Wallace as a modern-day saint of compassion and a champion for diversity in American politics and culture is to misread the intent of his work. Instead, as the very messianic language with which he discloses his own understanding of writing reveals, Wallace feels himself a martyr for the cause of a besieged culture of which he is the figurehead, hoping through his self-sacrifice to remake the American world in his image. The sensitivity toward pain that has garnered such positive responses from his fans is consistently grounded in Wallace's personal feelings of alienation, misunderstanding, and loss. His appeal may be superficially cosmopolitan, in that it challenges us to feel more for others, but the direction of our expanded feeling is always toward and for the benefit of Wallace himself. Those people who do not feel properly are on a global periphery, living in a state of irony-induced detachment, in need of a return of focus toward an American, and Wallace-based, center. It is a pragmatic cosmopolitanism serving the interests of a homogenous and singular identity.

Consider the following statement Wallace describes as a letter he liked to distribute to African-American students in his writing classes:

I don't know whether anybody's told you this or not, but when you're in a college English class you're basically studying a foreign dialect. This dialect is called 'Standard Written English.' [...] From talking with you and reading your essays, I've concluded that your own primary dialect is [one of three variants of SBE [Standard Black English – my addition] common to our region]. Now, let me spell something out in my official Teacher-voice: The SBE you're fluent in is different from SWE in all kinds of important ways. [...] In this country, SWE is perceived as the dialect of education and intelligence and power and prestige, and anybody of any race, ethnicity, religion, or gender who wants to succeed in American culture has got to be able to use SWE. This is How It Is. [...] African

Americans who've become successful and important in U.S. culture know this; that's why King's and X's and Jackson's speeches are in SWE, and why Morrison's and Angelou's and Baldwin's and Wideman's and West's books are full of totally ass-kicking SWE, and why black judges and politicians and journalists and doctors and teachers communicate professionally in SWE. [...] And [INSERT NAME HERE], you're going to learn to use it, too, because I am going to make you. (Lobster 108-9)

Wallace seems indifferent to the fact that Standard English is only standard because of the dominance of specific national, racial, and cultural traditions that might differ from those of his students, or that there exist such things as cultural violence tied to linguistic traditions.<sup>9</sup> By making the issue one of Standard Written English versus Black English Wallace defines the confrontation he initiates with students as one of racial ownership of national identity. As the white instructor, Wallace claims entitlement to define how the student may experience reality as part of the instructional experience he embodies because he also identifies America with his own white sense of self. The student can either conform to Wallace's description of American significance or fail both to pass the course and to become a person of value. Given the obvious hostility evident in Wallace's condescending tone when he addresses African-American students in a college classroom as if they were extraterrestrials, it is not surprising, although it is disappointing, that he confesses his surprise that "a couple of the students I've said this stuff to were offended — one lodged an Official Complaint — and that I have had more than one colleague profess to find my spiel 'racially insensitive'" (109).

Wallace clearly means the letter to vindicate his outrage that political correctness and the tolerance behind it continue to cause unreasonable hardship on progressive individuals like himself.<sup>10</sup> The attitude the letter exposes hardly corresponds to an

aching desire to move readers to a greater love for humanity at any personal cost. Quite the opposite, Wallace actually threatens his students' right to a freely determined sense of self worth when they do not meet to his expectations. As Sally Robinson argues of conservative male writers more generally, Wallace's petulant behavior is an attempt to redefine the terms of identity politics in a way that makes his painful awareness of racial and gender marking something in which he can feel pleurably outraged rather than only victimized (55).<sup>11</sup> What Wallace is concerned with in the classroom at this moment is not the well-being of his student or the expansiveness of that student's understanding of human culture or ability to feel for others, but that this student obediently give care to a particular set of cultural values institutionalized in Standard Written English. He wants to maintain the legitimacy of intergenerational structures of care underlying the long-term consistency of national identity. He will allow his students to attend to outliers like King or Baldwin (but not writers who were about changing America's idiom, like Zora Neale Hurston or Alice Walker), but only on the condition that they dutifully translate the fruits of their efforts back into those structures of care Wallace recognizes. Although couched in terms of race and stylistics, the issue, at its heart, is one of how individuals pay attention to the surrounding world, and roaming hyper attention is of little value for Wallace.

The racial politics of Wallace's classroom management policies fail to make a compelling case for his expansive civic vision. His critique of television, for which he is known, is marginally more successful. It is more persuasive because where the letter overtly targets a powerless and traditionally marginalized category of person, in his

engagement with commercial culture as the source of American decline Wallace attacks an impersonal force. Blaming television, Wallace also attempts to shift readers' attention away from the implications of his dismissal of TV culture for those individuals represented within it and who have built meaningful identities upon its circulation of texts. His appeal includes all readers in an audience unified against a divisive, infantilizing, and cosmopolitan TV, ironically given the reality that of all new media, television is most exclusively distributed and consumed along national lines and continues to represent straight white middle class men as the normal face of America.

In the case of both TV's natural degradation of its viewers' cognitive functioning and his own redemptive turn from commercial culture, Wallace implicitly adopts the assumption that the substance of an identity, its social capital, is based in affect and is an abstract product of the work of paying attention. As the product of our attention to texts, the sorts of identity for which Wallace feels concern are what Michael Warner calls publics, "space[s] of discourse organized by nothing other than the discourse itself" (67). A public "exists by virtue of being addressed," meaning it forms a point of affective density around which people can congregate simply by circulating among a particular body of people. Individual identity and the values of public society are equally products of performance, and performance takes the appearance of necessity through the individual's belief in the efficacy of what is observed, felt, and enacted. We feel ourselves to be a part of a public, as if that public objectifies our affective experience of embodied life, through our devotion of attention to the narratives surrounding that public, by paying attention to what it has to say about itself. One can attend to a

character on TV or to a person sitting in the park. To be a part of a public, one needs only hear its message, or interpret its body as projecting some message subject to interpretation. As Warner explains, “by coming into range, you fulfill the only entry condition required of a public” (88). Taking this definition of public space, TV, instead of seducing individuals away from other traditional or more stable political communities, simply is more efficient at distributing its message to a wider audience. The medium has no pre-determined value. TV can reinforce the white male hegemony with which Wallace associates, or it may contest normativity with pluralistic visions of humanity. It is supplanting long-form print fiction because it places fewer restrictions upon who can obtain meaning from its address. It offers a more expansive form of community in which individuals can believe themselves to be. The openness of the TV model of textual distribution makes it more cosmopolitan relative to the singular, closed one Wallace associates with fiction and the nation.

Wallace’s critique addresses a problem of the relative value of social capital produced by people immersed in minority discourse communities, whether TV viewers or African-Americans. Ghassan Hage describes this kind of attitude toward the nation as “good white nationalism,” or discourse that generally admits the need for a multicultural society, but under the assumption that the identity of society remains the object of white concern. We see this assumption in Wallace’s thinking when, for example, he laments that TV increases “the number of choices and options” toward which people may direct their precious attention but does not provide them with stable “guides to why and how to choose among experiences, fantasies, beliefs, and predilections” and does so in an

economically self-interested way (75-6). Television is a threat to Wallace's position within a homogenous, normative America because it effectively undermines the ability of any single authority to regulate channels of cultural distribution and consumption. It does so by constantly interjecting new images into popular discourse, changing the terms by which cultural capital negotiates its value, such that no single image, narrative, or source of either gains an established hold on the long-term direction of public discourse by becoming an inter-generational structure. Television institutes multiple legitimate publics within national space. The threat of its pluralism to a writer like Wallace is of a society that can choose between a highly diverse body of texts that dilutes the potency of structures of care transmitted through deep attention exerted upon a static canon. With such a variety of stimuli, the individual author runs the risk of having his pain go unnoticed.

Cosmopolitan consumption, or the hyper attention TV watching cultivates, devalues the currency of Wallace's social capital only so long as people like Wallace understand the relation between themselves and others as oppositional. He describes emergent TV culture as stripping Americans of their ability to produce or retain social capital of any sort rather than simply expanding the register of what we know as valuable. If this is the case, then people are not responsible enough to enjoy the pleasures of freedom and instead do need to be told what to attend to in order to protect the viability of American culture. Fiction becomes a way for Wallace to make a quasi-fascist authoritarian appeal to a racialized and gendered nationalism without making explicit overtures to racial or gendered violence. He does by comparing the state of

American culture he feels he has inherited (and thus owns) from writers of the 60s to a rowdy high school party also in need of some firm guidance. At first, immature partiers find the newness of the experience pleasurable, but the absence of parents and their ability to enforce boundaries upon behavior within the household and to limit entry at the door quickly becomes overwhelming. As a writer, responsible for the moral direction of the nation/party, “you're the host and it's your house too,” despite the presence of drug-dealing party-crashers, “and you gradually start wishing your parents would come back and restore some fucking order in your house” (McCaffery 150). The problem with the party begins when those not invited begin to feel at home in its space. As a metaphor for cultural production, this suggests immigrants, women, subversives, and any other non-normative voice. They are unwanted distractions, noise within the transmission of structures of care. While recognizing the feeling motivating his desire for order, Wallace intervenes to demasculinize feeling as such, arguing, “what's wrong with us? Are we total pussies? Is there something about authority and limits we actually need?” (150). In this way, he makes his appeal for fascist cultural nationalism a masculine imperative. To be a man and an American means to come to terms with the thought that “we're going to have to be the parents” who kick out the uninvited guests, foreigners and women, and to take responsibility for how others shape what is legible within the nation as a valid expression of humanity (150).

The xenophobia and misogyny latent in Wallace's description of television's effect on America come out more openly in his militaristic description for how it structures its viewers' attention. By paying attention to TV, Wallace suggests, “it is not

I the spy who have crept inside television's boundaries," but the reverse (32). TV, he complains, "has become my – our – own interior" (32). TV's content in itself is not an issue. Instead, Wallace is concerned that TV, as a public outlet, has effects upon its viewers he cannot control.<sup>12</sup> When TV is consumed in the massive quantities Wallace cites, a daily average of six hours whose excessiveness he repeats obsessively, the performance of naturalness it puts on display, even if it is not understood as transparent or natural, comes to occupy an influential place within the symbolic structure by which viewers evaluate their own selves and construct the "real world" (EUP 22, 24, 26, 29, 34, 37, 39, 41, 44, 53, 57, 64). It inevitably makes publics by merit of the volume in which we permit it to address us. He feels violated by the thought that it influences how others might understand him, a sentiment echoed in his frustration at his students' offense rather than attempting to understand or change his practice. Their ability to voice their concern at his behavior, and the fact that their concern is taken seriously, marks a boundary between two publics. The very existence of multiple publics reveals Wallace's own position as constructed and requires him to justify his exercise of power. If he can successfully make TV into a foreign invader, a threat reuniting America's multiple publics fractured by multiculturalism and political correctness, then its diversifying effects lose all rightful place in public discourse. It becomes a threat to the public's capacity to actively shape its own formation; complaints about the loss of power or capacity to assert voice on the part of the sorts of subject it might represent are simply treason. Any effect it has upon viewers, the American public, is the result of its abuses of power, the irresponsible way it naturally reconfigures attentive forms.

The loss of a general ability to feel for others is the stated cause of Wallace's intervention, but it is not feeling as such he aims to restore. Rather, he advocates a restricted range of emotion, notably centered on pain, focused on the production of personal social capital. Wallace, as the rightful emissary of American identity, feels entitled to set the direction of public discourse and processes of individuation founded thereon. Since he cannot both claim to be a credible voice on culture and dismiss the value of different cultural perspectives out of hand, he is forced to blame the medium through which difference circulates most prominently. And, since an economic interest in social capital drives Wallace's analysis, he must treat television as if its conditions of production, distribution, and consumption are fundamentally different from those of prose fiction. The corner into which he paints himself results in a number of glaring inconsistencies that further reveal the narcissism of his argument.

It is not just TV that is the problem, but because TV forms the foundation for Americans' perception of reality, non-fiction in any genre as well. In his introduction to the 2007 volume of *Best American Essays*, Wallace explains that as he understands it, nonfiction is a reflection of "the seething static of every particular thing and experience," of a reality "both numbing and euphoric, a kind of Total Noise" (xiv, xiii). Although it is written and requires the reader to engage in sustained deep attention, non-fiction puts that deep attentiveness to the service of advancing the passivity of television culture by making the seething static of its hyper attentive restlessness appear more legible and humane. Nonfiction is a product of global capitalism's material realities and the influence of commercial culture upon American society. This leaves prose fiction as the

only redemptive medium, the exclusive source of healthy attentive forms, because it is spontaneous and individual. It “comes out of nothing,” as if the fiction writer lived entirely apart from popular culture and public life. Fiction counterpoises an abyss of “silence” to nonfiction’s noise (xiii). The heroic fiction writer, as we should expect, is a person a lot like Wallace. Similarly, he imagines his readers are “people more or less like me” (McCaffery 128). Fiction writers and Joe Briefcase, Wallace’s name for the average American consumer, “covet a vision of themselves as witnesses” while at the same time feeling an equal dislike of “being objects of people’s attention.... being watched” (“EUP” 21). People are, in a word, voyeurs. Wallace claims that watching people when they don’t know they are being watched and cannot strategize the appearance their behavior exhibits creates a space in which an individual can freely and deliberately create in fiction the symbolic structures that somehow result in healthy social behavior when they are consumed according to reading’s deep attentive forms.

In order to illustrate the difference between suspicious TV viewing and laudable voyeurism, he argues that the latter, while “creepy,” is more ethical than the former, because the voyeur’s action is somehow transparent, or sincere – they just want to see what someone else is really like (23). “The only illusion in true espial,” Wallace offers, “is suffered by the voyee, who doesn’t know he’s giving off images and impressions,” and this is for him not merely harmless, but beneficial (23-24). He attempts to sanitize voyeurism by calling it the “fiction research” by which a writer faithfully reproduces espied moments for the consumption of the reader (22). Since the voyeur takes care to maintain the secrecy of his violating gaze, Wallace assumes no violence or exploitation

occurs. According to the same logic, Nike hurts no one so long as American consumers do not realize their shoes are manufactured by underpaid third world children. The writer's sincere, economically disinterested reproduction of moments of vulnerable activity is what enables the reader of fiction to produce the generalizations of affect (although he only mentions suffering) that form the foundation of Wallace's ethical sociality in which readers are restored their capacity for feeling in general by first feeling for the author.<sup>13</sup>

For Wallace, the interaction between TV and individuals must again be entirely unlike the nourishing, redemptive voyeurism of fiction and the understanding of social conventions its readers form through seeing people in moments of unstructured natural behavior. Where readers and writers are voyeurs, party to something unmotivated by the pressures of observation, TV watchers are merely "viewers," because "television is performance, spectacle" (23).<sup>14</sup> The result of our extensive consumption of TV is to "confuse fiction research," interaction with people or "peeping-Tomism" with "a weird kind of fiction-consumption" divorced from active contact with others (26, 23, 26). This is bizarre given that we watch TV in groups, often socializing to produce running commentaries on live shows or live-tweeting them, whereas reading is almost exclusively solitary. The only distinction is in the form in which the consumer's attention is commodified, which divides neatly along Hayles's categories of deep and hyper. It is also important to point out that voyeurism is an entirely private fantasy that affords little of the actual contact with people that is the stated aim of Wallace's fiction. Instead, it keeps the other of the gaze at a safe distance from which it cannot disrupt the

voyeur's production of knowledge upon the body of the other and in which the watched has no say in the production of the political out of their image.

If television is morally negative because it actively structures the reality of passive viewers, Wallace argues it is morally positive to watch people in moments of passivity, because this passivity is not actively scripted, and thus sincere. In order to sustain the qualitative distinction between the bad passivity of the television viewer, which we should not emulate, and the good passivity of the voyee, which we should, Wallace also has to, although more implicitly, treat differently public and private behavior. A person alone is who he or she is, but in society, that "sincere" self becomes obscured by individual desire for recognition. However, Wallace has already explained that the problem with television lies in the way it isolates viewers. Fiction is supposed to remedy this state of affairs by nurturing subjectivity beyond narcissism. It is important that for Wallace fiction guarantees not just healthy individual lives, but the very life of the nation, which ensures the legibility of his identity and its members' empathy with his pain. What fiction offers is not health, per se, but rather the guarantee, through the policing of the moral contours of life, that a particular kind of life retains social currency. Wallace feels the potential for the pleasure of public recognition of his project of self-building as good and valuable through his gift of loyalty to those power structures inherent in the reproduction of fiction as the vehicle of national identity. The feeling that inspires pain is an individual experience, and the sensation of being incapable of communicating it fully is alienating. However, the way an individual knows that feeling

is pain, even if he or she cannot fully symbolize it, is not entirely private and does not, as Wallace suggests, doom the individual to a solipsistic existence (McCaffery 143-4).

Within his aesthetic, the core of pain remains intact beneath whatever affective sensations readers produce in themselves in order to feel an identification with the writer, who becomes emblematic of pain in general. Wallace's writer can possibly address a reader, but this address only occurs within the reader's imagination, as a result of a particular, limited affective orientation toward the text. Only by coming to a belief that one holds the same values or experiences the same emotions as the writer, by becoming the object of the writer's desire, does the reader accomplish the painful work of aligning him or herself with the writer in address.<sup>15</sup> By adopting the writer's presumed affective structure as one's own, the reader allows the writer to speak through the transformation reading enacts on his or her own sense of self.<sup>16</sup> The effect of the reader's empathy with Wallace's pain is the transformation of himself from writer to Author, with all its Foucauldian implications.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Wallace believes, TV prevents both sincerity and empathy, offering viewers a shortcut to pleasurable recognition by including them in its hyper attentive shifting appeals to consumerist trends. TV addiction, or the desire for a certain kind of community, Wallace's argument suggests, is the source of the detached stasis he describes as plaguing contemporary American culture. American viewers are passive because they are subject, as are all humans, to this addiction. Addiction, as Wallace deploys it, is a universal response to the sensation of pleasure. Pleasure, although satisfying, is for Wallace an affect that depresses the sensation of other emotions. Politically speaking, Wallace characterizes

pleasure as a totalitarian affect. It mutes all other feelings. The suspension of feeling that results from pleasure is also what Wallace suggests defines depression, so to be addictively pleased is to suffer depression.

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace defines depression as

a level of psychic pain wholly incompatible with human life as we know it. *It is a sense of radical and thoroughgoing evil not just as a feature but as the essence of conscious existence. It is a sense of poisoning that pervades the self at the self's most elementary levels. It is a nausea of the cells and soul. It is an unnumb intuition in which the world is fully rich and animate and un-map-like and also thoroughly painful and malignant and antagonistic to the self, which depressed self It billows on and coagulates around and wraps Its black folds and absorbs into Itself, so that an almost mystical unity is achieved with a world every constituent of which means painful harm to the self.* (695-6)

The reason the pain of depression is so especially unbearable is that it is impossible to “ever even begin to make someone else understand what clinical depression feels like, not even another person who is herself clinically depressed,” because the depressed person “is incapable of empathy with any other living thing” (696). He or she is consumed with feeling the effect of his or her own feelings. Fiction becomes redemptive for Wallace because it offers a way out of the isolation of depressive thoughts by way of his ability to imagine a reader struggling with his words on the page and sharing in the burden of feeling.

The narrator of Wallace’s novella-length story “Westward the Course of Empire Goes its Way” explains the redemptive function of sincerity as sustained in fiction through an analogy to hostage taking. In the story, Ambrose, a creative writing instructor and compelling charlatan based on John Barth, tells his students that “People read fiction the way relatives of the kidnapped listen to the captive's voice on the captor-

held phone: paying attention, natch, to what the victim says, but absolutely hanging on the pitch, quaver, and hue of what's said, reading a code born of intimacy for interlinear clues about condition, location, outlook, the likelihood of safe return" (293). While the figure of Ambrose is the object of both criticism and intrigue in the story, his comparison is an apt description for what Wallace hopes to attain through his own creative endeavors, especially in terms of how his own experience of depression influences his politics. When he discusses what fiction does, he explains it as a way of giving structure to the reader that verifies something or someone beyond the individual.

When people speak of Wallace as a writer of compassion and sensitivity, it is this desperate search for life beyond oneself to which they attend. In a simplistic way, such descriptions are accurate: Wallace does very much want all people to cultivate a sensitivity for the feelings of others and is fiercely committed to the idea that one's private feelings are not reducible to common memes, but must be dealt with in difficult and unique ways. The reason Wallace thinks of fiction in terms of an author giving voice to the reader in a sincere, or absolutist, way is that if the voice of the author can come across the text intact, then it proves the existence of the outside world. Sincerity promises Wallace's experience can be externalized. This is important to him because his interior world is one determined by the constant pain of depression. The substance of the subject is self-evident to itself, so only the outside conveyed in fiction matters. However, for the depressed person, living inside of oneself is the most refined experience of pain. This perception of the self is a product of Wallace's depression. All he wants is to get out of himself. By finding a way to enter someone else in fiction, he

can temporarily escape the world of his mind. Fiction offers relief from the torments of depression by at least temporarily (by distracting the attention) rewriting the structures of the self according to those of the author. These must be conveyed in an authentic or sincere way, because if not, then what the reader constructs out of the act of reading becomes no more than yet another private fantasy, which, in Wallace's case, will lead inevitably to the renewal of depression's pain. Because only an author taken as sincere offers genuine relief from the pain of isolation and depression, the reader becomes the attentive hostage to the text, scanning with something more than just active interest, that bears on addiction, in order to extract from it some form of temporary relief and to fulfill an ethical burden to mitigate the author's suffering through empathy.

If to be pleased is really to feel depressed, a fact we fail to register because we passively accept TV's description of depressing consumerism as exciting, and if depression is the apotheosis of pain, then writing that induces pain and evades addiction is the most substantially pleasurable, even if it doesn't feel that way.<sup>18</sup> We feel pleased, Wallace offers, when we sense a state of homeostasis in our environments, another odd paradox given that we want true pleasure and to avoid numbing stasis. Existing within a homeostatic environment, individuals tune out potential stimuli in order to maintain balance and order. Homeostasis is the prerequisite for the cultivation of deep attention's singularity of focus. However, homeostatic individuals, Wallace suggests, are unlikely to engage in political activity, with its often discomforting and even painful consequences. Pleasure is always debilitating and always an involuntary response (remember, TV naturally saps viewers of the ability to form complex thoughts) to

external stimuli. It ends in stasis, Wallace explains, because the individual is not capable of processing the diversity that evokes pleasure in the act of consumption. The solution to civic stasis, as he sees it, is to eliminate the distraction of that which is immediately pleasing. This requires an attitude of total ascetic restraint. Abstention from global streams of cultural exchange, according to this logic, results in vibrant cultures and politically engaged individuals. All we need to break free from the pain of cultural stasis is to eliminate any outside voices competing for our precious attention. Fiction, in Wallace's reading, is democratic and compassionate because it forces upon readers a sensitive orientation toward the pleasurable pain of tuning out the pleasures of the present. Unfortunately it does so by treating anything feminine or racially different as a source of painful pleasure. In the end, Wallace proposes we overcome the entropic forces of pleasurable diversity, which are destroying the civic foundations of American life, with an all-encompassing sacrifice of self-interest on behalf of a pre-determined long-term collective identity, or consensus. This consensus is encapsulated in Wallace's famous appeal to sincerity, a "childish" return to "backward, quaint, naïve, and anachronistic" commitments to "single-entendre principles" (*EUP* 81).

A recent, and ironic, trend in Wallace scholarship is to characterize his work as the triumphant arrival of an ethically sound "new sincerity," the vanguard of a new America that frees both writers and readers from the corrupt power structures of ironic postmodern life and commercial media to enjoy the fullness of American democratic freedom.<sup>19</sup> Exemplary among these critics is Adam Kelly. Kelly surprisingly argues that sincerity, while being of fundamental significance to the political and aesthetic

meaning of a text, is not a quality possessing actual content or substance. Instead, he clarifies, sincerity exists as a contract of honesty inferred from a literary work by the reader that solidifies the writer's persona in opposition to ironic manipulations of affect that exploit the political outcomes of consumption.<sup>20</sup> By believing in the honesty of the writer's depiction of values in a text, the reader transforms the trace of the writer into authorial presence. The operation of sincerity makes the author into something for which the reader now has real feelings (The New Sincerity" 133-145). Aside from the critical uselessness of rendering all texts sincere, Kelly's definition of the term, which I understand as a fair appraisal of Wallace's critical intent, also invokes a mode of authority that severely limits the democratic potential of reading. Considering that sincerity is opposed to irony and that sincerity is taken as a sign of moral superiority, for the reader to refuse to recognize sincerity within a text and its author's intent is tantamount to refusing the validity of both as human. Either the reader must accept wholesale that Wallace is sincere, forgiving any violence, racism, or shortsightedness contained within the text, or take responsibility for exerting violence against him and his right to engage in the liberal project of self-narration. The political aim of Wallace's and Kelly's sincerity is not to free up discursive conventions or to allow individuals the freedom to feel themselves as real but to force the unification of a body of readers through the affectively norming figure of the Author. Sincerity mandates consensus in order to avoid facing unpalatable epistemological violence, or what might otherwise be called difference internal to identity narratives.

The experience of sincerity that Wallace wants fiction to sustain differs from TV viewing along with ordinary aesthetic experience. While it does encourage readers to come to an awareness of a new and more sensitive outlook on the world, Wallace's fiction is not democratic, because it attempts to force the production of that ensuing world upon its readers. His art belongs to the ethical regime, as Rancière defines it, of works with no autonomy, "to be questioned for their truth and for their effects on the ethos of individuals and the community" (Corcoran, 15). Fiction is good because it produces a therapeutic effect while TV is bad because it encourages self-indulgence. Since a particular kind or work of art has a set ethical value, it also has a set effect on consumers, who the artist subsequently tends to view in terms of passive consumption or spectatorship. By creating a context in which people consume a work, the artist shapes the ethical and political direction of the community. So, while Wallace's fiction may be his means of provoking readers to think for themselves and to evoke a state of genuine empathy, his work is not democratic or compassionate because he sees it as a way to make his readers react in a specific way to specific stimuli. In democratic art, or under the aesthetic regime, Rancière argues,

the spectator who experiences the freeplay of the aesthetic in front of the "free appearance" enjoys an autonomy of a very special kind. It is not the autonomy of free Reason, subduing the anarchy of sensation. It is the suspension of that kind of autonomy. It is an autonomy strictly related to a withdrawal of power. The "free appearance" stands in front of us, unapproachable, unavailable to our knowledge, our aims and desires. The subject is promised the possession of a new world by this figure that he cannot possess in any way. ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 117)

The aim of sincerity is to force the production of a world through art's seizing the reader or spectator. It *is* about authorial control. The lack of control over television is what Wallace dislikes so much about it (he claims to dislike it because it must please its viewers out of commercial necessity, but fiction is no different). It is compelling; it does effectively traffic in the affect Wallace so desires to cultivate. Television, seemingly without effort, causes viewers to feel strongly for its images. Its endless choice offers the reader the freedom to feel for whatever of its many stimulating texts they may desire without hurt or loss. The author has no such luxury. If the reader loses interest, she does not flip to a new chapter or page, generally speaking, but puts down the text. Sincerity demands the cognitive flexibility of the reader, who must conform his or her modes of reading, along with forms of attention, to those commanded by the text. This demand in turn forces a strict linkage between textual medium and political form that enables Wallace to call his elitist and narcissist critique of mass culture a defense of American democracy.

The flip side of a morally bad dependence upon television, with its seemingly endless variety of short-term and immediate pleasures, and its ensuing structures of hyper attention, is a sustained appreciation for boredom. In his final, unfinished novel, *The Pale King*, one of Wallace's unnamed narrators prophetically declares that "the world of men as it exists today is a bureaucracy," and the key to life within it is "the ability to deal with boredom," that with immunity "to boredom, there is literally nothing you cannot accomplish" (439, 440). In the selection of his working notes that accompany the novel, Wallace remarks that the way to true pleasure in modern life he

has discovered and wants to convey to readers likewise lies “on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom.” This boredom is one that “one must first embrace.” “Pay close attention,” he says “to the most tedious thing you can find ... and, in waves, a boredom like you’ve never known will wash over you and just about kill you” (548). Rather than divert one’s attention to passing stimuli that might tempt the bored individual, for Wallace, it is essential to persevere in scrutinizing the singular object through the pain of deep attention because eventually this boredom will transmute to “constant bliss in every atom.” What is interesting in Wallace’s description of the production of infinite happiness from the discipline of boredom is that he understands its cause as a function of our awareness of time itself. Redemptive deep attention is boring, he suggests, because what one attends to never changes. This is also a fair description of the relationship of Stiegler’s individual to inter-generational structures of care. They learn to change their desires in accordance to what does not. What boredom entails in a very basic way is a highly conscious awareness of the ordinarily unconscious sensation of our existence within fluid time. Our capacity for attention in any one moment is limited, but this capacity is always engaged to the full. We feel satisfied when our attentions are occupied nearly to the full with a single aim we perceive as useful and attainable. We have enough remaining attention to have an awareness of the opportunity cost of our investment of deep attention in a particular inquiry, but not so much that we feel we are wasting our time working on a meaningless project. Too much stimulation produces the stressful sensation that the world around us is doing something more important than whatever it is we are stuck with; too little, our attention begins to take in

unimportant and uninteresting minutia. The in-depth study of deep attention can be highly satisfying; this is because the object of its energy feels productive when we link it to larger systems of meaning. The inquiry of boredom is not. The more our attention becomes siphoned off during boring moments, out of a need to fill our capacity to pay attention, the greater our awareness of the great, empty stretches of uneventful time, of the crushing homogeneous monotony of existence. Deep attention only becomes boring when we fail to find meaning in it. What Wallace encourages is for readers to find themselves meaningful in any environment. This is redemptive and a laudable aim. However, he does so at the expense of that environment, which he characterizes as posing an absolute obstacle to the production of structures of self-care, as if taking an interest in the passing world meant losing the opportunity to cultivate the infinite bliss of immersion in deep attention.

What Wallace finds in the expansion of every moment to infinity is an absolute equivalence of all possible moments. His retreat into boredom is the ultimate cultural safety measure in a world filled with global communications networks and the constant noise of living. It is because it attempts to equate the restless stimulation of hyper attention or cosmopolitan consumption with the controlled focus of deep attention in order to restore focus and control to individuation. If one can derive the sense of satisfaction associated with stimulating difference in an endless iteration of the same, there is no need to look beyond oneself, beyond an otherwise empty landscape for the materials of self- and world-making. Each moment of individual, isolated self-reflection already contains the world. The perfection of boredom is the exercise of complete

control over how others, including media, may stimulate and influence one's individual and political composition. In surpassing boredom, Wallace devalues entirely the need for curiosity, interaction, movement, and change. In the end, the total extension of deep attention, of loving care for the mundane, promises a completely fulfilling stasis free from the risk of immersion within chaotic streams of life.

In a discussion of his views on pedagogy, Rancière suggests that revolutionary art, work like Wallace's, fails to achieve its emancipatory ends because it continues to insist on a hierarchy of knowledge that institutes a permanent gap between artist and audience (*The Emancipated Spectator* 8). This proposition certainly is the case with Wallace's assessment of the plight of American TV viewers with its insistence on passive viewers and active writers. For Rancière, knowledge is not a thing passed from teacher to pupil or writer to reader, but rather a habit of inquiry, a recognition that all intelligence is a process of translating one form of sign into others. "[E]ach intellectual act," he writes, "is a path traced between a form of ignorance and a form of knowledge, a path that constantly abolishes any fixity and hierarchy of positions with their boundaries" (11). The position of the emancipatory "ignorant schoolmaster," capable of addressing gaps between persons differently situated, is one Wallace is incapable of occupying because he speaks out of a belief that there is a profound need to recuperate his readers from a flawed, ignorant perception of their status as a community emerging from their collective, though isolated, participation in TV watching.

Because Wallace is continually redeeming America from the stupidity and laziness of its consumption decisions, he can never allow that Americans might reach a

point of equality in communication from which they could enjoy the sort of human contact he desires. His moral message is not emancipatory precisely because it attempts to restore people to their proper place in relationship to art and politics. It tells people what it can mean to be a human being and places limits beyond which people cannot responsibly or respectably pass. In the end, Wallace's efforts to liberate readers from their addictions ends up caught in the feedback loop he sees them trapped within, because he does not want to allow for the transformation of information through the operation of human knowledge upon it. Moralities and the communities they represent are not static goods. What goes into a community in the form of representation does not come out intact when it is received by an audience. The art a community collectively views may indeed structure them, but it does not do so in a programmatic or uniform way. Instead, each viewer enacts upon consumed art a profound transformation as he or she applies unique knowledges of being human to it.

**The Vanishing Individual: Plasticity and Chaos in the Cosmopolitan Vision of Hari Kunzru's *Transmission***

What I want to consider as I turn from Wallace's work is a potentially different relationship between author and readers, text and public. Where Wallace's appeal to feeling for others normalizes its expression within white America, deploying cosmopolitanism as discourse of exceptionalism, Hari Kunzru's novel, *Transmission*, uses appeals to American commercial culture in order to destabilize the nation as the center of a coherent identity. People may have common feelings and interpretations of the significance of events or values, but what connects them is not an institutionalized

site of cultural production. Instead, the constant movement of texts, in conjunction with entirely unpredictable events, allow people everywhere an unprecedented level of free play as they conceive notions of personal loyalty and make claims upon the value of political affiliation. Kunzru's chaotic play with global media follows Bruce Robbins's efforts to move cosmopolitanism away from projects linked to the production of identity and from affect, which Kunzru's work suggests is too intimately bound with processes of institutionalization and exploitation. We are cosmopolitan regardless of how we feel or with what we identify. In Ulrich Beck's terms, people are connected because the consequences of lives, as well as those of uncontrollable natural events, do not correspond to artificial boundaries. The consequences of the shift from a cosmopolitanism of inventive will power to one of material conditions are not limited to the global risks associated with disaster or to transnational economy. Treating cosmopolitanism as a material condition of global economy also affects psychic individuation as texts transmitted within digital networks instantaneously cross international boundaries. Kunzru's depiction of appeals to nationality within global space helpfully questions the explicit link between a particular attentive form and ensuing forms of community. The idea that the novel, for instance, produces the nation presumes that the consuming individual who comes to feel for the community known as the nation does so free of local influences, in a way that does not tear him or her apart in myriad directions and that feeling for the nation results in some meaningful form of solidarity rather than frustration and exclusion. The chaotic global flow of texts at the present helps make plain that even if someone comes to feel exclusively in terms of

nationality, to do so is already a way of addressing affect that circulates globally. It is to choose to ignore the world at large pressing in on oneself.

*Transmission* tells two interdependent stories, one of Arjun Mehta, an Indian computer programmer, who attempts to live the life of an Indian-American immigrant character he sees in a Bollywood romance, and the other of Guy Swift, a hyper-privileged British marketing executive, who meets his downfall through a disastrous plan to brand the EU's border police. Although their lives never intersect directly, their individual actions have profound effects on one another. Guy's business is the source of the sort of branding that enables Arjun to live within fantasies about immigration to America, and the computer virus Arjun creates in a last-ditch effort to prove his value to the American anti-virus software firm employing him erases Guy's identity in European security databases just as the EU begins an immigration sting Guy has helped popularize.<sup>21</sup> As the two set narratives of identity circulating beyond their control, and anyone can claim to feel aligned with narratives, values, or affects originating from any physical or cultural location, narrative itself loses its ability to ground a meaningful sense of self on identity. Each character embodies a new sort of community that fulfills the other's desire for recognition, but at the same time inadvertently undermines the other's ability to claim exactly the sort of identity they desire. What emerges in the novel through Guy's and Arjun's mutual experience of subjective erosion is a form of cosmopolitanism in which systems of textual production and distribution do affect the shape and effect of communities upon real individuals but cannot regulate how such effects take shape or transform as they circulate within the public spaces that make them

meaningful.

Kunzru takes the same premise as Wallace, that television consumption and its meta-discourse of brand identity have effects on how we imagine ourselves and our communities, but situates the cosmopolitanism of globally circulating media within an overarching discourse of radical democracy. The uncontrollable movement of information across transmission disrupts the policing of identity in *Transmission* and defines cosmopolitan communication as the site of dissensual politics. Kunzru deploys cosmopolitanism in two directions within the novel. His chaotic cosmopolitanism redefines community as shared implication in global events instead of affect, political affiliation, or identity. The devaluation of identity as the basis of politics that globally circulating texts accomplish also creates a different set of possibilities for cosmopolitanism, with its continual transformation and plasticity of meaning, to reconfigure political action on a global scale. The effacement of identity within Kunzru's cosmopolitanism is not a threat to identity *qua* sense of self; instead, it decouples the link between social capital and the institutional management of rights. His novel's depictions of outsiders' attempts to claim the right to the life depicted within American Dream narratives reveal the degree to which America is not America, that the projected coherence of any national identity is primarily a means to protect the market value of its cultural exports and to validate international policy. In place of an Americanized America, Kunzru's America becomes the nexus of global feelings associated with the consumption of U.S. dominated popular culture.

*Transmission's* rhetorical structure is fairly straightforward and can be

summarized according to three related claims. First, Kunzru insists on the proposition that all acts of communication are subject to distorting noise. No form of attention results in the perfect maintenance of intergenerational structures of care. The answer his narrator supplies to the question, “How many people must be involved for certainty to dissipate?” is “two” (146). His position challenges Stiegler’s claim that media, or any institution for that matter, can seize control of the process of individuation through the management of tertiary retentions alone. The problem this position addresses does not concern the expansion of societies of control but rather the way individuals respond to texts within any society, either flexibly or plastically. When individuals perceive their global position as precarious, they subsequently feel obliged to internalize those affective and attentive structures accompanying media associated with powerful or dominant cultural narratives. To manage what Judith Butler refers to as their “precarity,” consumers with low self-esteem or from impoverished and oppressed parts of the world imagine themselves participating in exceptionalist narratives originating from dominant locations, like America. If they resist flexibility’s reduction of humanity to economic value, they appropriate such narratives as their own, and in fact, only this latter, plastic act of consumption ever occurs. The idea of flexibility is a rhetorical strategy for managing the dominant culture’s interaction, on an affective level, with those it has marginalized.

In more mundane terms, the signals we emit – our words, gestures, stories – cease to be our own in public space and take on surprising new forms by merit of their very circulation. This is true of individuals speaking face-to-face and of aggressively

marketed commercial texts exported across national boundaries. Even if we imagine ourselves within some stable community, the people we identify as our fellows probably imagine what we share in different ways. There is always, Kunzru's narrator claims, "a chance for noise to corrupt the signal." The children's game of telephone is a good example of the ubiquity of noise: the message whispered into the first player's ear bears no resemblance to what is finally spoken aloud at the end of the circle, whether because of misunderstood words, inattention, or deliberate invention. The production of identity is the same. We may believe a set of texts produces a shared affect, but even with a consistent label, the experience of affect is individual and transforms the nature of a received text.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, each participant has heard a message and furthered its circulation. This is Kunzru's second big claim. In the aftermath of Arjun's virus, the narrator reflects, "Do you know anyone who Leela did not touch in some way?" (254). Despite the distorted form in which we receive all communication, messages do circulate globally in ways that affect, or touch, all of us. While a particular text may be associated with a national tradition or culture, it does not circulate within a limited body and is not received within a controlled environment. Everyone everywhere may feel for it and the feelings they may have can take on any form.

We "have drenched the world in information" the narrator continues, but we pursue the cosmopolitan expansion of information's affective range out of a primordial "hope that the unknown will finally and definitively go away" (253). Wallace's own desire to communicate feelingly is a case in point. The impulse to communicate is not innocent. This is Kunzru's third proposition. As his description indicates,

communication is always about exerting power over a representational field. Successful communication defines the narratives by which communities take shape and does so by identifying a portion of a cultural milieu as signal and another as noise. It suggests ways in which an individual can claim, exploit, or make use of social capital by becoming a particular kind of someone. By internalizing and re-transmitting a specific message, an individual attempts to root him- or herself in a stable, institutional site of abstract value production, whether the nation or something more prosaic like a brand name. One signal becomes information and another noise out of a relation of imbalanced power. What Kunzru entertains, and what makes his work interesting and complex, is the idea that, contrasted with a writer like Wallace, it is in the abandonment of the subject to the play of transmission that individual life becomes possible. Only by giving up the attempt to justify one's dominance over cultural space does cultural space become democratic. Although communication is about overcoming noise with some form of clarity, in a cosmopolitan context, a great deal of noise escapes regulation and continues to circulate beneath disciplinary observation. Cut loose from the constraints of identity rubrics, narratives that define what it means to be a successful Englishman or what America offers the world, Kunzru's individuals circulate wildly within imaginary cosmopolitan spaces that never take hold, that cannot be flexible because they do not accede to the static demands of any institution, but which continually gesture toward human plasticity.

The plot of Kunzru's novel is set into motion in the fateful moment when Arjun watches *Naughty Naughty, Lovely Lovely*, the latest Bollywood romance sensation starring Leela Zahir, already the object of his fantasies. A very emotionally confused

and idealistic young man, Arjun gazes raptly at the screen and concludes that the film was a prophetic message meant specifically for him, “nothing less than a call to change his life” according to its narrative (33). It depicts another young man, Dilip, who, very much like Arjun, is well educated, but discontented with his life in India. The predictable introduction of a charming and wealthy but indifferent Indian-American girl home for a visit suggests to Arjun a template for worldly success: “the key to his beloved’s heart lies in acquiring NRI status” (34). The film is so seductive to Arjun, because, whereas real-live people “were a chasm, an abyss” spilling forth inexplicable “violence,” “vagueness,” and “unknowable motivations” that weave together “into a nightmarish social world,” narrative fantasy offers him a structured alternative. (101). Even though he realizes one should not “make a major life decision on the basis of a movie,” and that the plan he concocts from it is no more than a daydream, for Arjun, a rigidly controlled daydream is nonetheless an obviously “preferable choice,” because it responds to his “commands, reconfiguring itself according to well-understood operations” (33, 14). A film or dream, Arjun here suggests, holds its appeal by making the promise that identity remains stable across time and space, that people can be known and predicted. Arjun’s conscious decision to transform himself according to the narrative constraints and values the film endorses exemplifies the effects of cosmopolitan flexibility. Since the success of the film’s hero depends on his assimilation to American society, although it is a product of the Indian film industry and Bollywood conventions, it extends American exceptionalism to global terrain. Only by rewriting India as American from an Indian perspective can an individual like Arjun

fulfill his desires. To be employable to an American software company, Arjun must first appear marginally American and understand himself as pursuing American desires. This is the tyranny of flexibility. It ties success to a particular identity rather than to kinds of actions or behaviors, or even suspect narratives like “hard work leads to wealth,” toward which an individual could actually work.

Arjun’s total seduction to the American values on display in commercial cinema echoes Stiegler’s and Wallace’s paranoid fears that commercial culture destroys more genuine and local structures of care. Watching the film, Arjun identifies absolutely with its hero. However, Kunzru repeatedly suggests he does so not because film has inherently seductive qualities, but because Arjun suffers from Asperger’s syndrome. One of the defining traits of Asperger’s is susceptibility to overwhelming fascination with minutia. The problem Kunzru’s characterization of Arjun suggests is not of an insufficiently committed attention, one spread too thin across a plethora of sources, but rather of one over-zealously searching for patterns on which the consumer may define a stable sense of identity. In other words, deep attention is more susceptible to cultural imperialism because it does not actively seek out outside stimuli that complicate communication’s signal to noise ratio. Arjun’s deep attention toward cinema sustains the illusion that it expresses a direct communication of cultural values, free of noise. Kunzru’s pathologization of Arjun parallels Malabou’s own evaluation of neoliberal flexibility. As a consequence of a cognitive disorder, Arjun’s efforts to find himself within Dilip echo the contemporary individual’s difficulty switching between deep and hyper attention. Even though Arjun is a film consumer, which critics like Hayles and

Stiegler associate with hyper attention, he is operating according to the principles of deep attention. He believes that pursuing inquiry into the structural features of the cinematic genre holds the key to his personal success, as if becoming an attentive consumer of its attentive forms can refashion his identity. His consumption entails absolute flexibility.<sup>23</sup>

We can see the negotiation between *idem* and *ipse*, and particularly the way it involves the effective deployment of attentive forms, at work in the way Arjun relates to the world through film. The film he is obsessed with, like any other, deploys characters as models of ideal human possibilities and inserts them into a bland story about the inevitable successes that accompany hard work. Although set in India, it tells the story of the American Dream. What is appealing about the film is its promise that life generally does work out for the best. It finds a way to comfort uncertain viewers. Arjun translates the film's narration of character into a formula for his own desire for self-actualization, in which he feels frustrated in part because he comes from a lower-middle class family. He makes the faulty assumption that orchestrating the same set of general events as those depicted on-screen will render himself identical to the character and produce similar results. Notice here, the shift from same to self. Faithfulness to oneself, in the sense of the self as an unfolding event, evokes plasticity's capacity to refuse narrative as a form of automatic definition. To remain faithful to the abstract self requires the ready ability to detach one's attention from acculturated objects of attention. To make Dilip his model for reality, Arjun must reduce all of subjectivity to the sort of identity inhering in stable categories and give up the ability to adapt or deviate from

these templates. He must sustain deep attention at all costs. In this case, his deep attentiveness to film distracts Arjun from the material realities evident in his everyday life. For example, when in a job interview for what is clearly a slimy transnational temping agency, Arjun notices his interviewer's glamorous appearance, especially his cool sunglasses, but not his instant readiness to offer Arjun a position without examining his credentials or providing any specifics on the job itself.

The narrative Arjun creates about his relation to his fictional hero makes his own sense of self about rigid consistency with the generic structure of romantic heroism – he needs to be the same across time and space. While the subjectivities we produce through narrative are not inherently destructive, Kunzru's novel suggests that the disjunction opened up through fidelity to actions, or the choices immanently available within provisional contexts, where narrative continuity is hegemonic, is what generates cosmopolitan solidarity. For example, after witnessing his American friend and crush Chris Schnorr kiss another woman, Arjun feels deeply confused and disappointed because he cannot incorporate her actions into his adopted narrative framework. He has feelings for her; as the hero of his story, he is supposed to be the exclusive object of her desire and she is supposed to be unspoiled, pure, and heterosexual. His is not a moral outrage, nor is his confusion the result of a limited understanding of sexuality. He was “familiar with lesbianism,” a “favorite theme of the CD-ROMs Aamir sold at Gabbar Singh's Internet Shack” (76). Instead, Christine's interest in another woman disturbs Arjun because it does not fit within the romantic narrative he has adopted as his basis for reading life, and his exclusive attention to such narratives has him at a loss. He is

equally upset to learn that Chris “lived and slept with” her boyfriend Nicolai when “they were not married” (75). Arjun can only respond to this new information within the confines of a rigid deep attentiveness by reducing her identity to his schematic understanding of human character. Since he is a student of romance, he must fit Chris into a romantic narrative to make her meaningful. He demands her flexibility to his Indian reading of American conventions. First, he thinks “her limit-definition” for relationality “was unsound” and proposes “a less vague system” using “measurable criteria” structured around the “performance of particular sex acts” (75). Next, he attempts to categorize Chris’s non-normative behavior with the direct question, “Is there a word for someone like you?” (76). He is interested in her, but her sexual activity does not lead to the fairy-tale ending he has in mind. The whole encounter leaves Arjun feeling violated, as if Chris had “flayed away a skin of romantic possibility” (78). From it, he realizes he cannot have the love he imagined with her. Chris’s plasticity, her refusal to adopt the form of his vision of the world, starts in motion a comprehensive explosion of Arjun’s own sense of self.

The simplicity of Arjun’s conclusion that a responsive dream can serve as a model for reality corresponds to Guy Swift’s interpretation of product branding. He practices what he refers to as “Total Brand Mutability,” a marketing technique that reduces a brand’s identity to whatever images bear cultural capital at the moment. For Guy, the embodiment of hyper attention, life’s meaning does not come from any one source. Instead, life takes shape in a cosmopolitan and provisional matrix of consumption options. His cosmopolitan consumer exists as the center of gravity for a

series of “intersecting value circles that he visualized as defining his life” (67). The range and weight of these circles, like Guy’s mutable brand image, may at any time shift, but together, whatever their substance, define the conglomerate expression of need that is Guy. An effective brand is so because it acknowledges something common to a wide audience base and positions itself as central to that feeling or desire. Total Brand Mutability finds the human in something strange or incidental and renders a consumer object, the marketed good, legible to the community to which it is exported. It draws the world inward to the marketer’s vision of value by making its products central points of identification for diverse peoples. As it does so, it creates powerful narratives, like the one that consumes Arjun, about what it means to be happy and successful in today’s busy, unpredictable world.

Total Brand Mutability, despite the chaotic and flexible appearance Guy would like to associate with it, is, rather, a process of establishing narrative continuity. It asserts the stability of affect across shifting product appeals. By drawing the strange and unfamiliar into a personalized inner circle of stable affective signs, a successful brand creates a narrative of individual emotional stability. By investing one’s identity in it, a consumer transforms the product into an imaginary point of refuge from change. As Guy explains, it is “Human input,” or adaptation, that “creates awareness and mines the brand for emotion” (20). Brands exert power over consumers, he suggests, only to the extent that they attract investments of deep attention into their images. If a brand’s identity is the function of a public’s free investment of attention, then its materialization as the site of what Guy describes as “the perfect way to come together” offers a different

range of possibilities for community than do identity categories like race, gender, or nationality. By framing his activity in this way, as a brand advocate, Guy is ineligible for accusations of exploitation, because his brand can only exert power through an individual's active investment of power into it. Any effect it has upon a person is the product of that person's prior action upon it. In this sense, a brand narrative is not a public object, but the private consequence of focusing attention on public feelings. If a public, as Michael Warner has suggested, requires only attention for inclusion within its identity, then Guy's marketing perspective reminds us that it also depends on the attention of its audience to supply the identity that attracts them to it in the first place.<sup>24</sup> All a brand does is bind an associative link between a feeling and a product through archetypal imagery. If that is the case, then Arjun is seduced by his desire for a girlfriend and not by the romanticized narrative about American opportunity. Such distinctions cannot be made. It's a little of both.

Although his branding methodology claims to revolutionize marketing, Guy "didn't want to change the world, just to be in the lead as it moved forward on its preordained path" (124). The pose of flexibility Guy embodies, while exuding confidence within mobility, or mutability, is no more than a tenuous covering over deep-seated anxieties about his value as a human being and the certainty of his place in the world. A brand may be entirely subject to instantaneous change, but Guy's idea is that these changes do not alter the common feeling they inspire. Instead, constant change produces a static affective atmosphere of security and placement out of which insecure individuals may narrate some sort of life. Tellingly, Guy shifts from his description of

branding strategies to the reassuring thought that the brands he creates insulate him from common folk going about their lives in a cocoon of “the even light and neutral colors of a present that seemed to be declaring its own provisionality,” and his home, in the *In Vitro* housing complex, whose name suggests an artificial womb-like cloistering, produces an effect “of absolute calm, a heavenly sense of floating free from the cares of the world” (20, 110). Guy needs the privacy of his luxury apartment and the power to regulate the images that define public space because he wants to prove that he is his father’s son *and* that he is different from his father. For example, when Guy feels flustered, he thinks back to how his father taught him to believe that “*People like us don’t lose*” while also reminding himself that his own “‘we’ was different from his father’s,” better for his ability to distance himself from middle-class “self-denying rubbish” (206). His is a putative cosmopolitanism defined in terms of people who consciously craft an identity costume out of mundane consumer decisions. They are detached from local limitations because their felt loyalties are to the feelings underlying branded images,<sup>25</sup> which ultimately are their own desires, rather than lengthy narratives about past or purpose that ground the imagined nation with its inter-generational structures of care.<sup>26</sup>

Total Brand Mutability is for people trying to evade the pain or risk of fixity. As such, even though the idea of mutability evokes mobility amongst objects and modes of attention, it is a model of flexibility rather than plasticity because it requires its consumers to adapt to the flavor of the moment in order to stay cool. Playing off the mobility of capital, Guy’s company equates identity with assets and concludes that

personal stability means existing in harmony with the market's "constant cycle of fall and recovery" (21). What an individual or organization wants, according to his theory of branding, is not to be some thing, but rather, to command attention, to exert influence in a way that attracts social and economic capital. All anyone wants, it seems, is the feeling of value that comes with recognition. A brand offers only the hollow promise of stability to those who cannot really afford to stay put. It promises stability in mobility, certainty in provisionality, or the benefits of a combination of deep and hyper attention without the work of switching between them. As Guy explains, "humans are social," and "need relationships," but those relationships may exist on any basis (20). What brand identity is concerned with are not the narratives people imagine out of interaction with a particular product, that is, the way individual moments of decision accrete over the course of sustained deep attention to retroactively define a narrative of becoming, but the formation of objects saturated with particular affects that can assert the political force of identity without the limitations or risks of plastic consumption of narrative. A brand makes a product the signifier of a feeling like happiness rather than of a value or event. In becoming effective, a brand serves a good or entity by making that good or entity felt as occupying a site of empathetic potential. It consolidates power within a single site that becomes the nexus of plural feelings of identification, or, makes the world recognize itself as contracting toward the innermost concentric circle of the advertised thing.

The nod to provisionality at the center of Guy's consumerist vision of reality feels like a compelling and cosmopolitan alternative to norming pressures of fixed identities only so long as it is held entirely apart from any economic context, or as

Kunzu's narrator observes, until we consider that "it would be hard to specify who other than himself was included" in the world Guy imagines (206). His brands, and even ideas about branding, change according to his shifting desires in order to ensure that he always occupies an influential, lucrative place within society. By exploiting the brand's capacity for change rather than developing a thick narrative atop a product, Guy forces consumers to internalize the risks of the instability he feels as an entrepreneur who must earn his keep by attracting business and as a man who fears he can never live up to his parents' expectations. Guy's character is problematic not because he lives in a world filled with branded products, or because he draws meaning from his consumption of them. Instead, what makes Guy intolerable is his belief that he can master the world through his regulation of how branded products make people feel. He thinks he shapes others through objects; they do not shape him. Kunzru illustrates the absurdity of Guy's beliefs in two disastrous episodes. In the first finds Guy making a sales pitch to a fantastically wealthy oil emirate who owns a golf resort in Dubai, and the second finds him refashioning xenophobic EU immigration policy.

Where he meant for his company, *Tomorrow\**, to rebrand "British youth sector business," Guy finds in Dubai "the future, arriving at mouse-click velocity" without his help (168, 166). When he finally meets Al-Rahman, Guy is surprised to learn his client has a passion for golf (168). To compensate for his own complete lack of understanding Guy decides he wants to find out "What does Al-Rahman actually stand for?," assuming the family name is, like any other good or service, an image in need of a positive emotion (171). Guy proceeds to explain to his client, the Arab golf expert, that while

“Golf is great,” he is concerned whether it is “really something your people can get behind” (171). His understanding of the narrative underlying golf’s consistent identity is one of “freedom” and “style.” His confusion is the product of his Arjun-like inability to reconcile his need for consistency with the fact that Al-Rahman is Arab and his resort is located in the Middle East. Guy only understands freedom and style as elements of stories about the West, whereas Arab people are oppressive Islamic fundamentalists or terrorists who cannot credibly project an interest in a genteel pursuit like golf. His rebranding of the resort centers on the racist slogan ““There is no game but golf and Al-Rahman is its prophet,” unfolding elegantly in “your traditional Arabic calligraphy style” (171).<sup>27</sup> The stylistic change is an obvious attempt to stabilize Guy’s momentary disorientation at the sight of Dubai’s conspicuous wealth through an Orientalist appeal. Not surprisingly, Al-Rahman rejects Guy, explaining that he likes “to do business with people who respect the things I do” (172).

Determined to cast his client in the role of a backward and confused foreigner in need of help, Guy describes a brand image, in language eerily evocative of Wallace’s pleas for redemptive fiction to provide Americans with a guide for how to feel, as a device that “help[s] you to make your choice” when shopping and “nurtures and protects you like a caring parent” by reassuring that the choice you have made feels good (170). A brand filters out the uncertainty of life for insecure consumers. Like Guy’s apartment, a brand promises consumers an artificial private shelter from the instability of the public world. His reading of the brand is highly revealing. First, it shows how Guy modulates his presentation of who he is and what he does in response to a preconceived

understanding of geopolitical power relations. As an Englishman, Guy suspects his Middle Eastern client must be anxious about participating in the world of modern consumerism. Since Al-Rahman is a foreigner, but one with money, Guy presents his form of branding as a means of entering into a desired community. He assumes a paternal role toward his customer despite the awe-inspiring display of wealth and power that makes even him uncomfortable. His pitch targets a person stuck with but not actually comfortable within the fluidity of life, someone who feels his place in life threatened and who must flexibly conform to the demands of capital. This person is certainly not a man like Al-Rahman, but it does describe Guy, who, after his failure, fears his life is a “structure wrapped around a vast emptiness” (173). Al-Rahman does not need to cater to British Orientalist fantasies about the Middle East. Guy’s branding only works because it speaks to the aspirational desires of people forced into movement against their will, and his failure to realize this is a product of his own need to maintain the image of himself as a savvy insider who is not so constrained.

Guy’s second pitch goes better, but exposes him to the very precarity he attempts to cover over because it is such a success. In anticipation of a massive tightening of immigration policy and deportations, Europe’s border police headquarters in Belgium plans to rebrand its agents’ uniforms. Where Guy presents branding as a gentle guide for helpless consumers in search of a nurturing community in his presentation to Al-Rahman, what he describes for EU bureaucrats overtly facilitates violence and exclusion. “The border,” he points out to his enthusiastic audience, “is not just a line on the earth anymore,” but a negotiation of personal “status ... opportunity” (235). Using a brand as

a way to express the desire to be “one of the gang” is perfectly fine when it relates to leisure activities and hobbies. Advertising a golf resort as the most exclusive in the world is elitist, but not entirely objectionable. In the context of the border police, however, the status and opportunity to which Guy euphemistically refers through a glamorous “metaphorics of leisure” and “club culture” stand for racial and national identity and economic class (239). The border agent he describes as the continent’s bouncer effectively sends the message that “you should only try to get past ... if you’re wearing the right kind of clothes,” or class and nationality (239-40). Unlike a clubbers, though, the people being bounced from Europe are asylum seekers, displaced persons, and the destitute. Despite his general buffoonery, in the middle of his pitch, Guy makes the profoundly incorrect observation that citizenship is just “a question of attitude” (235). His confidence that through effective branding, a person “can be on the inside” and still be made to feel “on the outside,” reveals the extent to which the rights and privileges associated with legal citizenship are, in practice, only the effect of a community’s willingness to acknowledge an individual’s performance of its brand identity.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, he fails to note that this willingness is largely a matter of capital. So, despite a mutable appearance, branding is a form of maintaining the narrative continuity of the community or product it defines. People who fail to conform to mutable ideals or standards lose the protections accorded to those who keep up with the tone set by the state. By reconfiguring the border police in a very visible way as an agency unified against outsiders, Guy’s project re-territorializes those lines abstracted away from the map to a degree the state could never legitimately approach through overt

political actions. His mediation of border patrol agents' contact with unwanted refugees and asylum seekers through the image of clubbing de-politicizes Europe's assertion of power over the mobility of its citizens that allows a return to the degree of regulation remembered within its past of "fascist grandiosity," to achieve an inadmissible "sinister aim of final consensus," without the taint of overt violence (232).

Guy's border is only "in your mind" but the power it authorizes is not (235). As his venture capitalist Yves claims, "people don't give a shit about power, not really, not if it looks cool" (243). The attitude the two express corresponds to what Sloterdijk calls the paradox of modern conservatism, that the more repressive a regime is, "the more violently must the rhetoric of freedom be hammered into the people's heads" (185). His own example follows a different history of xenophobic violence across Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor. The Inquisitor, he says, does operate out of utopian principles. He is perverting religion in a way that exploits his followers, but does so in order that eventually people will, through greater oppression, begin to feel more free. Since the Inquisitor's force defines public reality, only he knows the pain of inauthenticity. Likewise, Guy and the EU bureaucrats feel the violence underlying the pleasurable surface of public life they rebrand as European clubland. Sloterdijk describes this posture as exemplary of modern cynicism, that is an attitude cynical about one's means but religiously inflexible about the ends (192).<sup>29</sup> Guy's rebranded Europe is an exclusive place that not just anyone can inhabit. Its horrific new deportation policy guarantees stability and opportunity for the lucky few permitted to remain. According to cynical logic, mass violence is just as good a means to reach this point as any other.

Although Guy cynically believes belonging is all about attitude and that attitude can modulate to signal belonging in any community, his critical intersection with disciplinary power reverses his formula: belonging, the possession of power, allows one the privilege to play with signs of identity, like attitude.

The power Guy has failed to give a shit about is based on an assumption about information equally naïve as Arjun's reading of cinema: that the border can be rendered solid through "common information collection and retrieval" (234). In a novel obsessed with noise and miscommunication, this reliance is an obvious weakness. When Arjun realizes that love in America does not correspond to what he saw in Bollywood, he reacts violently on a local scale to restore the viability of his vision of reality. When Chris, who pities his virginity, sleeps with Arjun in moment of drunkenness, he takes her attention as confirmation that she finally sees him as the hero of their shared story. His reaction temporarily allows him to go on living comfortably. Although naïve, Arjun is also highly cynical. He will deploy any means to attain the end of narrative continuity, to preserve the world contained within his obsessive devotion to cinema. Retreat into fantasy stabilizes Arjun's grasp of reality momentarily. However, shortly after having sex, Arjun falls victim to a cycle of massive layoffs. Distracted by romantic narrative making, he fails to notice the severity of his situation until his supervisor calls him in for an "employee encounter" (90). As he listens to the grim news that he will lose his job and be forced to return to India penniless and in shame, Arjun "realizes" that the events he is swept up in are not "his story because this was not how his story went," someone "had made a mistake" (90). The pain he feels in his moment of panic is, once again, that

of exposure to discontinuity in his process of narrative subjectivity. The distractions of material reality force him to depart from the exclusivity of deep attention.

Unemployment threatens the endpoint of the romance narrative, and without a clear destination, Arjun fears the validity or solidity of his self in both past and future becomes invalid. Given his assessment of the situation, all Arjun needs to do is follow the contours of the narrative that is his, or learn to better tune out hyper attentiveness to the world developing around him. When heroes face troubles, they use their inventiveness to save the day. Arjun acts as if he was in the midst of “any other technical problem” (92). To save his job at the struggling anti-virus company, he needs to create demand, to prove himself his company’s hero. He does this by programming and then releasing an incredibly adaptable virus spread through an email attachment bearing the image of Leela Zahir, the star of *Naughty Naughty, Lovely Lovely*.

When Arjun’s computer virus scrambles an EU census database, Guy finds himself the victim of the action his work glamorizes. Mistaken for an Albanian gangster seeking asylum in Germany, Guy is forced half-naked into a holding cell and eventually winds up entirely nude on a beach outside Naples after smugglers toss him overboard (259). Guy’s slippage through the cracks of the information system in which the EU is so confident reveals the fallacy of his assumption that the line between insider and outsider can be marked by branded images. Despite his passport, Queen’s English, and concerned friends, Guy himself becomes subject to total brand mutability. His attention to the appearances of insiderness and outsidership do not ensure recognition by the powers enforcing identity. The information system’s failure exposes the threat of

violence against individuals endorsing the Total Brand Mutability lifestyle of flexible capital. Guy cannot control his image or its reception. It is totally mutable, and as such, can, without warning, become detached from the security and comfort he associates with branding itself. Following the realization of the inevitability of radical insecurity in the modern world, Guy retreats from public life entirely. As his narrative closes, we find him living in a remote village, unlisted in public registries. To cope with his experience of contingent violence, Guy develops an arcane system of reading geomagnetism as a source of psychic “distortion in the earth’s natural energy field” and gives solid form to wet clay as a potter (258). For Guy, the solution to the risk of public life is surrender, irrelevance. He no longer engages with the outside world but he does remain in it, a person commanding some dignity and the right to exist. What he doesn’t admit, but seems to have learned from his experience, is that he can be what he wants to be only by ensuring that he is not publically visible. So long as he does not interact, is no one to the market, the world of targeted marketing and surveillance will leave him to his “sincere pots” (259).

The devastation the Leela virus unleashes is the fault of his flawed understanding of reality, but, unlike Guy, the reality Arjun fails to understand in his overvaluation of his centrality to the world places justice on his side. Arjun lives in a fantasy world of Romance because the reality of his life is brutal and impossible. When, inevitably, the FBI identifies Arjun as the source of the virus, which by then is causing financial chaos globally, Arjun goes on the lamb, attempting first to reach the nearby Canadian border. When he takes the wrong bus and ends up in Oregon instead, he abandons his plan and

heads for Mexico because flexibility in crisis is “the kind of tactic that had worked for Rajiv Rana in *Run from Injustice*” (197). His plan, despite its inanity, seems to work. With a new disguise consisting of dark sunglasses and a ball cap, Arjun realizes, nobody “was paying attention to him” (201). Even when he appears on the news as a “*Cyber-terror suspect*,” complete with a close-up photo, his companions on the bus are captivated with the spectacle itself or just bored by the monotonous landscape. By ceasing to be the hero to those around him, and instead occupying a peripheral position in his own life, Arjun gains a new degree of freedom of mobility. What actually happens to Arjun is unclear, however. He does manage to run to California, but his hotel is raided by the FBI, who find and kill an armed Korean American teenager who had recognized Arjun. Kunzru leaves a gap in the narrative between when Arjun enters the hotel and when his pursuers close in, a gap in which he ceases to be a concrete person and becomes “legend” (249). The intense focus of media attention upon Arjun’s life and his subsequent disappearance makes him an object of speculation for authorities and rebels alike. The official stance is that he died en route to Mexico, another nameless body in the desert. Others, however, narrate out of his disappearance a “hope” for revolutionary causes (267).

When Guy ceases to be a promising and wealthy young marketer and becomes a forger of sincere pottery in an isolated country shack, he undergoes a transformation from what Sloterdijk describes as a being cynical of means to kynical of ends. Whereas the cynic is always invested in institutional power, directed at grand aims, the kynic “culminates in the knowledge ... that we must snub the grand goals” (194). The kynic

affirms the “meaningless of life” implied in the radical instability of total brand mutability or cosmopolitan mobility, “about which” Sloterdijk writes, “so much stupid nihilistic prattle winds itself” (203). Instead of finding despair in the meaningless, he suggests an affirmative cynicism founded upon the recognition of meaninglessness “provides the foundation for [life’s] full preciousness.” Devoid of the possibility of orchestrating the continuity between popular narrative conventions and the individual experience of life, or a plastic subject deploying a nuanced and supple repertoire of deep and hyper attentive strategies, the cynic revels in a life that may go nowhere. This free play “endows meaning, energetic consciousness in the here and now” where otherwise only noise might be visible. In ceasing to be the hero of his own story, Arjun becomes a potential hero for all sorts of heroic causes. He may lose all tangible substance and the freedom to exist openly, but, in disappearing into noise, Arjun finally does become a romantic hero. In the end, Guy becomes just a guy, a person. In doing so, he absents himself from narrative projects. He is a self with no continuity, no trajectory. Arjun, however, becomes a purely narrative being, losing his embodied self completely. Despite this division, both Guy and Arjun become exactly what they desire – Guy is finally stable and Arjun can be the hero of anyone’s story. Narratives about ourselves only work to a limited extent. In a noisy cosmopolitan world, the risk of instability is unavoidable. However, as the redemption of both characters shows, living within the risk of noise provides surprising opportunities. After all, Arjun’s death is only speculative. As his many admirers noted, when he fell off the face of the earth, so did the film star whose image he used for the virus. As their theories suggest, the best

explanation for the continued absence of both is in a mutual escape from unwanted attention. By losing control of his own direction, Arjun became subject to the possibility that he could become what he could only dream on his own.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues that simply watching the media does not transform viewers into reflections of its contents. Instead, he suggests that viewers perform a sort of production of a second order on media products – this is his consumption. The viewer actively transforms what is sent or imposed by the media, not becoming like the media, but reading the media so that it is made like the viewer – finding something within it with which he or she may identify (30-33).

<sup>2</sup> Wallace's argument recapitulates Horkheimer and Adorno's assessment of the culture industry, although his concern is for American TV exclusively. In statements Wallace echoes nearly verbatim, they claim that film in particular

trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality. The withering of imagination and spontaneity in the consumer of culture today need not be traced back to psychological mechanisms. The products themselves, especially the most characteristic, the sound film, cripple those faculties through their objective makeup. They are so constructed that their adequate comprehension requires a quick, observant, knowledgeable cast of mind but positively debar the spectator from thinking, if he is not to miss the fleeting facts (100)

Film destroys human creativity by demanding the entirety of the spectator's attention, leaving no room for imagination. Entertainment becomes a form of labor for the entertainment industry. Further, they conclude, "the original affinity between business and entertainment reveals itself in the meaning of entertainment itself: as society's apologia. To be entertained means to be in agreement. Entertainment makes itself possible only by insulating itself from the totality of the social process, making itself stupid and perversely renouncing from the first the inescapable claim of any work, even the most trivial" (115-6). In short, new media, because they occupy the attention of contemporary consumers, causing them to fail to appreciate older works and older values, are destroying human civilization.

<sup>3</sup> We see this assumption as well in discussions of cosmopolitanism, and globalization more broadly, which take up the matter of the fate of the nation in the current atmosphere of circulation. A notable, and notorious, example is Martha Nussbaum's essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In it, she expresses her concern that cultural particularity leads to a bad form of divisive patriotism that frustrates the expansion of humanizing cosmopolitan projects, both of which are the outcome of regimes of education. While the impulse of her project, which is to envision a cosmopolitan subject whose "allegiances are to the worldwide community of human beings" first, is

admirable, what many critics have noted is that Nussbaum imagines the production of this community emanating from a colonizing American center. It also moves through a process of normalizing global practices of defining and recognizing the human through textual consumption within the national classroom. Nussbaum gives the image of ripples moving placidly across the surface of a body of water as a metaphor for the expansion of cosmopolitan consciousness. Education, by exposing American youngsters to foreign cultures, she argues, allows them to perceive that what they see as human in themselves, or American culture, is also at the heart of what other cultures value, provided they approach such encounters “undeterred by traits that are strange to them, and eager to understand humanity in all its strange guises” (9).

As a pedagogical device, difference in Nussbaum’s system of cosmopolitan education serves as an inoculation against cosmopolitan change. By treating the other, with its difference, as a consumable good from which we can produce universal humanity, Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan students construct an homogenous global space. The goal of her program, after all, is to produce subjects capable of “draw[ing] the circles” of her metaphor “somehow toward the center” and eventually to make “all human beings more like our fellow city-dwellers.” When we do so completely, there is no longer a distinction between patriotism and cosmopolitanism and we no longer need to give any other “circle” our “special attention” (9). As we pay attention to the “strange” differences of others, that which obscures the recognition of humanity evident in America, we do so in order to reduce it to sets of “morally irrelevant characteristic[s]” and practices from which we can extract practical value. The example Nussbaum supplies is of attending to the “child-rearing” practices of non-Western cultures (11). Doing so can help Americans to understand “in what configurations families exist, and through what strategies children are in fact being cared for” (11). This sensitive awareness presumably allows us to assert that the local differences that give rise to such unique practices are strange and irrelevant. (It also makes, given the center-periphery imagery and language invested in West-rest power dynamics, the unintended suggestion that the value of such attention might lie in learning how foreigners working as childcare providers might have an undesired effect on their American charges). What Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan education seeks to manage, then, is the way in which a national body pays attention to its boundaries through the act of learning, which is comparable to cosmopolitan consumerism. The act of reaching outward in textual selection, which is comparable to hyper attentive stimulation, is grounded in a system of deep attentive interpretive structures that draw reading practices back inward to the production of a globalized national imaginary, one immunized against global influences that might otherwise compromise a strong sense of patriotic loyalty.

Paying attention to human difference is not itself negative, imperialistic, or elitist. It is how a particular community attempts to manage the value of particular forms of attending to the world that determines its relative openness or oppressiveness. As Walter Mignolo argues, cosmopolitanisms, which are always plural, can be either good or bad, globalizing or subversive. Every way of representing or interpreting history is locally bound but some, he argues, have global designs. Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism

is globalizing because it positions itself as the unquestionable center of human value. The difference between local histories or cultures, cosmopolitanisms with colonial global designs, and critical cosmopolitanisms that do not lie in the scope each assumes as an explanatory model for humanity. The former possess the trappings of justice, equality, and a vision of a better world for all, but through these images, work to impose ideologically localized ways of understanding and valuing life upon the world at large, hence their global designs for local texts. Cosmopolitanisms with global designs are resisted by the latter critical variety, whose insistence on irreducible particularity, the provisionality of identity, and the colonial history of others' efforts to manage their ways of life, disrupts globalizing cosmopolitanisms' utopian surfaces. Within Mignolo's plural cosmopolitanisms, all cultures potentially circulate in global space. Local histories do not exist in isolation but they also do not claim to be an interpretive key for other local histories they contact. There are very real differences between global capitalism from above and the local sites of resistance Mignolo calls critical cosmopolitanisms. However, common to both is the assumption that what they struggle over is not to control physical territory or material resources directly. Instead, at stake in such conflicts are networks of cultural distribution and the attendant power to make visible particular narratives about the human. In each case, what is objectionable is the actual or potential development of linear and vertically structured communication hierarchies. Such systems not only assume culture as a source of economic and political power, but move to regulate its expression. Globalizing cosmopolitanisms offer the potential for us to become a harmonious community but only through conceding an absolute and central authority of cultural value. At its heart, then, the debate over cosmopolitanism is one concerning how media are distributed and the effects our attentiveness to its various forms have on how communities take shape.

<sup>4</sup> Although Hayles understands deep and hyper attention as necessarily complementary, which suggests a need to develop a capacity for both, she presents her case for a differently balanced attention in terms of a correlation between media's evolution and the pathologization of attentive forms under the rubric of ADD/ADHD, which consequently devalues the independent merits of emergent forms of community.

<sup>5</sup> In *How do We Think?*, Hayles responds to Stiegler's commentary on deep and hyper attention, noting that while she disagrees with his tendency to villainize digital media, she finds his system of retentions useful nonetheless. As my reading above suggests, while Hayles may be more open to the idea of new media and their value, she is still highly invested in the idea of the nation as the site within and for which any new mixture of media produces social value.

<sup>6</sup> The system of retentions is the subject of Stiegler's *Technics and Time* volumes 2 and 3. For a more concise overview, see his "Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon."

<sup>7</sup> The ability of television to define how people feel for community and understand themselves is so devastating to Wallace because, as Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly argue, the "sole possibility for meaning, according to Wallace, is found in the struggle of

the individual's will" (45). TV neutralizes this willfulness by supplying a steady stream of pleasures and consequently prevents the actualization of full human potential.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace's critique of the pleasures of consumption are cynical and indicate a degree of cosmopolitan concern for humanity's well-being. Diogenes once remarked that "people eat for the sake of pleasure, but for that same reason are unwilling to desist from eating" (14). Unlike others, who "lived to eat," he claimed to eat "to live." This comment epitomizes Wallace's attitude. One must eat, but eating should not be a source of pleasure. We must communicate with others to have a meaningful life, but we should not communicate because we find it pleasing. Diogenes, unlike Wallace, follows up his moralizing with an ironic jab at himself, undoing the distinction between himself and others. As Diogenes Laertius relates, when asked "whether the wise eat cakes, [Diogenes of Sinope] said, 'Cakes of every kind, just like everyone else'" (15). The cosmopolitan cynic takes pleasure in the world of consumption but does not feel entitled to its constant presence.

<sup>9</sup> And yet, he is aware. Immediately before introducing his letter to black students, Wallace comments that the "real truth, of course, is that SWE is the dialect of the American elite. That it was invented, codified, and promulgated by Privileged WASP Males and is perpetuated as "Standard" by same. That it is the shibboleth of the Establishment and an instrument of political power and class division and racial discrimination and all manner of social inequity (107). So, he is aware of what he is doing but finds it easier or more beneficial to contribute to the inequality he observes.

<sup>10</sup> Wallace scholars tend to defend his work according to the same gendered terms, as well. For example, Paul Giles suggests that Wallace's racial condescension is equally significant as the "confusion that a 'misplaced modifier' can create within a social group," ignoring his active intent ("Sentimental Posthumanism" 336). In a more recent article, he laments critics' dismissal of Wallace as insensitive toward women with the complaint that for "some women readers" – referring explicitly to Catherine Toal, whose article on Wallace gives an insightful analysis of his representation of depression – it is "difficult to empathize in particular with some of the more schematic and apparently dehumanizing aspects of Wallace's earlier style" (*All Swallowed Up* 9-10). However, as Adam Kelly argues, the schematic in Wallace is exactly what makes his work significant because it marks his fiction as about "ideas" rather than trivial feelings ("Development through Dialogue" 268). For Kelly, those ideas women just cannot quite get a hold of are those that "transcend" individual experiences and make Wallace's world broadly inclusive of humanity.

<sup>11</sup> Wallace makes this case overtly when he complains "the very language in which today's socialist, feminist, minority, gay, and environmentalist movements frame their sides of political debates is informed by the Descriptivist belief that traditional English is conceived and perpetuated by Privileged WASP Males and is thus inherently capitalist, sexist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, elitist: unfair" and invites us to ponder that injustice by considering "the tense deliberate way white males now adjust their vocabularies around non-w.m.'s" (*Consider the Lobster* 81).

<sup>12</sup> And in making this distinction, Wallace relies on a moral devaluation of consumption. Things people purchase or which are complicit with commercial enterprise involve acts of consumerism, consumers are motivated to purchase by pleasure, and for Wallace, basing decisions off of pleasure destabilizes political community. How fiction, which is also distributed in the form of consumer goods, could escape this context, is not detailed in Wallace's argument. Instead, he supplies the proposition that fiction writers do not depend on the reader's good opinion for their livelihood as do TV producers. This is another obviously problematic claim. What makes his attempt to support his reasoning on this distinction interesting, though, is that historically, defenders of nationalism have consistently attacked cosmopolitanism on the grounds that cosmopolitan subjectivities are just too consumeristic (see Walkowitz).

<sup>13</sup> It is significant that as Wallace defines the subject of fiction, he conflates the writer's desire to be a witness with the ordinary individual's voyeurism. To be a witness to a scene is to determine its structuring principles, to give meaning to its appearance. Witnessing implies an active agent who defines the meaning of an absent scene for others in order to communicate its meaning publicly. A voyeur, by contrast, is one whose desire is fulfilled through the act of observing another. The very secrecy of the act suggests that what the voyeur gains is for personal use rather than public knowledge. By juxtaposing the two, Wallace's formulation of the writer-viewer relationship suggests a writer who takes pleasure in structuring another's experience of subject formation and a reader who is pleased by the structures fiction puts on display.

<sup>14</sup> At this point, it is useful to think of the performance occurring in the internalization of social values common to both viewing and reading in Judith Butler's terms rather than Wallace's. Butler defines the "social agent" as the product of the circulation of social signs. Her agent contrasts with the phenomenological Cartesian subject who exists prior to language, who chooses which signs are pertinent to who it is and subsequently comes to think itself into certain being (270). As Butler explains, "the *appearance of substance*" that legitimizes normative identities and hegemonic values "is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (271). This belief is what underlies the defense of nationalism, as in the case of Wallace's hurt and outrage. But, the reason we perform in a particular way is that we feel their elements to be of value. For instance, Sara Ahmed argues the family is happy "not because it causes happiness and not even because it affects us in a good way, but because we share an orientation toward the family as being good, as being what promises happiness in return for loyalty" ("Happy Objects" 37).

<sup>15</sup> Wallace's subject is an individual product obscured by the intrusion of the social upon its thought. It is Cartesian and ontological and this causes problems when he wants it to also have a primarily ethical orientation defined in terms of its ability to freely "care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day" (Water 120). As Lacan suggests, the cogito posits a subject committed to itself, to exploring the conditions of its own being. Ethics, by contrast, requires a

subject of relationships (*Four* 34). The cogito, for Lacan, offers an inadequate explanation of subjectivity because its understanding of thinking is autonomous and conscious. As he argues, “this *I think* ... cannot be detached from the fact that he can formulate it only by *saying* it to us” (36). The movement of thought into being relies upon some real principle grounding its own reading. This real remains outside the subject, in the social, and forces the subject “to reassure himself ... of an Other that is not deceptive,” one which is not what Wallace would call ironic, “which will ... guarantee by its very existence the bases of truth, guarantee him that there are in his own objective reason the necessary foundations for the very real, about whose existence he has just reassured himself” (36). The truth that Wallace implicitly uses to ground his distinction between behavior and acting or performance -- that private individuals observed in voyeurism behave without motive whereas actors’ performance is exclusively motivated -- is one that only exists for the private, thinking individual in the movement of that individual into a social symbolic. For the individual to be him or herself, the Other of people-watching has to simply be what it is, as it seems on the surface. The consequence of this is that the Other has to be, in full, the individual’s desire.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan says something similar in “The Signification of the Phallus:” “What I seek in speech is a response from the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I proffer what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to answer me” (*Ecrits* 247).

<sup>17</sup> Foucault proposes a shift from thinking of texts as the product of an individual genius who owns the content therein, an Author, to moments in which new discursive possibilities are founded. For Foucault, an author is “the ideological figure which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (*Reader* 119). Wallace’s attempt to limit the movement of national identity to serious fiction exemplifies this fear: the biggest threat to individuals is information coming from sources he does not know intimately. By making the author our object of concern in interpretation, we produce questions like “Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?” (119). This last seems particularly relevant to Wallace’s concern for fiction research. Following Foucault, I read Wallace’s work according to the questions “What difference does it make who is speaking?” and “Where has [this discourse] been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself?” (120).

<sup>18</sup> The circular and debilitating structure I’ve identified within Wallace’s description of reading is what Lauren Berlant would call “cruel optimism.” As she explains, “optimism [is] the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own” (1-2). Optimism is the feeling enabling empathy. All attachments are optimistic in that they encourage the repetition of affective investments in expectation “that *this* time, nearness

to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way” (2). An optimistic attachment becomes cruel when “the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (1). Regardless of its object, “the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world” (24). The dynamic between cruel and ordinary optimism is one Wallace is aware of as well. He makes the distinction between addiction and malignant addiction, noting in terms similar to Berlant’s, that one’s “activity is addictive if one’s relationship to it lies on that downward-sloping continuum between liking it a little too much and really needing it.... But something is *malignantly* addictive if (1) it causes real problems for the addict, and (2) it offers itself as a relief from the very problems it causes (EUP 38). What differentiates Wallace’s work from Berlant’s is that unlike Wallace, Berlant considers the possibility that people who feel attachments to objects of cruel optimism are still in the process of making meaningful lives. For Wallace, “Television is the way it is because people tend to be extremely similar in their vulgar and prurient and dumb interests and wildly different in their refined and aesthetic and noble interests” (37). TV might indeed appeal, as Wallace suggests, to society’s lowest common denominator and may even do so out of dubious economic motives, but people identify with its images, nonetheless and the identifications they form generate new possibilities for remaining optimistic in a world filled with painful uncertainty and instability.

<sup>19</sup> The individual feels lonely because his culture is predominantly ironic. Essentially, this is so because TV allows viewers to sustain a fantasy that their personality is coincident with the world. TV pleases the viewer by promising the fulfillment of a desire for a return to an undifferentiated ego, or a return to the presymbolic moment of the mirror stage. Wallace scholars, Marshall Boswell in particular, have noted the similarity between Wallace’s critique of TV and Lacan’s mirror stage, but have consistently misinterpreted Lacan’s point. Boswell, summarizing Lacan’s argument, suggests that the subject’s acquisition of the symbolic during the mirror stage produces a subject split between itself and an other who “then spends the rest of her life desiring a return to that lost wholeness, that lost one-to-one connection with the (m)other, and this desire takes the form of a series of endless substitutions – material goods, other people, drugs, you name it” (130). He does not, however, connect this moment with the individual’s development of the ability to identify with others or to use symbolic language. For Boswell, the subject’s split formation and its acquisition of language “is a seductive but ultimately alienating idea that can and should be overcome” by an alternative found in Wallace’s turn to sincerity and democracy (128). This analysis rather misses the point of what Lacan has to say about the centrality of language and mediation to subject formation in the mirror stage, namely that the passage from the mirror stage into the symbolic is what allows people to empathize with others, if only partially and out of self-serving interests. Boswell’s characterization of what Wallace wants to do with Lacan sets up his work as advocating what Lacan describes as “an existential psychoanalysis” (*Écrits* 80). In their attempt to find a selfless good deed, an

act not motivated by personal desire, this sort of existential thinking leaves the subject trapped in a series of “impasses” or as Wallace frequently puts it, “double-binds”: “a freedom that is never so authentically affirmed as when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment that expresses the inability of pure consciousness to overcome any situation; a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of sexual relationships; a personality that achieves self-realization only in suicide; and a consciousness of the other that can only be satisfied by Hegelian murder” (80). Boswell’s misreading of Lacan may or may not be Wallace’s own, but his description has been taken as fact within Wallace studies and serves as a key foundation to many readings (for example, David Herring describes his reading as “the clearest delineation of Wallace’s agenda and canon” (10)). The problem, as I see it, that Wallace’s work addresses is not that the subject is alienated in language and needs to be returned to a pre-symbolic state in which sincerity is possible and in which self-gratification would hold no addictive appeal. Instead, TV disingenuously promises viewers that to be other than alienated is possible. Fiction, for Wallace, differs from TV because it confronts readers with the inescapable pain of feeling alienated.

<sup>20</sup> In a similar way, Lee Konstantinou proposes that Wallace moves beyond irony to a post-ironic discourse characterized by people who cannot but believe in personal “ontological convictions” (87). Irony, he suggests, eliminates entirely “the possibility of *belief as such*,” and Wallace’s mode of addressing readers restores balance and order to people’s ability to make sense of the world. One wonders what people managed to find meaningful in the years leading up to Wallace’s amazing intervention if belief itself was entirely impossible during the era of metafiction, which ironically enough coincides with the years of Vietnam War protest and civil rights agitation. If Konstantinou’s claim that the self-referential irony characteristic of metafiction has anything at all sustainable about it, then it represents a pretty once-and-for-all and damning case against the genre. To strip people of the possibility of feeling belief is almost unthinkable monstrous. To believe is to imagine that power extends beyond oneself, that one can be a self in a meaningful way, that existence can happen, that there is worth to living. What a life devoid of the sensation of belief might look like is difficult to imagine because belief, treated as a general affect and not as pertaining to a particular value-system, is fundamental to human experience. It is not possible to be conscious of existence without assuming belief in some sort of order or value. To say that metafiction has the power to deprive even its most devoted readership, let alone a larger public, of such ability is absurd. Take Barth, for example. Although the short stories of his most meta-fictional work, *Lost in the Funhouse*, may be tedious and boring as hell, and even if the thought of re-reading them fills me with a profound feeling of despair, they do not undermine my ability to imagine myself as part of a larger world or to believe that there is something underlying the rules of social order. In fact, despite Barth’s ironic textual gestures, his work, in the end, is about the playful spaces for communication and the surprising kinds of personhood enabled by the art of storytelling. That is, his self-referentiality is all about the ways telling a story like his enables one to go on believing in the face of despair and doubt. A much better target for a critique of his work is of the type of

pleasure, or lack thereof, that can be taken easily from reading his work, but this is one that is much less dramatic, as well as less worthwhile. If you don't like heavy-handed and baroque metafiction, don't read it. But don't blame all of society's ongoing problems on artists' adoption of its communicative tropes. It seems much more advantageous to let people communicate in whatever means feel effective or possible than to disallow them because they make us as individual readers feel displeased with our reading selection. If metafiction does not inspire Konstantinou to want to make the world a better place or fails to grasp the heart of what he believes is holding his world back, there are plenty of other genres out there to engage with. I think this dissatisfaction lies at the heart of his complaint and in his turn to "post-ironic" fiction, but his critique lacks the honesty to present its grounding on taste overtly. Whatever its effect upon belief, for Konstantinou, post-ironic fiction also serves an important political function. Freed from the shackles of irony, post-ironists, he says, become "more concerned with overthrowing the rule of a particular type of person, the ironist, and have far less to say about changing the institutional relations that give rise to this type" (106). Incredibly, Konstantinou presents this putative development as if it were a positive and inspiring one. The post-ironic turn from addressing systemic injustices and oppressive power structures to petty attacks on individuals who symbolically occupy sites representing them along with those individuals who have made a meaningful life out of a relationship to public figures, in addition to its superficiality and cruelty, guarantees a continuation of violence against difference. If true critique involves turning a blind eye to structures of inequality, it is unlikely that such structures will ever change on their own.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Brock argues that, because of the novel's focus on computer viruses and the coincidence of sex with prostitutes, *Transmission* can be read as an AIDS allegory. The parallel between transmission of computer viruses and information and biological pathogens can certainly be made, but to say that this is the primary point of the novel overstates the case (380).

<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, this is also the point of Borges's story, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in which a modern day writer types up *Don Quixote* word for word and claims to be the author of a new text. Jonathan Safran Foer also relies on the individuality of affective experience when he claims to be the author of his *Tree of Codes*, a story he created by physically cutting most of the words out of Bruno Schulz's short story collection, *Street of Crocodiles*.

<sup>23</sup> Where Kunzru identifies Arjun's problem with his simplistic tendency to assume that the chain of events unfolding on screen represent a path to success, a plausible way to structure his own life, Paul Ricoeur argues that the problem of self-identity is a complex of both fidelity to one's word, something like Foucault's care of self, and consistency across time. Narrative mediates between the description of a subject and prescriptive conclusions that make of the description a model for being and identification (114). Narrative fuses the distinction between *idem*, sameness or the consistency across time associated more exclusively with deep attention, and *ipse*, self or awareness of the

ongoing process of embodiment, a sensation that is plastic according to shifting stimuli and which deploys both deep and hyper attention in concert.

<sup>24</sup> See Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics.”

<sup>25</sup> Guy’s drive for constant mutability and futurity evokes what sociologist Aihwa Ong calls “flexible citizenship.” The flexible citizen is an “effect of novel articulations between the regimes of the family, the state, and capital,” informed by an all-encompassing immersion in “the cultural logics of capitalistic accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (4, 6). Ong finds that “in their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena,” flexible citizens “empathize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” to the extent that “flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability” (6, 19). The flexible citizen, while concerned with toppling hegemonic knowledge regimes positing Western cultural and economic superiority, are ultimately driven by this logic of individual accumulation and opportunism, whether in the form of consuming the latest fashion goods or in holding passports to politically and economically favorable nations.

<sup>26</sup> The shift from the novel to the advertisement image, though, does not suggest that people have shifted from affective communities founded on elaborate narrative projects to depthless schizophrenia. Instead, consumers engage with smaller narrative units. As Guy points out at another point in the novel, branding works well because it demands little attention at any single point in time. He calls this property “extreme concision” (207).

<sup>27</sup> If what’s wrong with Guy’s pitch doesn’t speak for itself, see Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>28</sup> Or, that is, that people can be made to feel cosmopolitan. Diogenes, the originator of the term, as Andreas Huyssen points out, was “the plebian outsider inside the walls of the city” (xvii). Guy’s assertion is a good reminder that the feeling of detachment associated with cosmopolitanism is not exclusively the privilege of the wealthy, but also the pain and discomfort that must be borne by those with least recourse to the securities afforded by citizenship.

<sup>29</sup> This is how Kunzru differs. Wallace, despite his forceful calls for compassion, remains cynical in Sloterdijk’s terms. He is always violently committed to the moral idea that Americans need a kind of freedom from pleasure that he can supply by exposing them to the reality of pain. The imposition of freedom through attentiveness to pain is his cynical means to the greater freedom of civic freedom underwriting his critique.

### CHAPTER III

#### HUMANITARIAN INTEREST AND INTERESTING HUMANS

In *Transmission*, Arjun's and Guy's unswerving commitments to the idea that the media defines clear personal, social, and political boundaries result in moments of violence against the self. But unlike Wallace, who blames the proliferation of media networks for social degeneration, Kunzru suggests it is the attempt to live as if media in any form could transmit identity uncorrupted that is the source of frustration, emotional pain, and his novel's dramatic portrayal of economic upheaval. Where both Guy and Arjun are consumed with the belief that paying attention to the media will make a home for themselves in the world, Kunzru's Leela virus offers a vision of a different possibility through its chaotic introduction of noise into the attempts of both to master communication. Its own transmission across global networks scrambles all ordered concepts of identity and boundedness as it swaps, reorders, erases, and creates personal data. The fluidity the virus unleashes is threatening in its unpredictability but also profoundly liberating in its capacity to undermine any claims to the ownership of representation. The emergent cosmopolitan sociality of Kunzru's novel is deeply unstable and cannot be pinned down, owned or contained, but it does not result in the fragmentation or negation of meaningful senses of self for his characters. Meaning still occurs within Kunzru's noisy cosmopolitanism, but it does not converge upon a single narrative arc or branded image. The conspiracy theory Arjun's life becomes is not so much a turn from a corrupt, because commercialized, cosmopolitanism, but rather a critique of the monopolization of attention's value that occurs when sociality is limited

to static narratives and set channels of distribution. His disappearance from the visual poses him as an ethical, cosmopolitan alternative for the production of affect-based solidarities in a world increasingly dominated by American cultural imperialism.

The ethical dilemma for Kunzru's characters results from their shared inability to see other people as endowed with the same degree of complexity and depth of feeling they value in themselves. Instead, each treats the difference of others as a commodity within heavily mediated commercial discourse. The other, for Guy and Arjun, offers insight into the subject, but has no chance to speak for itself. As an ethical text, *Transmission* suggests that the image of the human face cannot be produced as an end in itself. To do so reduces the other to a resource exploited on behalf of the subject's production of affective and social value. Instead, subjectivity must be the byproduct of an already ethical representation or encounter. In this chapter, I look more closely at the question of ethics as it relates to the possibility and necessity of representing foreign encounters. In particular, I am interested in how authors depict scenes of injustice and violence abroad to appeal to humanitarian intervention from within the nation, as a matter of cosmopolitan curiosity, or interest in human difference. To do so, I consider works by Joe Sacco and Aleksander Hemon, both European immigrants to the U.S. concerned with America's knowledge of and intervention in suffering abroad. Although they write in different genres, both are fundamentally invested in the problem of American representations of suffering others as the object of national concern. For both, Americans or people living in America enjoy responsibility for the well being of global humanity that is satisfied through their fascination with the lives of others. My reading

of both authors begins with two interdependent claims. First, ethics necessarily appeals to the cosmopolitan because it attempts to systematize action across time and space; ethics relies upon the universal, the common. Second, cosmopolitan politics involves a constant pursuit of ethicality that continually undermines all systematic articulations of the ethical. My purpose in this chapter is not to declare one author more or less ethical than the other. Instead, by examining liberal ethical systems that base the demand to act on behalf of another in the Levinasian Face, I address the ways the models for representation and engagement within literature about Americans involving themselves in humanitarian interventions abroad complicate America's claim to ethical interest in global others.

### **Encountering the Other: Levinas and Humanitarian Intervention**

As is well known, Immanuel Levinas founds his ethics upon a moment of encounter with difference. When I look upon it, the other's face "gives itself, all its weakness comes through and at the same time its mortality emerges," he says (*Alterity and Transcendence* 104). The very sight of the face, "without recourse, without security, exposed to my look and in its weakness and its mortality," Levinas explains, is the "possibility of murder, that powerlessness of being and that authority that commands me: 'thou shalt not kill'" (104). The ethical response to the sight of the face of the other is a refusal to kill, to spare the other, in its weakness, out of "the fear of all violence and usurpation that my existing, despite the innocence of its intentions, risks committing" (*Entre Nous* 169). Levinas explains that this responsibility is generated by the difference of a transcendent Other that is nakedly visible on any human body prior to the

production of cultural or political identities that give an individual its specificity. The ethical encounter is one of humanitarian compassion in which I am moved by the other's humanity to address its suffering, one commanding an intervention blind to the particular differences of the other. The ethical I, by merit of seeing the other's weakness, assumes responsibility for its well-being equal to that of its own care-of-self. The face of any individual produces the same recognition of the infinite and the same burden that remains in force despite local conditions. Ethical responsibility is a static cosmopolitan ground within Levinas's thought because it is prior to identity.

Levinas suggests that identity is always a reaction to difference. The subject cannot "be" without recourse to some other. However, he bases the ethical upon an imbalanced encounter with a difference that cannot be localized within an entirely powerless other. In this sense, his ethics are always complicit with exclusionary violence toward difference. As he explains, "the relation to the Face is both the relation to the absolutely weak – to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute" – and to the decision to not kill, "the fact that I cannot let the other die alone" (*Entre Nous* 104). Levinas describes this commitment as an absolutely selfless orientation toward the other and his or her needs. To be ethical, he explains, is "[w]ithout knowing how to swim, to jump into the water to save someone [...] to go toward the other totally, without holding back anything of one's self" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 164). On a purely theoretical level, this burden is heroic. The one who views the spectacle of the other's helplessness in the world maintains a relationship of absolute imbalance in order to quiet murderous urges with a feeling of pity. This pity, although resulting in empathy

and compassion, emerges from the perception of the infinite superiority of one's own self. The "thou shalt not kill" only emerges within the face at the moment when the individual chooses to not abandon the other to a situation of helplessness manufactured within the perception of the subject for the sake of self-making.

Ethics depends on the individual's capacity to exercise power over the being of the other. I cannot be ethical unless I imagine the other as in need of my sacrifice. Levinas attempts to account for the power transaction in the ethical moment by suggesting that the ability to look in this way is always mutually shared. One of the things I recognize as I gaze upon the face of the other is that whatever is within the other is also gazing back. "At the outset," Levinas writes, "I hardly care what the other is with respect to me, that is his own business" (*EN* 105). I ought to be willing to risk my comfort to prevent the certain demise of someone else. To jump into the stream, as Levinas would have us, is to assume that one is the only agent capable of addressing the other's needs without first assessing the context. The irreplaceable human value for which I sacrifice my well-being is balanced by the insubstitutability of my own efforts. It may be a selfless act, but drowning myself on my way to rescue the other is not expedient. I am only ethical when an other affects me but I have not yet translated my affection into feeling or language.<sup>1</sup> When two people meet in the way he describes, they have no personal history or basis for grounding their relationship to one another. In this moment, responsibility makes its demand. In the absence of politics, there is no reason not to commit oneself to the good of the other. What the other is, in the moment of pre-political contact, "is above all the one I am responsible for" (105). Levinas's ethics are

cosmopolitan precisely in the way Nussbaum's patriotic reading is as well. Both depend upon the idea that recognition of the human, in Nussbaum's case, or the divine in the human in Levinas's, produces a responsibility to make the conditions by which life becomes possible, and both presume that those differences creating tension between the self and other exist not as productive aspects of human difference, but as irrelevant or suspect noise. The culture and politics that disrupt ethics are treated as dematerialized sources of historical identities. To the contrary, it is necessary to think of our relation to others precisely in material terms. As Cheah points out, material inequalities prevent many of the world's inhabitants from the luxury of looking at America in particular in the way Levinas requires. An other is only other in the sense Levinas describes at the moment of initial encounter, before the establishment of any identity. As Rancière has argued, humanitarian intervention relies upon a deployment of the ethical concept of human rights to justify its political management of global populations. Where democracy requires dissensus, the logic of intervention commands consensus, which he defines as "the attempt to get rid of politics" by transforming "conflicts into problems that have to be sorted out by learned expertise and a negotiated adjustment of interests" ("Who is the Subject" 304, 306). Consensus, Rancière argues, reduces democracy to the production of a particular lifestyle's ongoing visibility.

Within the context of the nation, consensus defends the idea that all members of a particular population equally enjoy the protection of certain rights on the basis of their shared physical and cultural space. The effect that consensus has upon the felt experience of holding rights is to nullify their value. If citizenship guarantees rights and

everyone is a member of some nation, then human rights become the rights of those who have rights, by merit of universal citizenship, or they become the rights of those who have no rights. Human rights, as Rancière points out, are either a tautology or nothing (302). Refusing the logic of consensus, he argues rights ought to be reformulated accordingly: human rights “are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not” (302). The Rights of Man, he argues, only belong to an individual when that individual is capable of enacting them in order to produce dissensus within socio-political space. This is not possible within ethics, he claims, because encounter represents others as always in need of management and protection from misfortune and stupidity. If they have rights it is because the *I* sacrifices its comfort to guarantee them. Within a consensual space of nationalism, humanitarian intervention operates discursively to lodge rights within the humanitarian, generating a primary set of citizen’s rights and ancillary “victim’s rights.” The citizen, who already has rights protected by the nation, has no use for human rights. Human rights pertain only to those who do not have rights. They are the rights of those without rights. But, rights, as Rancière suggests, require the capacity to deploy power in order to exert them. Lacking rights, the subject of human rights has no capacity to claim their right to have rights. From this point, the humanitarian can return the meaningless right to human rights to the victim and feel good about making the world a better place. In order to realize human rights within the logic of intervention, or responsibility, “somebody else has to inherit” them in order to bring about the moment of their enactment (308). This shuttling of rights is what Rancière calls the “right to humanitarian interference.”

Humanitarianism's appropriation of rights through the differentiation between citizen's and human rights opens up a political space through the discourse of ethics, "the infinite conflict of Good and Evil" that closes "all political intervals of dissensus" and holds the other hostage to the lifestyle of the humanitarian (309).

Although Rancière characterizes ethics as a discourse of false dilemma, I believe this claim needs a finer point put upon it. It is not ethics per se that is at issue. Rather, it is a particular usage of the ethical as a justification of power and the application of power in the production of what he would call distributions of the sensible. To associate an individual with an identity, or to claim to know the person, by contrast, reduces his or her infinite potential, guaranteed by the infinite alterity, to a limited totalization emerging from the exercise of power. Despite its contradictions, the ethical system Levinas describes has a great deal of potential for rethinking political solidarity within cosmopolitan spaces exactly because it does not result in a tenable means to claim one's own ethicality. What I find useful about his thought is its performance of how subjectivity comes about and is justified through the economic management of the affects generated through the interdependent acts of paying attention to others, in pursuit of interest, and performing on their behalf to make ourselves interesting to them. By staging the emergence of ethics as a pre-political, pre-subjective, continually repeating moment, Levinas implies that the location of responsibility is not within a particular community defined in terms of power relations as Rancière describes, but rather in our capacity to form and economize on affective bonds between them. We spare the other because its face inspires a particular kind of feeling within us, prior to our commitments

to particular identities or values. Ethics, more so than a propensity for good or evil action, is a sensitivity to others' capacity to affect, or change, oneself and, consequently, to redefine solidarities. It is the cosmopolitan impulse underlying democracy's push toward the demos that continually refutes power in Rancière's descriptions ("Ten Theses on Politics" 32-33). The other is what enables affect to stick to an object and circulate as representation, and our desire to see others as worth caring for extends humanity to them in ways that command restructurings of the sensible. It is this affect, and not the face we associate with the other, that is for Levinas the site of ethical infinity. Or, as Judith Butler notes, "affect is never merely our own, ... [it] is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere" (*Frames of War* 50).

As Levinas himself confessed, his ethics becomes immensely complex with the real-life introduction of the problem of the third person. The third person, someone who is not present at an encounter but who has affected the self or other, disrupts ethics because between three parties, politics has always already intervened. With the third party, I arrive upon a scene with a history.<sup>2</sup> Ethics demands an absolute commitment to all others, but when one intervenes between two others who have a history of interaction, comparisons must be made and comparison economizes our interest in them. As Levinas explains, "it is important to me to know which of the two takes precedence" in the bid for commitment, that is, who is of greater value to my subjective production of my self as the agent of the good (*EN* 104). The comparison this requires demands the formation of totalizing representations of others through which I may know and judge them. It is not quite so simple as declaring allegiance to universal humanity at the

expense of local identity, although the local enters into the ethical formula as the source of all conflict and can be understood as producing useful dissensus. In practice, though, ethics always operates under the assumption of a favorable imbalance of power in which the self occupies a privileged site of discretion and action to produce the interest, with its promise of returns, that motivates responsibility. While it encourages feeling for the suffering of others, it does so in order to consolidate the self's right to manage the rights of others. Whichever other most effectively and positively moves the self becomes the object of ethical care and the recipient of the various sorts of economic capital and political legitimization that accompany it. As a consequence, others in need of care must perform on behalf of their humanitarian benefactors in ways that confirm the legitimacy of the imbalanced relation of power between them.

To be ethical is at the same time to be capable of representing or imagining the other as utterly dependent upon oneself and to never entertain the possibility that one appears as this evil already present in the eyes of the other. The ethical self cannot see that seeing the other as abject and dependent deprives that other of the capacity to produce social capital of any value to itself. The other for whom I am responsible cannot be my equal. Although the *I* of the encounter has the power to represent the other as utterly dependent upon its agency and mercy, this *I* also depends entirely on the other's persistence to supply it with ethical value, without which it would cease to exist. Levinas writes, "[t]he *I* as hostage to the other human being is precisely called to answer for this death" prefigured in the "thou shalt not kill" (*EN* 167). When framed as the source of absolute responsibility, the face-to-face encounter becomes a risk that one

must manage through the assumption of responsibility for global effects, or, in Levinas's own terminology, systematization within some totality. This distribution of risk differs from Ulrich Beck's observation that we live in a world of globally shared risk, which simply recognizes the arbitrariness of boundaries divvying up its ownership and the reality of environmental events that span them, or Butler's similar suggestion that we recognize the differential exposure to precariousness that global politics institutes.<sup>3</sup> Although for Levinas, risk moves beyond any boundaries, and we are all subject to its effects, his ethical responsibility charges us with the task of claiming the total right to its management. Furthermore, it does so in order to produce a beneficial affective state in the self – the satisfaction of mastering evil with personal benevolence and sacrifice through the production of interest at the site of the other's abject embodiment. By continually distancing itself from the political and cultural, Levinasian ethics obscures the labor involved in making the other into a decontextualized individual. To perceive oneself as ethical is to be unethical, as to do so assumes absolute control over the attention economy encounter creates between self and other.

If Levinas's ethics does not offer a way to behave ethically, it is less objectionable as an account of how power functions in the production of hegemony.<sup>4</sup> I approach Levinas's system of totality and infinity in secular and materialist terms rather than the more traditional theological reading ascribed to it. The infinite is not some thing that actually is, or it at least is not accessible in any way that could be claimed to justify an order of power. Infinity is the untroubled state for which hegemony, a totalization, strives. As Levinas explains, totality is “the integration of aspects [of

humanity] that confirm one another” (AT 44). Totality naturalizes a particular reading of the human as a justification for a form of power. As it naturalizes power, it also effaces the transfer of value from other to self to maintain the dependence of the other upon the self. In fact, the reverse is the case: the self can only allow itself to exist if the other recognizes its own need to be taken responsibility for, by reducing itself to the object of the self’s interest. Confronted with its own exercise of power, a totality “does not explode,” or cease to exert influence over the social, Levinas claims. Instead, each “moment of breaking open” that occurs as totality encounters human excess or supplementarity “immediately reconstitutes the totality in another direction” (44). Power always reconsolidates, or as Deleuze and Guattari argue, every deterritorialization ends in some other reterritorialization. Totality is always provisional, never total. The infinite is no more than the desire for a natural state of being that effaces the exertion of power enabling a particular discursive system to regulate social space. As a consequence, the infinite should not be the aim of Levinasian ethics because the infinite is a denial of the appropriation of abstract value from the other’s body on which ethics depends.

Edward Said’s discussion of Palestinian-Israeli relations provides a good illustration of the breakdown of Levinas’s drive to infinity. Orientalism is discourse structured around the idea that any Westerner can become an expert on Asian cultures while Asians themselves are incapable of knowing or representing themselves to the world. In the context of Orientalism, Westerners have a responsibility to preserve, learn about, and communicate Arab culture on behalf of Arabs who cannot do these things for

themselves. As is the case of Orientalist discourse generally, in twentieth century British descriptions of Palestine, which set the stage for its representation in global discourse, “‘Arabs’ were always being represented, never able to speak for themselves,” Said writes (*The Question of Palestine* 25). A big part of the problem for him is that the British represented Palestinians as savage and uncivilized, and thus, as both interesting to British individuals looking for no more than the thrill of adventure and in need of British management. Since they cannot reliably speak for themselves, Arabs cannot object to British characterizations. The British claimed responsibility for the Palestinian condition and managed Palestinians as if they had no investment of their own in the community, even as if they were not really there, Said claims (85). The conjunction of British imperialism and its commitment to Zionism further complicated the issue. Said describes Zionism as mediating between the British and Arabs by positioning itself as a liberalized or Westernized East, claiming the right to produce Orientalist commentary on its own environment. This enabled an alignment between Israeli and British imperialism. If Israelis are really “like” Westerners, then an encounter in the Middle East becomes one simply between Westerners and Arabs rather than Israelis and Arabs in which the West intervenes. The effect of this system of identification, Said points out, was that it became impossible to distinguish between a critique of Israeli violence and anti-Semitism. The force of the positive association between Israelis and liberal values emerging from the history of Orientalist discourse about Palestinians and the feeling of responsibility toward Jews grounded in the negative association with Holocaust atrocity creates a political context in which America is vested with authority over the region but

in which it can make no distinction between Nazi violence against Jews and Palestinian defense of homeland. In this light, any violence toward Jews is inexcusable because of the visibility of their traumatic history.

The critic's duty, Said writes, is to "make distinctions, to produce differences where at present there are none," or to insist on the significance of the identity of the person being faced as responsibility is claimed (59). The critic refuses responsibility at the level of encounter with the face because to claim responsibility is to deny the other the potential to produce value apart from human interest. Even between two individuals, history and politics have already intervened. His critique of the U.S.'s unconditional support for Israel over Palestine suggests an ethics of political difference. Butler's discussion of America's Iraq and Afghan wars further clarifies this position. She explains that the function of criticism, when it addresses political conflict, is to reveal the ways in which political discourse frames what is representable within public space. Politics conditions a public's capacity to recognize a spectrum of humanity as living and another as not. What she calls frames of "recognizability" are "the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition" (*FW* 5). Recognition of an actual person as endowed with human worth only follows conditioning according to normative schemes of recognizability, that is, inculturation within history and politics. What we are able to recognize as a human face capable of inspiring the ethical moment is a political construction of humanity that may or may not be limited according to categories of race, gender, nationality, political orientation, religion, or other ideas.

Butler provides the illuminating example of American journalism's depiction of Afghan women liberated from life beneath the burkha following U.S. military "intervention." On the cover of the *New York Times*, she recalls, the faces of these young women declared their exposure "an act of liberation, an act of gratitude to the U.S. military, and an expression of a pleasure that had become suddenly and ecstatically permissible" (*Precarious Life* 142). As the images are framed within a narrative of Levinasian ethical responsibility driven by the face, the *Times* story reassures American readers that their violence is justified by the very increase in visibility it accords these women. We can see them, and thus feel for their suffering, and at the same time, feel good about our military presence in Afghanistan because of their smiling, unveiled faces. However, the story was, precisely as a story, staged to produce an effect. It was "to the camera" and an American viewer, "made ready to see the face," that the faces of these women, made to be the Levinasian face of the Other, were "finally bared." As an element of political narrative, the face becomes "a symbol of successfully exported American cultural progress," and, Butler concludes, effectively conceals the suffering at the heart of the Levinasian face because "we saw and heard through that face no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life" (142). It suggests only that American intervention into conflict abroad has resulted in the successful management of precarity, that the war is an act of responsibility toward Arab women that enables them to claim the economic and political value of the human interest their faces exude.

The logical conclusion of Levinas's formulation of justice is that to intervene in conditions of suffering or inequality is ethical. We jump into the lake even if we cannot swim. If I perceive injustice abroad and determine to take action, I behave ethically towards the Other on whose behalf I act. As the history of British and American Orientalism show, however, the act of managing others' precarity is often no more than a convenient political excuse to justify the pursuit of self-interest. The idea of universal and unconditional responsibility in Levinasian ethics is a rhetorical means to excuse oneself from injustices of global significance. By remaining in the position of the ethical observer, the I of ethics claims the infinite status of humanitarian good. The ethical humanitarian acts selflessly and self-sacrificially. Its figure cannot be the center of humanitarianism's production of human value, but to become humanitarian, the self must monopolize the abstract value produced in the encounter. Humanitarianism's disavowed economic structure allows clearly unethical acts and oversimplified interventions to claim the appearance of ethical grounding. It is necessary to consider the additional possibility that the viewing subject, observing struggles beyond his or her home, is implicated and that responsibility involves a reassessment of domestic practices or political abstinence. The ethical I needs to scrutinize its own desire to intervene and the consequences of assuming a totalizing responsibility for the well-being and, ultimately, the sovereignty of others.

I want to consider one final comment from Levinas that complicates the use of his ethics of the face within neoliberal humanitarian discourse. In "The *I* and the Totality," he makes a distinction between being that simply lives and one that thinks and

consequently between feeling and thinking, empathy and representation. (*EN* 13-14). Being that simply lives is “ignorant of the exterior world,” its “senses bring it nothing, or only sensations,” or affects (14). The living being has a self, finds its existence profoundly meaningful and important, but within the field of ethics, is problematic because the living being is “a consciousness not concerned with situating itself in relation to an exteriority, which does not comprehend itself as part of a whole.” The living being, Levinas suggests, sees the world as an extension or representation of itself, as if there were no boundary delimiting the ability to unproblematically act within space on the one hand, and to claim responsibility for actions that affect others’ well-being on the other. He remarks that for this living being, its “Same” determines “every other, without the Other ever determining the Same” (14). The thinking being is one who reacts to the affects that inspire murderous rage and, through a process of affective labor, transmutes feeling to a recognition of difference that paves the way for sociality in any form.<sup>5</sup> In this way, his ethics comes upon the political management of human rights.

I see Levinas posing a challenge to the logic of consensus in his discussion of living being. The living as that which reduces experience to fact forecloses dissensus through its denial of the value of affect. Levinas returns the idea of living to nationalism with global aims, noting ironically that the paradigmatic expression of simply living is American patriotism transcribed upon global politics. “The living being,” he writes, “lives beneath the sign of liberty or death” (*EN* 14). The humanitarian collects factual data about global suffering and assumes the responsibility to dole out either possibility. Turning to Sacco, we see the production of a ground of factual data through which the

right to intervention can be claimed through journalism's reduction of both Palestinian and Israeli experience to sound bites and visual imagery traded on a market based upon human interest.

### **Human Interest and the Image in Sacco's *Palestine***

It may be easy to assume that graphic narrative, because its *raison d'être* is the incorporation of visual representation within storytelling, intervenes in the field of ethics. It is also tempting to conclude that because comics journalism, a genre single-handedly pioneered by Joe Sacco, shows the faces of suffering individuals in the midst of conflict areas it is implicitly ethical. In *Understanding Comics*, which has become the foundation for comics studies, Scott McCloud makes the impassioned case that comics, because of their tendency to represent humanity in iconic form, are also an inherently cosmopolitan medium (29-36). He draws a parallel between the automatic facility with which readers identify human characteristics in simple drawings and everyday objects, for example the slots in an electric outlet, which resemble eyes and a mouth, to the political project of empathizing with people different from oneself. Further, he suggests comics are necessarily engaged in ethical work because they require active imaginative labor from their readers to fill in action between the cuts from one frame to another (65-8).<sup>6</sup> As he understands them, comics make readers figuratively complicit with the actions they depict. When a murder occurs between frames the reader must imagine how it unfolds, and this requires serious ethical thinking on the part of writers as well.<sup>7</sup> Building on McCloud's work, Adam Rosenblatt and Andrea Lunsford argue that comics present a unique way to destabilize the myth that journalism and journalists are objective

and distanced observers by forcing its readers to visually identify with foreign people and places (69). For them, “comics journalism is a hybrid form that uses images and words in sequenced panels to take readers directly into the situations” it depicts (70). Likewise, Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven argue that “graphic narratives usefully challenge the transparency of realism,” because, “the reader of graphic narratives is not trapped in the dark space of the cinema” unlike the frequently discussed “passive female spectator following and merging helplessly with the objectifying gaze of the camera” (770). Elsewhere, Chute argues that graphic narratives are inherently suited to ethical interventions because they can “map a life, not only figuratively but literally” (109).

While comics may be more immediate than a text-only report, the push to unmediated empathy Rosenblatt and Lunsford and Chute find suggests they view the medium as a means of converting the difference between experiencing suffering and witnessing it through representation into universally affecting moments, or cosmopolitanizing them, even if this is done with good intentions. While it may be true that comics do speak powerfully to people on the level of generalization, I wonder whether the form of identification, and the sympathetic knowledge readers produce as a result, that come from their looking at the wholly abstracted cartoonish image of a circle with two dots and a line translates to a more effective politics of representation across difference. Its tendency toward generalization does, as McCloud suggests, allow readers to fill in a character’s features with their own, but the assumption of identity reduces difference to the visual. As a genre addressing non-fiction and serious matters, comics journalism presents readers with visualizations of conflict and suffering in

addition to the interviews and commentary found in ordinary print journalism. However, it is important to bear in mind that a physical face itself is not the ethical Face, but an image subject to politicized representational schemas. The represented face always directs attention to the production of value and value always accrues to power situated within some totality. Instead, the genre walks a fine and often destabilized line between ethical concern for its subject matter and spectacle, sensation, and propaganda. This tension is especially evident in Sacco's first major work, *Palestine*, which deconstructs his journalistic and egotistical urge to represent a conflict and a more altruistic and humanistic one to know the people involved. In this section, I argue that *Palestine* critiques the desire to render the suffering of others a spectacle from which American consumers can develop a feeling of ethical responsibility and in that way also critiques the economization of humanitarian interest by situating comics journalism in an uncomfortable space between McCloud's exuberant utopianism and Beller's pessimistic Marxism. Sacco's graphic depictions of his own process of researching his book calls into question our ability to situate ourselves in the position of the ethical mediator between others or as capable of assuming responsibility for someone else. Instead, I read Sacco's meta-journalistic commentary as a destabilization of the visual logic behind Levinasian ethics as the site for national political identity formation.

The visual, which is the defining feature of the graphic narrative, as it is situated within the discourse of humanitarian intervention, short-circuits the production of the Levinasian ethical or thinking being back into what he calls merely living being. The discourse of humanitarian intervention does so by saturating the sensory field with an

overwhelming drive to know the other within a regulated representation from which one can thereby confirm oneself as the possessor of extra-human rights. The sight of the Other, and intervention's discursive framing of the other as a victim pleading for rights, constructs the consumer or viewer of its discourse as not pitiable, not abject, and not similarly devoid of both actual rights or the capacity to possess them. From the perspective of intervention, such knowing produced through activist viewing constitutes cosmopolitan patriotism. Its outlook upon the other held at a remove is requisite for the assumption of complete management of the well-being of the global other, even if only within the discourse of national fantasy that justifies the practice of intervention itself.

*Palestine*, Sacco's first work of comics journalism, documents his visit to the disputed area over a period of two months during 1991 and 1992. It chronicles the end of the first Intifada with the hope, Sacco explains in the book's foreword, of raising awareness of the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel as "an issue of international law and basic human rights" (vi). Sacco approaches the political problem his work addresses as one of a lack of cosmopolitan knowledge on the part of his American readership. If he can make his subjects interesting, he can inspire learning that can then sustain political and economic investments in international reform. While the book does effectively raise awareness of Palestinian humanity and the justice of their cause, it is not simply a matter of witnessing atrocity or of making a case for international intervention. Instead, as I have already suggested, Sacco develops a subtle critique of the impulse to claim the right to do both on the part of Western journalists, politicians, and ordinary citizens even as he continues to make such a claim for himself.

Sacco's engagement with journalism and humanitarianism is complex, but I think of it in terms of two major thematic elements running across his more specific topical encounters. First, Sacco consistently depicts himself as a figure for journalistic practice and, second, as dependent on foreigners as a fish out of water guest.

As a journalist, Sacco is in pursuit of renown and comments on his intent to transform the objects of his investigation into economically productive spectacular imagery with which his audience may feel sympathy. In effect, when he identifies his capacity to make Palestine into an arresting object of interest it becomes a valuable source of cultural prestige. This prestige is Sacco's source of the material well being and makes the boundary between himself and Palestinians meaningful throughout his humanitarian appeal – he is an authority on the human condition and on Palestine. Sacco's representation of himself is one of the most immediately recognizable aspects of his work. In a ubiquitously cited comment explaining his aesthetic, Sacco explains that when he began work on *Palestine*, his style was “a bit rubbery and cartoony” because that was “the only way [he] knew how to draw” (Gibson). “It became clear,” he goes on to explain, “that [he] had to push it toward a more representational way of drawing,” but as he did so, he also intentionally neglected to “update” himself. He is almost always shorter than his companions, hidden behind thick, opaque glasses, and generally dripping profusely with nervous sweat. All in all, he depicts himself in an unflattering way, as physically awkward and as narcissistic in his hasty judgments of the people he is on a mission to humanize. The easiest way to interpret these gestures is as a form of self-deprecating irony, taking the American abroad as its critical target. Indeed, the most

common reading of Sacco's Joe character takes his grotesque cartoonishness as a device by which he critiques American practices that readers might otherwise reject.<sup>8</sup> However, this is not the rhetorical limit of what the Joe character does for the author. Sacco can maintain the requisite distance essential to his status as an observer precisely because he does so frequently depict himself as the inverse of the typical cosmopolitan tourist, discomforted, shocked, even reviled by the sight of his Palestinian other rather than reveling in his consumption of their image. In these moments, his response performs the Levinasian encounter, moving from an initial desire to kill to the repression of selfish desires and the claiming of responsibility. Critics are right to note that Sacco's use of cartoonish anger does encourage identification, but that identification does more than advance the text's political critique.

Second, he represents himself as a guest within Palestinian space. Sacco is continually undermined in his efforts to uncover Palestinian experience by his utter dependence on the hospitality of his hosts and interpreters. At the same time, though, his journalistic self intervenes in representations of foreign hospitality to turn the tables and restore the balance of the distribution of rights back to his favor. The social capital the text produces and that Sacco desires is only his so long as it is evident that it is his work, his unique presence and perspective, that makes Palestine comprehensible and, more importantly, interesting to readers.

Sacco's story opens with him chatting up hotel receptionists in Egypt while he impatiently awaits the arrival of his travel visa. The conversation he has with Shreef and Taha, the two clerks, vacillates between forlorn stories of love and impassioned

outbursts of politics. The individual attention Sacco gives to each exemplifies the representational strategy through which Sacco the journalist would create an appeal to intervention through metonymy and sympathy. Both men want Sacco to perceive them as figures for a larger Muslim community. Shreef, “a Muslim in love,” tells of his extravagant courtship of a married woman. He loves her deeply, he explains, and the six months wages he spent on a lavish date are no object to him. When Taha objects to the absurdity of the story, Shreef appeals to Sacco as “a Westerner,” because this sort of love is something all Westerners understand, and further defuses Taha’s anger by listing his favorite English rock bands (2). This comment appeals to Sacco for understanding by evoking the idea of Romantic love. It also conflates British culture with American into an aggregate Westernized cosmopolitanism. Shreef’s suggestion that Sacco, as a Westerner, would understand his plight where Taha, a fellow Muslim and Egyptian, would not, implies a degree of coincidence between his values and Sacco’s. Although different, Shreef makes himself feel not so alien for Westerners; they share the same non-threatening pursuits. Shreef strategically accepts an Orientalist framing of Egypt and repositions himself within that frame as a Western-amenable access point that makes him of attentive value to Sacco and his Western readers. He is interesting because readers can relate to his hopeless consumeristic infatuation. His appeal is one of outright sympathy, which, as Foucault observes, “is an instance of the *Same* so strong and so insistent that it will not rest content to be merely one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another” (*The Order of Things* 23). Sympathy through cosmopolitan consumption in this instance is a

totalization effacing the difference of the Arabic third person. Shreef's claim to Westernization refuses the chaotic energy of Egypt as a foreign space, represented in the busy street scene filling the top half of the book's opening page and in Taha's more intimately violent face. By depicting Shreef in terms of easily identifiable Western attributes, Sacco opens the possibility that while "there are Muslims and there are Muslims," in actuality, Muslims are not so different from his readers (1). Not surprisingly, then, Shreef responds to Sacco's mention of his Israeli visa calmly and rationally. He evades the difficult politics of the topic, claiming "I have no problem with Israelis, they are like Europeans," which of course also means like Sacco and his readers (2). He is a Muslim Sacco's readers can get on board with.

Ultimately what Sacco suggests Shreef wants out of his performance is not for Sacco to understand his pining for the married woman, but instead to feel sympathetic for all Muslims, whose problems and interests are like those of Americans. Although not overt, his performance is political. Sacco calls attention to Shreef's appeal to Western consumerism in order to generate interest and to clear the ground for his own depiction of Palestinians suffering atrocity at the hands of Israelis who do continually dwell on militant politics rather than consumable culture in Sacco's text. This strategy is more or less typical of humanitarian journalism. It depicts the local subject in terms of some cosmopolitan common that forms the basis for appeals to political solidarity. Sacco, however, complicates this appeal structure with the interruption of Shreef's companion, Taha. Where Shreef works within the text as a means of smoothing over difference through cosmopolitan consumerism, Taha insists upon the particularity of

local identity through discourse on politics. When Sacco mentions he is waiting for his visa, Taha explodes in a violent outburst, screaming, “I would smash Israel,” as he pounds the table with his enormous fist (2). Where Shreef appears calm and pensive, Sacco renders Taha absurd and irrational. His face is distended with rage and globs of saliva fly from his mouth. By contrast, both Shreef and Sacco are united in their alarm at Taha’s anger. Although Shreef makes his case using absurd clichés and outdated cultural references and Taha is an informed speaker, in this moment Sacco reduces the latter to a metonym for the Arab rage with which his readers are also familiar. His cartoonish representation corresponds to a second element of humanitarian journalism. Where Sacco suggests we want to get to know Shreef and can include him within our idea of humanity, Taha is alienating. His anger at a comment Shreef is willing to overlook positions him as that which justifies intervention. The short exchange suggests that readers can support the cosmopolitan socialization of Muslims of Shreef’s variety by more actively paying attention to Palestine.

As a composite interaction, one between Sacco, Shreef, and Taha simultaneously, *Palestine*’s opening scene illustrates how people are reduced to metonymic sites of sympathy and antagonism in order to sustain violent relationships, in this instance operating within discourses of tolerance and cosmopolitan interest in popular culture. At the same time, it also suggests a refusal of the humanitarian journalistic paradigm through the unpredictable intrusion of a more violent form of violence. While either moment, Shreef’s nod to cultural intimacy or Taha’s refusal to assimilate to a Western vision of the Middle East, on their own are reductive and

exploitative, Sacco's juxtaposition challenges journalistic generalizations about the Middle East. The first instance is a performance of something visibly sympathetic, almost tailored to a Western audience. However, Shreef's appeal to common consumption habits fails to suture Egyptian and Western being seamlessly because of the intrusion of Taha's particular politics. Shreef's performance requires no commitment on the part of potential readers. They can identify with him on the basis of shared feelings for music or narrative conventions without thinking about where Shreef lives or what other sorts of values he might hold. Shreef poses himself as an object for identification without history or politics. Although represented as a unique person, Shreef is a figure for generic values. His appeal attempts to merge Egypt and Islam with America and thus to eliminate the problem of the third person within the ethical decision. By feeling sympathy for his humanity in contrast with Taha's violence, Sacco justifies the desire to manage his right to be. As a generic person, Shreef becomes a figure of the human in human rights. But, to read him generously, he is also engaging in a more subtle and self-conscious act of attentiveness to Western perceptions of Arab men, like Taha in order to undercut the humanitarian justification for intervention against inflexible, violent fundamentalists.

Taha, as the third voice of the passage, refuses the work of sympathy or consensus in which Sacco and Shreef are jointly engaged. His violence does not allow the two subjects to merge into some indistinguishable whole and is not content with the reduction to a sort of bare humanity that is the subject of rights management. On this point, Butler makes the interesting observation that nonviolence does not mean an

absolute abstention from violence, but rather a particular way of engaging the ineluctable possibility for violence in order to minimize its effects upon a loved object or context (*FW* 178). As a challenge to Western representations of Islam and Arabic people, Taha's outburst disrupts the sympathy Sacco elicits from Shreef. We could assume responsibility for the latter because he invites us into a sympathetic relationship in which there is no third party. We have the same deep values and commitments and our differences are superficial. Taha, however, forces readers, along with Sacco, to consider our own politics by refusing to play along politely, or by persistently being the Levinasian third person. For Butler, the ideal instance of nonviolence is not the peaceful compliance we see in Shreef, which ultimately allows for violent management of others, but what she describes as "a social and political struggle to make rage articulate and effective – the carefully crafted 'fuck you'" (*FW* 182). This is also the function of the third person in the Levinasian ethical encounter. The presence of the third person continually explodes the ethical *I*'s production of totality. Where Shreef would simply allow himself to become the object of Sacco's journalistic fantasy in the hope of attracting a less oppressive intervention, Taha intervenes on his own behalf in order to frustrate the claiming of responsibility on Sacco's part. His "I would smash Israel," while not quite the Butlerian well-crafted statement, nevertheless has the effect she describes of recirculating political specificity in a way that commands careful attention.

Sacco follows up this initial vignette with a short section titled "Blind Dates," building upon Shreef's appeal to romance, in which he elaborates on the production of sympathy with a self-deprecating depiction of himself as a guest within Palestine.

Ordinarily the relationship of hospitality places burdens of generosity and responsibility upon the host. Sacco's depiction of an ordinary encounter with a Palestinian man, however, shows him challenging this situation. Given that Palestine does not have internationally recognized sovereignty, Sacco balks at the man's desire to know what he thinks of "*his* country" (4). While the scene depicts the anonymous man welcoming Sacco, making him comfortable, and serving him tea, Sacco's response reorients it along humanitarian lines. By refusing the other's sovereignty from the outset, Sacco cancels the man's capacity to extend hospitality. Now Sacco can occupy the frame as an international, or cosmopolitan, operative lending credibility to the eventual production of what the man assumes the capacity to give. The gift of hospitality he cannot give, if it were extendible, would be one of Sacco's own making anyways – it would be a return, not a gift. His gesture reduces Palestinians to exiles or refugees within contested areas, and as such, to precisely that sort of victim incapable of enacting the right to have rights autonomously. Instead, Sacco, as the humanitarian journalist, is in a position to return such a right by humoring his Palestinian host's repeated inquiry "what *do* you think of my country?" (5). He thinks of himself as "gracious ... a perfect guest of Palestine" (4). As it appears in this scene, such a guest is one willing to absorb the ingratiating, valueless attentions of his host of refugees.

A perfect guest, Sacco, like Shreef, initially evades the political, commenting instead on the beauty of the land. Finally, he agrees to humor the man and notes that "this occupation thing looks pretty harsh," reflecting that this comment hits the man's "nail on the head" (5). Cosmopolitan subjectivity here can only be claimed by those

with rights guaranteed by national attachments. Since Sacco alone possesses these, or recognizes only his right to them, he alone can engage in the cosmopolitan practice of hospitality. His attention secures the position of the Palestinian man living within humanitarian liminal space. As it unfolds, the interaction becomes one in which Sacco extends the generosity of his interest to his Palestinian victim, humoring him with his attention. Sacco assumes that he can lead his hosts around through superficial comments in order to give them what they want, a political platform from which to alert others of their suffering. He frames his presence as allowing Palestinians to feel as if they are welcoming him into their space, extending the right of hospitality to a guest. In effect, he permits them to feel as if they enjoy his own State's rights by directing his humanitarian attention toward them. This sleight of hand reverses the claim to ownership of political space. Sacco understands himself, as journalist, as the true inhabitant and giver of hospitality by permitting his host to welcome him and by feigning interest in his host's everyday business. His initial investment of attention in the plight of the people pays off when Sacco's growing audience performs for him exactly what he needs to sell his story. His Palestinian acquaintances become "real-life adaptation of all those affidavits I've been reading," "up close and almost personal!" (10).

Sacco interrupts his account of interviewing Palestinians in Jerusalem with a comparison to the way American journalism creates sympathy for Israeli individuals through appeals to human interest, something human Palestinians apparently lack. He presents the case of media coverage of Leon Klinghoffer's murder in 1985. Klinghoffer,

a disabled Jewish American retiree, was murdered and dumped into the Mediterranean by members of the Palestinian Liberation Front, who had hijacked the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* to demand the release of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. Sacco recalls the event as sparking a passionate conversation with Claudia, a half-Iraqi woman with whom he was infatuated at the time. Although both share a passionate commitment to Palestinian sovereignty, Sacco explains to her that the visibility the international press creates around Klinghoffer constitutes something like an unethical intrusion of the third person that exists as a negative contrast to the interruption Taha makes upon the earlier hotel scene. The American media, Sacco explains, wants “human interest” (6). Unlike someone like Taha, or any other Palestinian victim, Klinghoffer is a sympathetic figure for the media. “We get,” Sacco says “the full profile,” down to “what he put on his Corn Flakes,” until “he sounds like the guy next door who borrows your ladder.” The point of the anecdote for the younger Sacco recalled in the scene is to justify to his love interest why America does not act, why Palestine is not visible within the national consciousness as an object of ethical concern. He would like to appear compassionate, but remain uncommitted to the cause in any real way. He can safely share a commitment to corn flakes without addressing touchy matters of sovereignty, torture, or ethnic violence. No such common ground exists with Palestinians, who Americans must meet at the site of difficult topics. Klinghoffer, although an American, was also Jewish, and as such became grounds for representations of Palestinians as universally against Jewish existence. The conjunction of his Jewishness with his Americanness unified American sympathy with Israeli nationalism against the PLF and Palestinian resistance more

generally. To attack a helpless man like Klinghoffer was to attack an ordinary American, possibly like the reader or watcher of media. His murder, then, became a personal act that made the Palestinian conflict a threat to Americans rather than a political one against unjust international practice.

Sacco's comments are not simply limited to teasing out the way national media coverage of international events shapes sympathy. He further undercuts journalistic motivations by depicting himself as speaking out of a self-interested desire to manipulate Claudia's feelings. As he explains international politics to her, his implication is that Israelis are more effective at attracting the attention of Americans because they are able to frame their suffering in a gentle, human way whereas Palestinians insist on voicing their right to exist violently.<sup>9</sup> The problem is that Americans are able to know Klinghoffer as someone who exists within the boundaries of their own imagined community, defined in terms of safe consumer choices. The ability to imaginatively place Klinghoffer within our own home, eating our breakfast, is the site of journalistic human interest. Israelis buy and eat the same things as Americans and therefore need no special mediation in order to become approachable to American consumers. Palestinians and the Egyptian Arabs Sacco depicts live in a wholly alien world that has to be conditioned for receptivity through this narrative about consumption in order to sustain later dialogue about politics. This politics, however, is sustainable only in the absence of any call for solidarity. As Sacco concludes, "Americans won't care about the problems of Palestinians when Americans get killed in these terrorist attacks" (7). The political action he initially recognizes returns to unjustifiable terrorism when it infringes upon his

sense of personal safety and distance. Sympathy emerges not from the significant political appeals at the heart of Palestinian rhetoric, but rather, on the mundane consumer choices, the brand of corn flakes Klinghoffer ate, or again, the list of bands Shreef rattles off. We do not know Palestinians as like us because they do not construct a visible image of familiar accessories to living. The appeal to Israel confirms an American totalization of the scene of global politics, or its consensus, whereas Palestinians challenge this hegemony.

When Claudia is not sympathetic to his explanation that Americans don't care about Palestinians because Palestinians just don't know how to frame their pleas in amenable terms, Sacco responds with peevish rage, decrying her privately as a "bitch" and a "terrorist groupie" (7). His depiction of his own uncontrollable rage creeping into his representation of the scene reveals the essential narcissism of the journalistic circuit of production. As an American, Sacco wants to enjoy the comfort of the assumption that violence is contained elsewhere, where he may or may not take it as the object of his fascination. When commitment to a cause poses the threat of actual consequence or the fantasy of personal romance is disrupted by political difference, he claims, both interest and the public of ethical concern evaporate. Sacco is only interested in appearing compassionate and committed so long as there is the possibility of romance with Claudia. When the conversation ends without an invitation to her hotel room, Sacco reverts to feeling for the object of American media. The capacity to selectively focus attention according to the potential for pleasurable return, or interest, is the basis for the international management of rights, and is conditioned by its object's ability to appear

sympathetic in the face of suffering. That this situation is “unfair” Sacco freely acknowledges (7). Nonetheless, he confesses that he “couldn’t get the taste” of Middle Eastern terrorist spectacle out of his mouth. “Terrorism,” he writes “is the bread Palestinians get buttered on,” a metaphor that again prepares them for the pleasure of foreign consumers. As a matter limited to terrorism, the problem of pain within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is continually returned to its effects on those with legitimate sovereignty. Klinghoffer is an American victim of indiscriminate violence and what Sacco remembers are only those events in which Westerners were involved: the airliners that “went sky high in the desert, ... Munich and the blown up athletes, the bus and airport massacres” (7). Sacco concludes, “sure I had sympathy for a homeland lost, but what were the problems of Palestinians to me next to Klinghoffer, who ate Brand X corn flakes and probably borrowed my ladder” (8). When Palestinians even make the news, they are bodies or masked men, never faces, and certainly never consumers of corn flakes. He returns from this excursus to the outcome of his enactment of inverted hospitality. Shaking the grateful hand of his Palestinian host, Sacco thinks, “I will alert the world to your suffering!” and “Mission Accomplished! Told you I was good at this” (10).<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the passage as a whole, because it so insistently undercuts Sacco’s expressed journalistic purposes and aspirations, does frame his interviewees compassionately, as victimized by his inquisitive presence and his desire to monetize their suffering into marketable objects of human interest.

Sacco’s meta-journalistic practice reveals his failure to create the sympathetic, human interest content he is after and instead results in something that may actually be

more ethical that is capable of inspiring deeper empathy. It also challenges his capacity to take responsibility for the text he ultimately creates and for the human rights of the people he depicts. It is their generosity and patience with his shortcomings that allow Sacco to get a glimpse at something human and interesting going on in the refugee camps he visits. Jabalia, the largest and poorest camp in Palestine, was also the site of some of the most intense political violence during the first Intifada and as such is an essential location for Sacco's account. In the chapters of the book that cover his investigation there, he sets up a complex tension between the good work of documenting conditions in order to accomplish the work of alerting the world, his own motives for doing so, and the effect the production of his humanitarian text has on the people with whom he comes into contact. Throughout his time in Palestine, Sacco works closely with local contacts to arrange meetings, translate, and contextualize the finer points of the conflict's history, but he is especially dependent upon them in the camp. Sacco's depiction of his reliance upon his sources, for both shelter and contact with the local people, calls into question his ability to "accomplish" good within the Palestinian community and the extent to which he is responsible for the representation of its people he produces in his comics.

Although he describes his relationship with several sources over the course of the book, Sacco worked most extensively with a well-educated man, Sameh. After teaching philosophy in Yemen, Sameh returned to Palestine to help his family and has been unable to find employment since. Nonetheless, when Sacco meets him, he is busy working as a volunteer. Although without income of his own, he helped set up a

rehabilitation and education center serving deaf and mentally disabled children within the camp. The disabled are typically marginalized even in affluent societies, and as Sameh relates, the circumstances in the camp are even worse. According to his count, “only five people in Gaza work in the field of special education, and none have specialized training” (206). Sameh’s mission, like Sacco’s own, is to foster a “humane understanding of the handicapped” through a “professional program.” Even though the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) has nominated him for a training course in Israel, he cannot attend until he receives Israeli permission to leave the camp. In the meantime, Sameh continues to devote himself to the disabled children of the center, which “can’t even afford a wage for him or its six teachers” (207). Despite the futility of the situation Sacco describes, it seems as though Sameh is doing something that makes a real difference in the lives of the refugee children Sacco draws happily learning to speak, read, and write. Unlike other volunteer workers, Sameh has built up his program through professional commitment rather than political affiliation. His education, altruism, and focus on pragmatism over ideology characterize Sameh as an appealing moderate to skeptical readers taking in an otherwise disorienting environment.

In addition to his work at the facility, Sameh enthusiastically takes Sacco under his wing. When he needs a place to stay, Sameh is the model of hospitality, making Sacco “feel comfortable in his place,” so much so that he notes, “initially I felt uncomfortable” (187). Whereas in the earlier market scene, Sacco depicts himself as a savvy negotiator of public spaces, at home in Jerusalem’s busy streets, at the heart of the Palestinian conflict, his confidence is shaken. The camps offer little from which Sacco

can form a cosmopolitan foothold. Although politically oppressed, the people he encounters in Jerusalem live within a minimum standard that Sacco is able to recognize as human. They have homes with electricity, jobs that pay living wages, access to education, and a degree of mobility within their community. Sacco can claim to accomplish some work on their behalf because they already have the rights his text aims to produce. By paying attention to their existence, Sacco can create a sense of empathy that allows readers to feel closer with their everyday struggles to have their voices heard without demanding a change in behavior or political values. Although he is a guest within their community, he is also a tourist and pays his way. The economic power he exerts as a tourist diminishes the effect their gestures of hospitality have upon his conscience. Their attention to him is proportionate to the gifts his presence offers. There is no need for discomfort, because although he offers nothing of substantial value he takes nothing from the community either. Life within the camp is entirely alien to Sacco's economic cosmopolitanism. There is no hotel and Sacco's money is relatively useless. Because life in the camp is not stratified according to consumer practices, but rather political affiliation, Sacco loses the capacity to differentiate himself from the locals in the way he could in Jerusalem and resorts instead to wearing one of Sameh's keffiyehs. In the camp, although the economic power differential between him and his hosts increases exponentially, Sacco becomes much more dependent upon Sameh's hospitality.

Whereas Sacco was able to keep the disparity of his own power and wealth out of focus in the city, the extent of Sameh's sacrifice on behalf of his superficial comfort

shifts the balance of responsibility out of Sacco's favor in the camp. He is there to intervene on behalf of Palestinian suffering, after all, so Sameh should not suffer too much on his account. When Sacco runs short on clean clothes, Sameh offers up his own clothes to keep Sacco in clean ones, and Sacco draws the line. He could live in his house, take him from his job, but he would not be seen "wearing his underwear ... you gotta keep *some* distance" (189). What Sacco's discomfort at Sameh's hospitality reveals is the one-sided dynamic by which humanitarian intervention attempts to manage the distribution of rights. Only by assuming the absence of the capacity to exert rights can Sacco enter the camp with the objective of relieving the suffering he encounters there by representing it abroad. Sameh's gift of his clean underwear places a burden of an entirely different magnitude upon Sacco. The thought of such intimate contact threatens to dissolve the boundaries between journalistic observer, humanitarian intervener, and object of intervention. If he were to wear them, Sacco would have to act in order to justify his act of taking. This disturbing care Sameh extends to Sacco also destabilizes Sacco's representation of himself as witness to suffering. As if recognizing the futility of Sacco's endeavor, Sameh approached him during his first UNRWA tour of the camp with the proposition that while Sacco may have produced results by showing sympathy with the people in the city, "You're not going to see anything this way" in Jabalia (218). Instead, Sacco explains, he needed someone who knows "why I'm here," that he wanted "real stories" and not just the view from the UN tour bus (219). This is ironic, however, given that "comics is a visual medium," and what Sacco, the journalist on the ground, wants above all else are memorable images that will produce

humanitarian value in the imagination of his readers (218). It is doubly ironic that his project, to get to know Palestinians intimately, to make them interesting, depends upon their prior and superior knowledge of their American audience. He can only succeed in enlightening his American audience of the plight of hapless Palestinians if they are already savvy members of a cosmopolitan society able to present themselves in ways Americans will find appealing and sympathetic. Despite the clarity of his own purpose – to alert the world to Palestinian suffering – Sacco claims to not “quite know what Sameh got out of hosting me for four days, indulging my quest for unhappy stories,” apart from the pleasure of his personal company and the friendship they developed in the process (189). It is as if he has forgotten that in addition to revealing suffering, his work is also to show Palestinians as human. Sameh, as an equal of sorts, becomes too human to fit within the frame of refugee or object of humanitarian interest, and Sacco cannot quite place him without compromising the sense of distance he must maintain in order to preserve the credibility of his activity. Sameh gives him food and shelter, political connections, and supplies him with the focused and visually compelling subject matter necessary to make Sacco’s book economically successful. What Sameh seems to get out of the interaction is the chance to personify Rancière’s thesis that he has the rights he has not but does not have the rights he has. Sacco the journalist assumes Sameh is the victim in need of his intervention, denying him of the ability to pursue his own rights; but, Sameh continually subverts this assumption by rescuing Sacco from his failures to understand the realities of camp life. Sameh is human and cannot be reduced to the subject of human rights within Sacco’s journalistic representation. But Sacco’s

representation cannot avoid putting him to work for his production of humanitarian interest.

As promised, Sameh becomes a way for Sacco to obtain the “vivid descriptions, the details, man” that promise to make his book appealing (219). For example, in one notable episode, Sacco recalls a dark and rainy night on which Sameh drove him across the camp, at great personal risk, to view a contraband video of Israeli atrocity. As Sameh navigates the uneven, muddy road, compulsively telling himself “I don’t like this,” Sacco thinks to himself, “I’ve made it ... I’ve come hundreds of miles via planes and buses and taxis to be precisely here: *Jabalia*, ... a Disneyland of refuse and squalor” (208). If the two are stopped by the authorities, Sameh will face imprisonment. He doesn’t have a driver’s license, is out past curfew, and is in possession of an illegal video. The thought of the danger, however, is a thrill for Sacco, who at most would be asked to leave the camp and return to comfort if they were stopped. A scene of arrest, interrogation, and deportation would give interesting action to Sacco’s narrative, adding further value to his book. He describes his sensation of Sameh’s anxiety producing in him “my happiest moment” (208). Whereas Sameh is trapped within the reality of the camp, “unaware of the moment’s magnificence,” Sacco perceives their danger aesthetically. “This’ll make a great couple of pages in the comic,” he thinks, as Sameh struggles to find his way through the impenetrable maze of washed-out streets. In the moment, Sacco claims his success and ceases to be a humanitarian journalist. Instead, he becomes an even sexier “goddamn adventure cartoonist.” The scene offers the thrill of adventure for Sacco in which he can take pleasure in the risk of living in the

politically repressive squalor of the camp because for him, unlike for Sameh, it presents an exception to ordinary life. He will ride to the home of Sameh's friend, watch the video, and return to the safety of America. While he indulges in delusions of grandeur, conjuring up images of himself as the seasoned veteran, talking comfortably with even the most hardened Palestinians, Sacco also returns his reader to the reality of his situation: "I'm pinching myself in a car in the dark in a flood, giddy from the ferocity outside, and thinking, 'Throw it at me, baby, I can take it,' but I've got the window rolled up tight..." (208).

Just as the car insulates Sacco from any risk of exposure to the exciting weather, "the Palestinian experience" he feels himself brush up against exists only as the sense of worry he feels for Sameh, who cannot so easily divide himself from its reality. Sacco remains on edge throughout the outing, relieved when the two finally leave. On the walk home, he reflects, "this is all well and good for Sameh ... he's used to this sort of thing" (212). He would like to document the plight of the camp's refugees but will not subject himself to the experience of actually living like one. Again, there is a certain distance he must enforce. Sacco is the humanitarian journalist and does not want to "be mistaken for a Palestinian out here" (212). The video is a way of preserving a record of Israeli violence for the refugees. For Sacco, it's an excuse for a thrilling exploit. Although it does record compelling visual details, the very stuff of which graphic narratives are made, Sacco shows little interest in its content. Instead, he notes that the very medium offers him a sense of security when they re-view it the next day from the safety of Sameh's home. The good thing about a video, he observes, is that "you can rewind it,

watch it over, eliminate all surprises ... it's easier on your nerves" than actual observation or facing the reality of life in the camp (213). There is no risk in viewing a representation of violence, only in witnessing it directly. And there is really no risk for Sacco as witness, only for those who must continue to live in the camp after his visit is over. By showing himself subsumed within the joint problems of witnessing and viewing atrocity, however, Sacco opens an interesting aporia. He can only attend to the feelings of living in the camp, of a life consumed with the risk of violence, by transforming his own contact into a source of adventure. His witnessing must produce some sort of spectacular value. He cannot justify participating in the scene of the camp unless it leads to some productive contribution to his book, splashy pages that will attract and hold readers' attention. At the same time, however, his interpretation of his act of viewing the atrocity video, the reason for his adventure, reflects critically on the relationship the text he produces has with American readers. Like him, they may consume the representations of political oppression and violence at their leisure, insulated from any physical or emotional risk. It is certain that Sacco will emerge from his descent into the camp untouched, and we may revisit his striking pages at will, lingering over his detailed illustrations or pondering his remarks without the worry that we too will be caught up in the consequences of what he represents.

Sacco's time in the camp jeopardizes Sameh's position at the rehabilitation center. On the last day of his visit, Sacco learns that the center has distributed a memo, "no more friends to hang out at the office; no more serving friends tea; no more leaving early to show friends around the camp" (220). The note could have general

implications, but Sacco notes “my presence has been the catalyst.” This turn of events leaves readers to consider the value of Sacco’s work. He produces a text that challenges their attention with the humanity of Palestinian refugees, but it has disrupted the ability of a very talented Palestinian to make a material difference in the lives of some of the most underprivileged members of his community. Throughout the text, Sacco consistently depicts Sameh as an archetypical good worker within the humanitarian paradigm in contrast with himself as ineffectual and selfish. By depicting his own labor, implicated in the production of an image of the other, and subject to a capitalistic dynamic of intervention driving U.S. imperialism, not merely as ineffectual, though, but as actually damaging to the labor of Sameh, who remains less visible, Sacco actually devalorizes the graphic narrative as an implicitly ethical medium. Rather than produce on behalf of humanitarian intervention, Sacco’s ironic labor subtracts value from his own intervention and diverts it back toward autonomous and unrepresented Palestinian agents. Although his collaboration in the moment was detrimental to Sameh’s ongoing project, Sacco’s text ultimately attempts to recuperate Sameh’s humanity by refusing to manage his humanity.

Although Sacco often calls into question his own motives and actions, he does, however, go to some lengths to make sure it is clear that he is not exactly like an ordinary journalist or Western tourist to the region. He returns to Jerusalem for a few days of sightseeing and relaxation after his stay in Jabalia, and there, he makes this contrast clear during a brief encounter with a fellow tourist. The young man, “an Oxford student with plans for going into the Anglican priesthood,” Sacco relates, was “a

connoisseur” of religious experiences and travelled to the Holy Land to take them all in. The young man’s interest in religion mirrors Sacco’s thirst for horrible stories of suffering. Both want to witness first-hand the fullness of life’s variety. Unlike Sacco, however, the young man attempts to live as if no distance existed between him and the people he had come to experience. Sacco sees him doing the “Stations of the Cross with the Franciscans,” joining “the Armenian Orthodox for evening vespers,” and even lying about having a “Jewish mother in order to get invited to Shabbat supper by the Hasidim” (279). Although both the man and Sacco are invested in witnessing a spectacle of sorts, the man’s performance strikes Sacco as false. Both, he notes, find what they are looking for in the other they came to witness, but the young man has failed to recognize the significance of his own difference. As the two share the experience of Christmas eve mass, Sacco reflects on the scene of the service projected across the street onto “the side of Israeli police headquarters” (280). The young man, caught up in the ecstasy of Christmas in the Holy Land, thinks nothing of the oppressive statement this image makes. His inattention to the tensions between people, and his eagerness to win sympathy, flattens out the political into a superficially cosmopolitan space in which people can mingle without risk, in which we can choose to act for others without careful thought. For him, the location is the site of religious interest, a set of consumable experiences devoid of politics that can enhance his sense of worldly subjectivity. Sacco’s disdain for the man calls readers to remain at a distance, to refuse the power to claim the right to represent others, but in so doing, finally succeeds.

### **The Performance of Interest in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project***

It is interesting that given the certainty of what the journalist gets out of representation and research trips, or the cosmopolitan tourist from his pilgrimage, Sacco claims to be mystified at his friend Sameh's desire to help him. The need to make a subject interesting traps Sacco the journalist in a cycle of complicity with oppressive institutions from which he would claim distance. But, as his confusion over Sameh indicates, representations of crisis are not just a matter of journalists reducing people to slick human interest stories. We report on something to raise awareness of it and to inspire transformative action. To do this we have to make whatever it is we report on into something that first bears interest. Terri Tomsy argues that because we only recognize certain kinds of trauma as worth our aid, humanitarians require victims to market their experiences according to our desire to aid specific forms of injury. The result is the creation of what she calls a "trauma economy" in which the "movement of memories is enabled by infrastructures of power, and consequently mediated and consecrated through institutions" (50). Within trauma economy, which is a form of attention economy, what matters, and what makes a representation marketable, is not factual accuracy, but, Tomsy notes, "getting it 'right' affectively" (54). The purpose of humanitarian appeals is to evoke a strong emotional response from readers. Sacco, she suggests, complicates this economy with his meta-journalistic representations of other journalists selectively constructing their stories out of human interactions. Reading affect economically, something is interesting when it promises a good chance of stimulating a positive emotional state in exchange for an investment of attention. And

attention defines the ways in which particular forms of community take shape. To make some person, thing, or event interesting is to put it to work on behalf of its prospective audience's sense of well-being and to reconsolidate the boundaries legitimizing the community of the audience as one oriented toward claiming responsibility for the state of others. It does all this prior to addressing any of those conditions that attract concern and make the reported object one of interest in the first place, since it is in the interest of the humanitarian journalist to protect its source of value. Further, the project of associating this mode of interest with a human being, as is the case of texts that frame ethics in terms of an encounter with singular humanity, makes an actual person and that person's sense of self the site of the production of the economized interest that funds humanitarians. Someone must become the Face behind the Levinasian encounter. In the case of *Palestine*, Sameh occupies this position by becoming the perpetually self-sacrificing guide.

The way responsibility is taken in the encounter that drives the production of humanitarian interest, in which the other whom we find is helpless, exposed, and without the capacity to produce value on its own, is pure fantasy. Interest requires someone to be the face, which means lending affective value to its ethical appeal. This person, like Sameh, must labor to become the abject, powerless object of interest for a benefactor whose agency is legitimized through the structure of appeal humanitarianism requires. In this section, I look at Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* to consider how people perceived as of interest to philanthropists and humanitarians, those in whose welfare we take a stake, must work to become interesting to their observers and what

effects this work has on their sense of placement in a cosmopolitan world. The economic management of fascination with difference and its effects upon those taken as fascinating is the subject of Hemon's novel. Its narrative follows the efforts of a suggestively autobiographical character, Vladimir Brik, who like Hemon is a writer stranded in Chicago by the Bosnian conflict, as he sorts out his place in the world while also struggling to fit into the American family of his wife Mary, a successful neurosurgeon. As he does so, Brik bears the pressure of constant demands to prove the social value of himself and his national identity and desires only to escape the constant attention to which he finds himself subject. While he recognizes the inhumanity of interest, he feels he can only accomplish his escape from it by creating a narrative around himself so seductive that it will distract attention from his true, authentic self. To escape life as the object of others' interest, Brik distracts readers' attention away from his body toward those of others for whom he can claim responsibility.

The book's chapters alternate between two texts Brik has written to this end. One set documents his travels across Eastern Europe with Rora, a childhood friend and photographer, to research the life of Lazarus Averbuch, a Ukrainian Jew who immigrated to Chicago to escape racist violence only to be murdered by the chief of police in 1908. In it, Brik recounts his own conflicted feelings at the need to become appealing to wealthy philanthropists in order to fund his travels abroad, which he understands as a means to independence from America itself, and his growing disillusionment with his marriage, which is based on a similar reliance upon his wife's name and explanations to secure his place in America. The second set are a fictionalized

story of Lazarus's sister and her grief following his murder and during attempts on the part of Chicago's Jewish Americans and investigative reporters to ease her suffering in exchange for the right to make Lazarus a media sensation and a symbol for various political causes. Brik's personal interest in Lazarus stems from a strong sense of identification with the young man's persecution as a misunderstood foreigner fleeing ethnic violence in the land of opportunity. He fears that, like Lazarus, he too is not known for who he is but only as an embodiment of human interest. This section of the novel makes a relatively straight-forward commentary on the callousness of journalists who see a chance to tell an exciting story but fail to appreciate that for their source, Olga, Lazarus is always first her brother, a person whose loss she can never recuperate.<sup>11</sup> The travel narrative, which documents Brik's motives for producing the Lazarus story and explains the content he invents for it, is more complex in its negotiation of the feedback loop between human interest and ethical responsibility that determines Brik's sense of self-worth.

From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that although he makes a living off drawing attention to the uniqueness of his experience as a Bosnian exile living in America, Brik desires nothing so much as to escape notice. When he writes columns describing the quirks of immigrant life, he complains that people continually take notice of the awkward ways he inevitably stands out. When his unnamed narrator defines the meaning of home, he does so not in terms of a source of identity, the basis for what makes one comprehensible to others, or even as commitments to another, but as a place of indistinction "where somebody notices when you are no longer there" (3). Home is

the site where one's presence is simply given because it does not have to be justified through the sight of others. Home, in other words, is where one's body and basic mannerisms are legible as signs of social capital. In the home Brik imagines he has the potential to regulate the effects of others' attention upon his body. As a Bosnian living in exile, the idea of effortless belonging haunts Brik's thoughts. If home is where someone misses you when you are gone, Brik thinks exile is like being forgotten during a game of hide and seek. He recalls the multiple occasions in which he sat hidden, awaiting discovery while his friends "were being bathed by their caring mothers, having all left the game without telling me" (30). His displacement hides or shelters him from the traumatic life of the nation, but its traumatization prevents his absence from becoming noteworthy. Belonging to the nation is something like the inclusion the other children experience and that Brik has traumatically lost in the game of hide and seek. He is still a part of the game, since he remains hidden, but cannot take pleasure in the game's unfolding. The nation is central to his sense of self, but he feels cut off from the unfolding narrative of its collective identity and the institutionalized cultural capital that this narrative confers on those who have lived through the war. His abandonment by his companions simultaneously marks his value within the local attention economy as null. His attention is not sought and its loss is not noted.

The years spent in Chicago, during which the war changed how the world at large understood what it means to be Bosnian, leave Brik feeling as if the nation has moved on without him, leaving him in the woods of the U.S. to fend for himself. The overwhelming visibility of the war in media coverage of Bosnia during Brik's exile

freezes his identity in America as the embodiment of its trauma and as a marker of the need for Americans to intervene on behalf of an imperiled Bosnian culture that otherwise might be lost to the world. In America, everyone is a humanitarian who seems only to notice Brik as an object of concern or curiosity. As a result, America demands a constant performance from Brik and can never be a home to him. His sense of displacement orbits around the scene of the Association of Bosnian Americans' annual charity dance that also sets in motion Brik's scheme to use the Lazarus story as an excuse to return to Europe. The dance stages a performance of Bosnian culture for the benefit of the community's wealthy elite. Each year, the city's immigrants gather to put on a show with the understanding that their dance expresses something essential about their difference. In it, Chicagoans can witness the Bosnian-Americans' identity and subsequently feel as if, by observing culture in motion, they are preserving something that otherwise might be lost to humanity. Although given in support of Bosnians, the charity ball is structured for the benefit of its American witnesses. By investing charitably in the Association, their attention can, Brik thinks, ensure that Bosnia's "untelligible customs" are "preserved forever, like a fly in resin" (13). This image is paradigmatic of his understanding of his relationship to others throughout the novel. The event is one of humanitarian intervention through a superficially cosmopolitan encounter with pleasurable difference. As he notes, Chicago's wealthy philanthropists "are far more likely to fork out their charitable money ... if convinced that our culture is nothing like theirs" (13). The event sustains the Levinasian fantasy that the philanthropists' gifts of attention, and as Brik hopes, occasionally financial support,

enables the irreplaceable human spectacle of Bosnia to continue to be. The extent of his interest to them is limited to his capacity to stand out as an exemplar of their ideas of the war-torn refugee and of Eastern European society as entities in need of their charitable sacrifices. Their attention to Bosnian difference crystallizes the culture within the American imaginary as an anthropological curiosity, as a distinct cultural artifact on display for their consumption. The Bosnians' value as a source of cosmopolitan pleasure for the interested philanthropist justifies the expansion of America's political and economic influence as the philanthropist acts in order to preserve their existence. As the extended metaphor suggests, however, neither philanthropists nor Brik see him as a hybrid subject transforming what it means to be American or Bosnian. He is a relic, not a human being with a dynamic, living sense of self. Once the face, he can be nothing else. As the object of curiosity, he performs to the expectations of his benefactors in order to fulfill their desires. They look upon his difference from a dispassionate, unaffected remove. He makes himself a face that allows them to feel their wealth and power are ethical in the sight of its helplessness. What Brik desires in America is to not be the object of human interest, but instead to be merely human. But to be human requires a fund of social and economic capital he can only attain by capturing attention. When they give support for his life in America out of philanthropic or humanitarian concern, Brik's American patrons force him to first give up the right to individual sovereignty and become instead whatever it is they are willing to validate in him.

As an exile struggling to accumulate the cultural capital necessary to create an absence that would be missed and a presence that goes unnoticed, Brik feels he must

remain the object of foreign curiosity dependent for his preservation upon his hosts. For instance, Brik recognizes that to fit comfortably in Chicago society, he must perform the identity of the Bosnian refugee immigrant according to the expectations of its wealthy elite, as he understands them. At the annual Association of Bosnian Americans ball, he spots the opportunity to secure a large grant to fund his research interests. At the event, he chats up an elderly woman, Susie Schuettler, who confesses her thrill at its spectacle. It “was amazing,” she tells him, “how different the things you knew well looked through the eyes of a foreigner,” and she confides that “she liked reading” about foreigners “more than sex.” Brik recalls how she makes this comment with a wink “demanding my complicity” (14). In the moments that follow, he resolves to charm her but ends up stomping on her foot instead. With him kneeling apologetically to massage her possibly broken toes, Brik and Susie become the subject of a photograph. The image captures the conflicted dynamic – of a desire to belong where one is and the need to perform according to someone else’s expectations in order to do so – that makes up the heart of Hemon’s novel. In it, he imagines she will see him as “a klutzy knight ... touching her shriveled knee,” the perfect gesture to encapsulate her act of benevolent patronage (34). While both she and Brik know the photograph actually documents his clumsy dancing, he understands the act of offering that particular image, one both know to be something other than what he sells it as, as a sign of his willingness to play along with her fantasy. She will be his sponsor if he becomes her conquest, but he understands playing the part of enthralled dependent as his means to evade her interest.

As Brik continues to reflect on the power relations between himself and his place of refuge, he observes “belonging to one nation and not another” is an “unearned nobility” (13). The right to belong unself-consciously cannot be earned but is a function of racial and ethnic markers. Nonetheless, Brik feels as if he must contribute something of value to those observing him in order to justify even his agonized presence in the U.S.. What he has to offer is the idea of Bosnian difference, and to put this up for display, he must give up the capacity to determine what makes him both unique and Bosnian. Unfortunately, he summarizes what he believes others see as interestingly Bosnian in the self-deprecating observations that his “country’s main exports are stolen cars and sadness” and that “In my country ... candy is the chief currency” (73, 163). (And this second comment ironically relates back to Sacco’s depiction of himself as the humanitarian making inroads with Palestinian children by passing out sweets wherever he goes). Brik’s complicity with this assessment perpetuates his sense of dislocation. He knows the sadness for which he is valued is one to which he has no claim since he spent the war years living in Chicago and visiting Europe only on luxury tours financed by his wealthy spouse. Further, by making visible the stereotypical image of Bosnian traumatization and political corruption, Brik obscures any personal sadnesses that might otherwise define his own experience. Everyone interested in him can see only the victim of war or ethnic violence. No one sees a man simply longing for home.

The effort to become interestingly different for American attentions, like a bug trapped in amber, leaves Brik feeling nostalgic for Sarajevo, where he knew “a kind of unspoken belief that everyone could be whatever they claimed they were – each life,

however imaginary, could be validated by its rightful, sovereign owner, from the inside” (20). What he describes here is a desire to attain a cosmopolitan belonging to Bosnia on the basis of his being affected by its war despite not having physically experienced its events. In Bosnia, he suggests, the conviction that something effects one on an emotional or psychological level is equivalent to an American conflation of reality and proximity epitomized in reality television and the effect the unreality of reality news TV has on Americans’ sense of having experienced the movement of global history. In America, he says, “people crave the truth” more than anything and “reality is the fastest ... commodity” (103). By this he does not mean new game show contests, but our perception of the war on terror and America’s own traumatic wound, the 9/11 attacks, both of which he continually indexes as a parallel to his own experiences. For him, missing the event of the war leads to a traumatic inability to live within the truth he can sense emerging from it. Its effects condition the nature of what it means to be Bosnian, at least from the perspective of media viewers, in such a way that he no longer fits in seamlessly with his fellow citizens who weathered its trials in Sarajevo.

Brik only feels Bosnian when American philanthropists take interest in his nation by paying attention to him. But Americans are no different. They make an unexamined claim to national trauma without directly experienced violence or any other negative effect upon daily life. What instead occurs is that the dramatic coverage of the events creates a compelling opportunity for its viewers to act as if they were affected directly, as Brik wishes he could do, as if by seeing or hearing of a violent event, one could incorporate its affects and chronology themselves, as one’s own – or, as if someone

else's story could become one's own by making it one that affects others. What he is suggesting in these remarks is not that either the Bosnian or the American way of relating to history or reality is more or less real. Both are fabrications spawned by our basic human capacity to feel for and identify with others. Instead, it is a matter of regulating the effects of identification upon interest and the ways in which becoming interesting affects one's capacity to produce cultural, political, and economic value. In the Bosnian case, sadness, or being interesting, is the only legitimate value Brik and the world note. Given this, he can only be the object of a humanitarian interest, which, as I argued at the beginning of the chapter, produces value at its object's expense on behalf of the affective and political well-being of the intervener. America, by contrast, is the land of opportunity, democracy, and freedom. Its victimization allows its citizens to wield interest alongside other already materially valuable modes of production. They do not have to rely on the witness of others to translate their abstract, affective labor into economically useful resources. With its own trauma, America has no need to turn abroad to people like Brik for humanitarian good feeling. They can just take care of themselves, following Bush's advice to invest in the American economy. Realizing this, Brik longs to return home where he can put his hurt feelings to work on his own and his own community's behalf. His feeling is echoed in Lazarus's and Olga's desire to return to Ukraine where, although they may face pogroms, they may live with dignity alongside family.

The sense of national competition over the production of humanitarian interest also pervades Brik's recollections of his crumbling marriage. Money, he thinks, "has a

man's face," and as a sporadically employed writer, he worries his merely "symbolic" contributions to the "Field-Brik marital budget" reduce him to the unmanly state of being "kept by his wife" (16). Susie's grant offers him the hope that he can "show Mary that I was not a wastrel or a slacker or a lazy eastern-European, but a person of talent and potential" (17). Or, that he is both productive and not identifiably foreign, someone worthy of the citizenship her association grants him. But, Brik fears he can never compete with his wife, a successful neurosurgeon. Her daily confrontation with death and her remuneration for it are a constant reminder of the equal extent to which his own labor seems trivial and goes unrewarded. When she opens up a patient's skull, she has the direct physical contact with life that Brik must appropriate in his own performance of sadness. The reality of her job upsets the economic relationship of the marriage by displacing Brik's capacity to monopolize the supply end of its affective production. Her sadness is more immediate, as it affects her directly and bears upon American lives. However, she does not value her connection to trauma that Brik cannot access in his own life. Brik thinks he must embody suffering to sustain his social value but Mary does not want to relive the consequences of her day as the two talk in bed. She refuses to convert her experiences to stories which can become the materials for Brik's performances of interest and can afford to because the medical field already pays so well. Her silence on her own pain reinforces the humanitarian circuit of witnessing. While his own pain is subject to public circulation and produces humanitarian value, as an American, Mary can keep her own pain private.

Brik objectifies Mary's pain by imagining it as a simple can "whose red label read SADNESS," tucked away in a discreet corner of their pantry (73). When he feels dependent upon their relationship, Brik imagines Mary's private feelings as something he could open up and discover. His desire to open the can reveals his desire to be the humanitarian taking interest in, coming to know, or resolving the hurt of an objectified other. His reification of her pain also imposes stasis upon it. Later, however, he reimagines their circumstances using the controlled but dynamic atmosphere of her office. Within its walls are "whole worlds of her" that he "had no access to" (278-9). His sense of her discomfort at his presence in the proximity of her private sanctum forces him to realize that "she would never allow me to imagine them," let alone invite him in (279). Unlike his own, Brik believes Mary's feelings exist as an unwanted excess to her job's economic productivity. She leaves their capacity to affect untapped, hence his sublimation of them in a discretely sealed can. He does not want to believe they are an intimate part of her identity because to see her as traumatized by violence strips him of his claim to humanitarian interest, the only valuable good he recognizes as at his disposal. The metaphor of the can is an apt one precisely because it shows Brik trivializing Mary's feelings as an object of no significance that she may absolve herself of, containing them where they attract no notice or interest whatsoever but absolutely compelling to his outsider's interest in comforting and knowing her. By reducing Mary's feelings to such a banal object, Brik makes his own stand out as more worthwhile of our attentions, replicating both the appeal to humanitarian intervention he wants to break free from and the humanitarian taking of interest in the other. Brik's own

uninvited presence in her office, where Mary proves her affective and material value, he realizes, “violated the cleanliness of her sovereignty” by putting her experience on equally fragile ground as his own war-traumatized past and by insisting on its centrality to her sense of self. By taking notice of her pain, her tension, Brik threatens to reverse the power dynamic of the marriage by occupying a position from which he could legitimize her worth by feeling sorry for her pain rather than indebted to its returns. Mary, he concludes, was unwilling to accept this possibility. Reflecting upon her closed heart, Brik decides to leave his marriage.

In order to defend his position within the attention economy of intervention, Brik frames the story about the end of his marriage as one of poor communication and lack of intimacy rather than the cultural power struggle it is. It is attachment to physical and cultural space that affords Brik, as an individual, the luxury of deciding his identity. His marriage to Mary opens the door for him in America, but leaves him indebted to and with the feeling that he is morally obligated to be something particular for her. As Brik understands it, to be American is to be free, meaning “I could stop caring what I promised, what I committed myself to, because I would just not care who I was and become someone else on a whim” (132). To be American means “I could be the sole meaning of my life.” The act of determining the meaning of one’s life, apart from given culture, or to choose life, identity, is close to Rebecca Walkowitz’s definition of cosmopolitanism as one’s style of choosing identity. However, As Brik perceives the issue, the felt need to be the sole meaning of his life is the result of the economic aspect of humanitarian attention. He can never simply be himself because he is always the

object of an attention that commands he perform something that produces value for someone else. Mary wants a certain kind of loving, but understanding, husband, and Susie can fulfill his wildest economic dreams, but also wants him to play along with her sexual fantasy. To be able to choose life, in the sense Brik desires, is to possess the economic or social capital necessary to escape the scrutiny of attention, as Mary does within the marriage. He sees two ways to achieve this aim; he could “earn the right to orgasmic selfishness (and the money required for it)” by producing a work of economic or cultural significance, or “purchase [his] moral insurance by going through the righteous process of self-doubt and self-realization” within the humanitarian discourse of traumatized victim of foreign violence (133). Since he is not the latter and does not possess the personal fortitude to claim the former, Brik is trapped within an uncomfortable lie. He can con others into making a real investment in him but cannot attain the security of a genuine, faithful tie to the events that define his sense of a national identity he can no longer fully claim.

Where Brik suffers the constant feeling that he is exploited by the interest of Mary and Susie, his travelling companion Rora exemplifies his desire for Bosnian manliness through his seemingly endless supply of outrageous tales of close calls with violent deaths, of rubbing elbows with American journalists and Saravejan gangsters, and of always outwitting the tourists he continually seduces with his easy confidence. Much like Brik’s plan to dupe Susie into giving him the grant, Rora’s stories find him conning American tourists and journalists, usually to comic results. But Rora, despite showing his hand as a liar and fraud, is seductively appealing to Brik as the model of

Bosnian authenticity because his stories set his deceptions against the backdrop of Sarajevo's wartime underworld and dodging bullets on the streets. They are exactly what Brik lacks in his own biography. Between stories of smuggling crime lords through underground tunnels, Rora tells Brik about how he once made a living selling American tourists chunks of painted concrete. Passed off as fragments of the Berlin Wall, he sold the rubble not by its appearance, but rather through the appeal of a "certificate of authenticity, signed by himself" (22). Even when the police force Rora to confess to his marks the fraudulence of his wares, the tourists, "chasing the shadows of true experience," were still all too happy to pay up. Back home, the anonymous certificate speaks for itself and allows the tourists to claim the reality of their brush with history. Like Brik's use of the photograph to manipulate Susie's feelings, Rora's con depends upon the contract the parties form around the certificate. Without the testimony the certificate provides to the supposed origin of the object, the cement block is worthless. What matters in the economic transaction is not the concrete itself, but rather the act of witnessing Rora documents through his signature on the paper even though the American tourists know perfectly well that Rora and the document are fake. What Rora sells is not history or the Wall itself. No one wants his worthless blocks. The concrete solidifies a contract between them, on the basis of its mutually understood worthlessness. In doing so, it becomes a vessel for cultural capital by embodying a site of geopolitical interest that is entirely subject to its purchasers' desires. The fall, which marked the end of totalitarian Communism in Europe, becomes instead a marker of the perpetuation of uneven power relations that inspired the destruction of the wall itself.

With his story of the sale of a worthless object, Rora sells Brik the idea of his capacity to invert the humanitarian relationship. Likewise, what Brik sells throughout the novel is himself, a fake Brik.

It is interesting, however, that as Brik makes a distinction between the reality-oriented American story market and the more playful Bosnian one, he insists upon characterizing Rora as trafficking in the American mode of storytelling. His account of Rora negotiating with the tourists forms the basis for his authentication of his novel's testimony to Rora's wartime experience as Bosnian, which is similarly suspect. At the same time, Brik presents himself as a more Bosnian storyteller, adopting the experiences of others to remake his own place in the world while claiming the American styled reality of his narrative. A story only holds value to the extent that it coincides with the identity of the teller. Since the war passed him by, he lacks the credibility to project himself as a sympathetic object of attention. Were he a more appealing victim of its violence, he could simply ask Susie for money directly, since no further conditioning would be necessary to condition his appearance. Instead, he must orchestrate an elaborate scene to position himself as her dependent just as Rora must certify his fake bricks. Hemon's novel suggests cosmopolitan acts of storytelling involves an elaborate contract of deception between teller and hearer in order to manufacture a mutually beneficial economic relationship mediated by the expression of sympathy. The aim of the story transaction is the production of a highly exploitative social belief. Neither the teller nor the hearer can admit to the fabrication going on in the interaction. Instead,

although both parties know what they are doing, both must pretend as if the story produces the genuine article.

Just as the truly free subject can reinvent itself on a whim, Brik idealizes storytelling and witnessing as a politically subversive exercise. In Sarajevo, Brik idealistically believes, deception proceeds more openly. All stories had some value because “nobody expected the truth or information, just the pleasure of being in the story and maybe, passing it off as their own” (103). Their recognition that reality is composed of fictions places witness and witnessed on equal footing. The philanthropist can only hold the other like a bug in amber with the knowledge that they too will become similarly objectified by the storyteller and that whatever image they capture amounts to no more than a complex conglomeration of past appropriations and self-stylizations. Where Brik could not acknowledge that Susie was also playing him for her sexual thrills without cheapening the purity of his moral imperative or sacrificing his sense of masculinity, in Bosnia, he can feel as though his observers are being imaginative with him. It does not have to take on the appearance of reality or authenticity in order to have value. This is an appealing change because it means that a story does not have to claim to capture the essence of an event in order to lend appeal to the teller. For Brik, who missed the war, it means he can retain a sense of Bosnianness vicariously by retelling the wartime experiences of his friend Rora without needing to make them his own. He can merely witness the event rather than embodying it.

The reason Brik cannot escape the deceptive mode of producing interest is that he is constantly concerned with the reception of his text and the image of himself that is

recalled from within it. Elaborating upon his earlier thoughts on his childhood memories of storytelling, Brik recalls reading to his blind Uncle Mikhal. When he became bored with the text at hand, he “would occasionally simply add things,” a “new ship sinks in the Battle of Guadalcanal” or “newly discovered subatomic particles that changed our thinking about the universe” (206). His innocent deceptions gave the young Brik “a beautiful high” because he “was constructing a particular, custom-made world” for his uncle (206-7). Blind to all else, the uncle depends on Brik to verify the content of the text and the text to supply the identity of its subject matter. The imaginary world they flesh out through the act of storytelling both is and is not like the Bosnia Brik and Rora put on exhibit in their various deceptions. It is false but it does not require an exchange of power. Instead, storytelling, in this case, lets Uncle Mikhal and Brik escape together into a more fantastic world in which they retain their sense of belonging. It offers them mobility and plasticity. What Brik remembers, though, is the pleasure of holding his relative “in my power for as long as he listened” (207). So, the attention gained through testifying to a particular state of reality allows Brik to feel justified when he claims the power over the world his uncle inhabits. It is not the end result of any commitment to the event he is describing or the impact it might have upon its hearer. He reassures himself that if ever confronted he could claim “misunderstanding” to protect his credibility and never considered the possibility that “my uncle might have been aware of my deception.” Had he taken note of the mutual fantasy production the two were engaged in, had he imagined “Uncle Mikhal as complicit,” they could have together “arranged more gigantic battles, explored more nonexistent continents, and built stranger

universes from stranger particles” (207). What Brik seems to recognize in this moment, inspired by Rora’s own con games, is that storytelling is always false, that what one expresses as witness is never the thing itself, but always something driven out of self-interested desire. The difference between the storytelling he despises in America and that for which he is nostalgic is not a greater or more innocent suspension of disbelief, but a disjunction of power and storytelling. Brik desires his stories to no longer carry the weight of bearing witness to his people. He wants to just be the meaning of himself, for himself, which, incidentally, is his definition of Americanness.

To have the confidence to be himself, Brik must first reconnect with his national identity, since he believes only physical intimacy with his ethnic community can supply him with the reserve of social capital necessary to cease his performance as witness. As he moves from America to Ukraine and Ukraine to Bulgaria and then Moldova, Brik represents himself regaining confidence in his ability to belong. Where he continually reminds readers of his pained sense of Bosnianness in America, in Ukraine, Brik effortlessly assumes his superiority, but as an American. Drawing upon the global prestige his travel documents imply, he thinks, “Everyone imagines that they have a center, the seat of their soul” (176). The soul, he explains, is “fixed,” it “does not move around” within a person, but remains constant, the product of whatever is essential to their identity (177). At the same time, it does move “with you” from place to place, giving a person a comforting sense of personal validity. When he was in America, Brik felt his soul in the memories of his lost Bosnia. In Ukraine his soul shifts from his longing for homeliness to his “breast pocket,” and more specifically, to the “American

passport and a wad of cash” sitting in it. This concept of belonging is a striking reversal of his earlier thought that home is where one is missed or appreciated apart from any potential economic value. The contrast between the two suggests that, like the dilemma Brik experiences in his marriage, cosmopolitanism is a function of regulating the attention paid to oneself. To be able to claim a center unified in the capacity to command attention through his presence, Brik must efface his status as an exile, and in so doing, insist upon the difference that makes him feel unhomed. Whereas in America, Brik attracted attention because he had no other value than as a marker of contrast that enhanced local value, abroad Brik portrays himself as an agent recording first the presence and then the absence of his friend. In these shifts, he renounces the spectacular attentive cosmopolitanism that has kept open his traumatic sense of displacement. Although he is the tourist, in Ukraine, he feels “wary of these people, these foreigners” he is forced to brush up against and describes his environment as a distressing “malodorous concoction of urine, vermin, and mental decomposition” (176, 124). Defined as an effect of power, the cosmopolitanism Hemon imagines is not the storytelling that occurs between Brik and his blind uncle, but that of Brik and Susie or Rora and Brik. In it, all that matters is the facilitation of the production and accumulation of capital. It is a thoroughly imperialistic cosmopolitanism opposed to all vital forms of national or local attachment. The flies of its world must, for their own good, be preserved in humanitarian resin because on their own, alive, they are filth.

Even as he begins to abandon his feelings for America, Brik has difficulty moving beyond the logic of humanitarian witnessing he has internalized there. On their

travels, he hounds Rora constantly with questions about how it felt to undergo the shocking experiences of the war he describes in detail. Brik's relentless interest in Rora's stories, which predictably end up being highly imaginative, seems to be driven by the idea that once animated with enough detail, they can take on a life of their own, apart from their source. If Brik can know Rora's past, he can use it to reconnect with his lost Sarajevo. Rora becomes Brik's fake brick. Basking in the wealth of Rora's memories, Brik is still distressed at the thought that although he has "X-rayed through the visible" to see "the original past version," he "couldn't see the now, only the before." Finally exasperated, Rora breaks form and tells Brik that "what you see is what you see, but that is never everything" (208). As witness, Brik wants to embody Sarajevo's past and its present. He would like to become that object that guarantees interest in its existence, or that which renders its private truth communicable knowledge. He wants to both own and save Bosnia. While he can economize its stories in this way, Rora explains that doing so will never give Brik the feeling of belonging or legitimacy that he truly desires. The Real of the community, its "past and future," he says, "exist without you ... Nothing at all depends on you seeing it" (209). The only value of witnessing lies in its ability to become an economic resource. It can address injustice or heal the self, Rora seems to say, but not both at the same time. Directed toward humanitarian attention, Brik's text is beyond worthless. It marks him an outsider at home and gives him no means to belong in America.

Rora's outburst shatters the illusion of cosmopolitanism sustained under humanitarian attention. Freed from its allure, Brik takes action to reclaim his own, direct

ties to the present that exists beyond representation, or at least tells a story that may or may not be a lie. He makes the transition by beating a seedy pimp into a pulp. With this moment of explosive violence, Brik tries to definitively cast himself in the role of guarantor of rights and taker of interest. Nothing could be further from the subservient, demasculinized figure kneeling before Susie at his story's beginning. The man, who had exploited Brik's American papers in order to ease his sale of a young girl into the sex trade, impels Brik back into Bosnian space in order to seek medical attention for his fractured hand. By taking action, Brik moves from witnessed to witness, from relying on the attention of others to giving attention, from begging for social security to freeing a powerless foreign woman from slavery. Fittingly, after his transformation, which is also an endowment of capital, Hemon supplies Brik with the direct contact with Bosnian traumatic violence at the core of its national consciousness. Living out Hemon's desire for Bosnia, Brik becomes involved in the life of the nation once again when, days after their arrival, Rora is murdered in a mugging while drinking coffee at a street-side café. His needless, random death gives Brik the source to an identity he no longer needs. The owner of real trauma, Brik can reconnect with his homeland and divert his attention from attracting the interest of others to being himself. Thinking of his dead friend, and his sister, a Bosnian doctor who treats his wounds and replaces Mary, Brik thinks, "Rora had bonded us" (288). Preserving the memory of his friend and his many dubious adventures allows Brik to feel at home at last.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Levinas's ethics resemble Teresa Brennan's redemptive theory of the transmission of affect. Brennan argues that the affects, which roughly correspond to the Freudian death drive and Newtonian entropy, sap individuals of vital energy with their constant demands for interpretation and reaction. Affects, she suggests, are physical particles our bodies unconsciously process through the sense of smell, often in the form of pheromones. She compares their effect to the early Christian concepts of the deadly sins and demons. The affects exert an invisible and seductive influence over rational being. To counter their effects, Brennan posits attention, which she also suggests is a rough synonym for love, the only positive affect, or the life drive. Brennan defines attention in terms of active thought upon affective stimuli. To pay attention is to consciously think about the sources and motives for those affective states exerting a pull on the subject's capacity to regulate action. While I find Brennan's idea that affect may be, at least in part, a biological response to physical contact with something entirely beyond our control, I'm not entirely comfortable with her evaluation of its role in subjectivity. As I've already suggested in conjunction with Ahmed's reading of affect and nationalism, the oppositions Brennan sets up between thinking and feeling, affected being and active being, and health and sickness is a defensive move against the openness and provisionality of cosmopolitan modes of sociality.

<sup>2</sup> Levinas's insistence upon the pre-political nature of encounter absolves its individual actors of their positions relative to one another within networks of power. This is Badiou's well-known objection to Levinas. As he argues, when politics is "subordinated to ethics," what emerges in responsibility is not a redistribution of power along more just lines, but rather the reduction of humanity to a "single perspective that really matters in this conception of things: the sympathetic and indignant judgment of the spectator of the circumstances" (*Ethics* 9). Or, as Badiou implies, a cosmopolitanism predicated on humanitarian intervention and rights management that depend upon the production of sensationalism and human interest. Furthermore, as Badiou observes, Levinas's ethics presumes evil precedes the good. We naturally want to kill the other in order to assure the security of our personal space in the sun. This desire is an economic one, to ensure we continue to enjoy the world's best resources without feeling greedy.

<sup>3</sup> See Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* and Butler, *Frames of War*

<sup>4</sup> As Raymond Williams notes, individuals do not experience hegemony as a "system or a structure" but rather as a "complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits" (112). Hegemony is never "singular," or a passively extant "form of dominance" (112). Instead, hegemonic articulations of power must constantly be "renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" in light of similarly continual encounters with alterity that defy the limits any hegemony imposes upon the social. Or, in other terms again, people experience hegemony as a series of encounters with human beings, faces of others.

<sup>5</sup> We might say that Wallace's and Kunzru's characters are living beings. They feel but do not react appropriately to their feelings. In Wallace's case, appropriately means producing a totality independent of affective stimuli that can then be used to censor out affect's unwanted effects upon the subject's capacity for thought. For Kunzru, it is more a matter of following up feeling with an examination of the merits of whatever meaning is produced through our socialization and those structures guiding socialization itself. In other terms, for Wallace, the problem is that feelings have an effect on us that we cannot control, and for Kunzru it is that our response to feelings is conditioned by our positioning within political structures.

<sup>6</sup> The work of imagining a story in the white space between frames that McCloud describes as the ethical grounding of comics is also at the heart of film. Jonathan Beller, however, suggests film's appropriation of viewers' attentions to produce the final product they consume, what he calls the "cinematic mode of production," is exploitative (*The Cinematic Mode of Production* 1, 13-15). For him, because cinema is tied to advertising, and often production decisions are made with an eye for marketing, the work of watching a film to produce its commercial meaning transforms leisure time into labor time that serves the interests of a film's producers and sponsors. There is certainly something to be said for the extent to which cinema is wedded to commercial interests but to think of it as an assembly line of sorts, especially because of the movement of frames, goes too far.

<sup>7</sup> Georgiana Banita takes this premise a step further. In "Cosmopolitan Suspicion: Comics Journalism and Graphic Silence," she argues that comics are defined by a "silent aesthetic" in which the white space between frames exposes the "failure of cosmopolitan convivial ethics" (51). Rather than merely implicating readers in the production of violence, she takes white space as a universal representation of the subaltern's inability to assert voice within public space. There is certainly room to suggest that the way readers fill in the progression between frames mirrors the way colonists speak for subalterns, but Banita's explanation does not account for how frames that overlay many images atop one another, with no white space, create a moving and powerful message at the same time that it devalues comics's most valuable asset: the ability to render visible subjects otherwise overlooked.

<sup>8</sup> Aryn Bartley picks up McCloud's suggestion that more cartoonish figures, because they are more generalized representations of humanity, encourage identification to argue that Sacco's self-stylization facilitates his critique of humanitarian practices. Were he more dashing, or at least less obviously grotesque, she suggests, readers would be more likely to resist identifying with his perspective ("Hateful Self" 65, 66). While there is some truth in this, I do not quite agree that Sacco's character exists at the level of generalization McCloud associates with the sort of identification Bartley implies. His examples are a plain circle with dots and a line. Sacco always remains a distinct individual. Instead, I think of his representation as a self-deprecating way of addressing the power disparity between himself and his subjects. If they are poor and disenfranchised, at least he is ugly. What makes it so easy to identify with Sacco is the

way he presents his gracelessness with such good humor and constant grace. This, along with his continual asides to the reader, create a sense of intimacy. We don't identify Sacco as a figure for all humanity, but do imagine him as someone we might have as a friend, or whose honesty we might respect.

<sup>9</sup> This is a common trope within a variety of discourses critical of speakers of oppressed identity categories appealing for rights. Lauren Berlant, for example, unapologetically explains that she is tired of the expectation on the part of conservative straight Americans that she apologize for her queer agenda and cease to express her outrage over homophobic violence against non-straight individuals. The rhetorical strategy of this appeal, as she suggests, is to efface the violence and injustice that demands paying attention to queer rights in the first place. It is an appeal to the oppressed person to not make an individual feel aligned with violence, even while refusing to abandon sites of oppression. In this case, her persistence is, again, the sort of "fuck you" Butler refers to. By remaining committed to violently exposing the greater violence of homophobia, Berlant's discourse is non-violent.

<sup>10</sup> *Palestine* was published in 1991, long before George W. Bush's similar infamous declaration, but I think both statements express similar logics and motivations.

<sup>11</sup> And in this sense, Hemon's novel echoes Sophocles's *Antigone* as well as Lacan's ethics he derives from his reading of the play.

## CHAPTER IV

### AMERICAN FICTION, TESTIMONY, AND COSMOPOLITAN TRAUMA\*

Brik's story ends with his reintegration into Bosnia's daily life. In Hemon's novel, the healing Brik feels as he rejoins his homeland is possible because he witnesses first hand the violence that saturates Bosnian life to this day as a result of the traumatic siege of Sarajevo and because he is able to shift from being the object of humanitarian fascination for a distanced benefactor to acting out an intervention of his own when he rescues the young Moldovan woman from a life of slavery in the Eastern European sex industry. Although the novel closes on the optimistic note of Brik finding love and recognition, its optimism strikes a pessimistic note in that Brik's self-actualization comes about through a shift in the triangulation of the humanitarian relationship without altering its structural imbalances. Only by making his pain authentic to himself can Brik evade the need to be interesting, but this pain can only remain authentic so long as he does not need to express it to others. Hemon's conclusion is further pessimistic in that it suggests that humanitarian explorations of difference, along with projects more generally concerned with cosmopolitanism or transnationalism, are always constrained to the genre of the gift. The authenticity of nonfictional trauma remains outside the frame of representation. In this final chapter, I consider how the incorporation of trauma theory's assumptions about the relationship between trauma's victims, the representation of trauma, and the spectatorship of suffering inform the production of altruistic or

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humanitarian fiction. Trauma theory, which in its early stages consistently claimed the unrepresentability of traumatic events, necessitates humanitarian intervention to restore legitimacy to traumatized individuals' subjectivities and to historical narratives that intersect with traumatic events and their ongoing consequences. I argue that the assumption of trauma's ceaseless rupture and evasion of representation contributes to the reconfiguration of humanitarian interest according to neoliberal values.

While it is important to continue to remember atrocities of the past and to bear witness to the humanity of those who suffered because of them, trauma theory creates a space in which the text or voice of an outside observer can take on greater historical and affective value than the voices of those who experience violence directly.<sup>1</sup> This in turn implies that the humanitarian drives the restoration and ongoing production of political and cultural identity in foreign spaces that become dependent upon the ongoing mining of interest from their cultural bodies following national or global traumas. Lauren Berlant argues that trauma theory treats the present as "a symptom, the detritus of the significant relation between lived and remembered pasts and occluded futures" (848). It does so because the spectacle of traumatic suffering makes such a productive resource within economies of attention that abandoning them makes little sense. I argue that by incorporating the authority and appearance of nonfiction to fictionalized accounts of U.S. concern for international atrocity, post-Cold War American authors seek to assert a claim to the production and reception of global history in order to sustain America's centrality to the cosmopolitan vision of trauma theory. I do so through an examination of novels by Jonathan Safran Foer and Karen Tei Yamashita, both of which blend

autobiographical characters and events with fictional accounts of traumatic violence. When they characterize their texts as fictional, both authors lower the stakes of their interventions into the representation of the Holocaust and Japanese immigration policies, respectively. Nonetheless, both texts make strong affective claims about their geopolitical and historical subjects and do so in order to elicit political reactions from American readers. By making a fictional account something for which American readers can feel equally moved as direct encounters with foreignness, these texts circumvent Americans' need to pay attention to the world in order to feel a part of a cosmopolitan society. Despite advancing morally concerned visions of a world transformed in the name of love and justice, the optimism for cosmopolitanism within Foer's and Yamashita's testimonies to violence abroad is continually frustrated by an ongoing, but less triumphantly declared, commitment to the superiority of American liberal values, whether the autonomous self or multicultural tolerance for difference. The performance of cosmopolitan unity achieved through the global circulation and witnessing of American subjects, in the end, reproduces American liberal values in local dress, because it takes the absolution of historical guilt as its precondition. The link between cosmopolitanism and America's fictional production of the world's true identity enables Americans to return to enthusiasm for the nation without addressing how the nation actually interacts with other forms of community on political, cultural, or economic levels.

## **Testimony and Trauma**

The key generic feature of testimony is its insistent appeal for attention.

Testimony's aim is not to produce identification, a cosmopolitan vision in which readers recognize themselves to be in common with foreigners depicted in the text.

Cosmopolitan identification would suggest that the pain, along with the conditions underlying it, are part of the reader's sense of self and daily atmosphere. Rather, testimony seeks to attract and hold affective resources which produce subsequent investments on material and political levels. Luc Boltanski argues that the sight of distant suffering, as in the case of an American account, fictional or not, of the Holocaust, burdens its spectators with the responsibility to report on the content of what is seen and on how those sights produce affects within them. By linking testimonial content to affect in communication, he suggests spectatorship is a legitimate basis for meaningful solidarity across difference (6). The centrality of affect to his description of the process of collective individuation is persuasive, especially in its theorization of the spectator's identity as the both provisional and active end of acts of consumption.

Whether or not the mere act of talking about the spectacles of suffering that one finds moving necessarily translates to effective action is by no means certain. What is clear, though, is that by putting suffering on display and by situating it beyond the limits of one's given community, testimony produces affects that feel global or cosmopolitan, even if they do not result in political action that actually redefines geopolitical boundaries. As an overtly transnational mode of attentiveness, testimonies to foreign abuse invite political intervention on the part of domestic readers. These interventions,

even if they remain at the level of imagination, produce a domineering cosmopolitan impulse to reform foreign societies and cultures according to one's own values. In the case of Foer's novel, this intervention supports the globalization of multicultural tolerance and liberal individualism; for Yamashita, it is a consumerist vision of cosmopolitanism mediated by globalized corporate experiences.

Unlike legal testimony, which derives authority from an assumed correspondence with a single testifying individual's experience, testimonial narratives gain meaning and authority to the extent that they create a flexible portrait of an entire community or culture.<sup>2</sup> Despite the overt generic differences between legal discourse and narrative testimony, there is a broad tendency common to readers, writers, and theorists to conflate the expectations of the two when reading nonfictional and even fictional narratives. The expectation that testimony speak to a broader human truth appeals to a superficial cosmopolitan ideal of homogeneity that then authorizes epistemological interventions – by reading about foreign nationals' suffering within large-scale events, domestic readers come to know something about foreign nations as a whole. The production of conclusive knowledge marks the shift from narrative to legal discourse.

Robert Carr observes that testimonies “tak[e] on value as capital in the fund for agendas of national reconceptualization” not exclusively because narrated individuals claim representative status, although they often do, but because academics “assume an easy metonymic relationship between the subject of testimonial and the ethnic group from which she or he comes” (157). When texts constructed allegorically are published, Carr argues, they “celebrate the reader's ignorance as the group is conversely constituted

as infinite duplicates of the ‘original’ subject presented in the pages of the testimonial” (157).<sup>3</sup> Metonymic readings become a limitation to testimony narratives when the presence of the supposedly objective writer becomes too successfully effaced from the narrative text or conflated with the first-person voice of the narrator, an effect Kimberley Nance describes as fusion. If, as Kate Douglass suggests, testimony narratives rely upon a second-person reader to validate the experiences they record through the act of reading and subsequently, of empathizing, the merit of such experiences lies in their ability to provoke the proper reaction in a remote audience. While the production of empathy for suffering individuals is an admirable goal, such means of attaining this response are not entirely satisfactory for the purposes of testimonial narrative, which is concerned with action rather than validation or identification. Equating the perspectives of writer and narrator allows both reader and writer to fuse their own identities with that of the narrator, and to evade the need to intervene in a cause or alter personal beliefs (Nance, “Disarming Testimony” 573). The conventions of testimony narrative assume a narrator sacrifices the integrity of his or her personal experience in order to more fully relate communal concerns and to describe an exceptional situation, not an individual, worthy of the reader’s attention and action.

Testimony narratives’ use of a metonymic representative of collective identity discourages voyeuristic readings and misplaced identification with their narrators, both effects that if left unaddressed would enable the reader to escape an ethical commitment to act (Braebeck 255). Likewise, Boltanski argues that in moral spectatorship, the viewed individual is not the viewer’s unsuspecting object. Instead, a reciprocal

anticipation between spectator and viewed and “the composition of these anticipations generates an equilibrium” between the two and prevents the relationship from becoming exploitative (39). Testimony is not strictly sincere or authentic; it always involves calculation and strategic management of the affects it hopes to elicit. Accordingly, simple factual description is never adequate to testimony, because its pretensions to realism only further exacerbate the imbalance of power implied in the victim/perpetrator opposition whose undoing is its aim (24). However, as it refuses identification, testimony creates several attendant problems. First, by making identification a moral issue, testimony foregrounds issues of identity and difference between subject and reader within its representation of political conflict, struggle, and trauma. In this way, it becomes a condition of the fact that the person or people of the text are not metonymic, and cannot easily be assimilated to the readers’ own identity, that their pain remains irresolute. Their persistent difference holds open the wounds of trauma that frustrate efforts to renew the production of sociability in traumatized foreign spaces. This invites a second problematic response, a cosmopolitan and reformist impulse to address the issue of difference itself, in terms of cultural values and beliefs, as the whole or partial cause for traumatization and the failure or inability to address an event’s lingering effects. The ethical imperative to act upon another’s world on the basis of humanitarian testimony leads to the imagination of those worlds reformed according to the safe and stable conventions of domesticity because it justifies intervention on the recognition of a generalized foundation of human identity. The assumption of shared identity sustains the further assumption of a shared desire for the humanitarian’s form of intervention.

Domesticity, in turn, is intimately bound to institutionalized political narratives rooted in the reader's geopolitical location, so the empathy testimony reading sparks becomes a desire to nationalize traumatized foreigners in order to restore their wounded subjectivity. Reading about global atrocity incites a desire to make the world safe and ordinary, like home, and acting upon the impulse to intervene in this way overcomes the firm insistence upon difference, leading ultimately back to the undesirable state of fusion Nance identifies in which no one needs to act.

Anne Frank's diary provides a useful example of how a single text remembering a particular event serves different needs when used or witnessed from different locations. Its global reception also shows the necessity and impossibility of forgiveness to cosmopolitan projects. In the U.S., the diary became popular following a stage adaptation. The play, as Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder relate, de-emphasized Frank's Jewishness in order to present her as a figure of universal suffering, the personification of Nazi violence against global humanity, and of a faith that humanity can withstand such suffering. Avoiding her murder in the German camps entirely, the play concluded on Frank's famous words, "In spite of everything, I still really believe that people are really good at heart" (qtd. in Levy and Sznajder, 61). In the context of its post-war performance, those people really good at heart are American citizens who put an end to foreign genocide and were beginning to conceive of themselves as heroically responsible for determining the direction of global development. The play's reading of Frank's words constructs the Holocaust in a way that serves specifically American purposes. Through the goodwill and hard work of Americans, Frank's hope can be made reality as

life resumes after the horrors of a war America put an end to (61). Under these terms her memory speaks to American munificence rather than Jewish hope or suffering and empowers American viewers to remake the world in their own image for Frank's sake. Levy and Sznajder suggest that a Jewish use of the diary places the emphasis on the history of European anti-Semitism and sees American global leadership in a less optimistic light.

The desire to interpret Anne Frank is a symptom of shifting global power structures. The act of interpretation invests a priori the remembered object or event with a belief in its relevance to the interpreting subject. Anne Frank says something about how America understands itself in the post-war world. For representations of pain to circulate within cosmopolitan rather than individual or national registers, the recipients of their address must be able to imagine that anyone might feel included within them. Literary texts operate effectively as a means by which people anchor a sense of individual self within a larger, imagined community, because individuals are able to read into their perception of textual address a specific kind of public, in the sense that Michael Warner gives the term.<sup>4</sup> As Warner argues, a public "might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence" (67). A public becomes real for those who feel included within its address by merit of their active investment in it of the agency to imbue their individual lives with a sense of purpose. What we feel defines who we are, and how we fit into the world is real only to the extent that we believe it to define us.

The problem of speaking for others is compounded not only by the fact of vast differences in political, economic, and social power between witnesses and those whom they witness but also, in Foer's and Yamashita's novels, by the mediation of their stories in fiction that at times performs as non-fiction. While, given trauma theory's claim that trauma cannot be represented directly, it may not pose an immediate obstacle to affective truth, the shift in what the fictionalization of testimony offers up as a textual product is fundamentally different from that of more straightforward narratives. With a victim or set of concrete historical circumstances no longer in view, the aim of such texts is no longer exactly to create empathy for either as specific or irreducible. Instead, the good fictionalized testimonies offer up to readers is the experience of feeling pain by traumatizing them with the experience of feeling for characters in extreme circumstances. This move, as Boltanski observes, reduces the common of cosmopolitanism to pain in general and treats the pain of readerly empathy as its central concern rather than the actual suffering of the people it professes to document (6-8). Further, the humanitarian novel's foregrounding of a celebrity or Western presence within and influence upon sites of foreign suffering infuses its testimony with the aura of celebrity, and this is the basis of its value within an economy of attention.

### **Cosmopolitanism as Affective Nationalism in *Everything is Illuminated***

In the preceding chapters, I have theorized cosmopolitanism as means to organize affective stimuli into sociality rather than identity. In this section, I consider the means by which humanitarian interest and generic conventions intersect in American literature in order to manage the boundaries of the nation within representations of

transnational encounters with events of global magnitude. Where critical discussions of cosmopolitanism are continually mired in the false dichotomy between national and cosmopolitan solidarity, literature presents a more complex and seamlessly integrated vision of how Americans produce and are produced by their worlds. Especially interesting is Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), which explores how solidarity comes into being as individuals from distant nations and conflicting cultures explore their feelings for global traumas and what consequences the movement of people and histories across global space might have for bounded communities. Like Robbins, who I discussed in my "Introduction," Foer envisions cosmopolitan sociability as a means to overcome America's negative public image as a nation caught up with a belief in its inherent superiority without abandoning the assumption that America has valuable lessons to teach the world. He does so by fictionalizing his travels to Ukraine to investigate his grandfather's Holocaust experience. The novel tells the story of Jonathan's misinformed adventure through a correspondence between himself and Alex, his Ukrainian translator, following their discovery that Alex's grandfather lived in a Jewish village and betrayed his friend Herschel to Nazi soldiers to secure the safety of his infant son. In their letters, Alex also describes the way Jonathan taught him the liberal values that enable him to embrace a queer identity, one Jonathan seems ironically unwilling to accept.<sup>5</sup> Foer undertakes a defense of the world from a culturally and economically imperialistic America by depicting Jonathan helping Alex to be true to his feelings. Alex's education proceeds according to an imperative Foer summarizes in the axiom "feel more," the advice of his

editor that he acknowledges on the book's copyright page as "always the best" and by presenting attentiveness to feeling as a particularly American value. This process reaches its climax in Alex's transformation of Jonathan's own advice, "Just be yourself," into sacrament (179). His words are sacramental in a double sense, in that for Alex they are epiphanic, illuminating, but also a confession of his sin of preferring America to Ukraine, and his idealization of Jonathan to his true self. The aim of Jonathan's affective intervention into Ukrainian culture is to satisfy Foer's own curiosity over the question, "can historical accuracy," the documented events of the Holocaust, "be replaced with imaginative accuracy," the story Foer desires (HarperCollins). Yet Foer's appreciation of affect also capitalizes on the production of identity within a world driven by what Hardt and Negri describe as an immaterial economy of affective labor. In both, attention is the scarce resource for which information must compete.<sup>6</sup> This reordering of the economy around attentiveness creates an awkward situation for Americans used to the idea of their exceptionalism since they cannot assume American culture holds a global premium. To maintain this illusion, Jonathan, Foer's representative of exceptionalist America, acts as if the world's consumers are beholden to an imperializing American culture industry rather than allow their acts of feeling more, produced when they play the part of just being themselves, to solidify into narratives that legitimize independent local communities. Instead of a heterogeneous but interconnected and dynamic cosmopolitanism, what results from his way of interacting with the world are global sites that feel autonomous but remain dependent upon American affective infrastructure to decode history. I argue that Foer's deliberate

blurring of the difference between fact and fiction, historical record and personal feeling allows him to manipulate the mechanisms through which affect adds value to specific forms of solidarity and aligns the feeling of cosmopolitan solidarity with a politics of American exceptionalism.

Whereas typically Holocaust narratives and commentaries on them express universal warnings against human violence, as in Adorno's phrase, "never again Auschwitz," in Foer's hands, the event's horrific violence does not exhaust its meaning for those who experience its memory in the present (19). Instead, *Everything is Illuminated* was born out of his preoccupation with the possibility that fictionalizing his relationship to Jewish history, along with that history itself, could help him overcome the shameful feeling that he was only "a closeted Jew" (HarperCollins). In other words, Foer reimagines the Holocaust as an event upon which individuals may engage in affective labor on their own behalf, bringing to bear upon it their own local attentive forms and to form from it different ways of affiliating with the world. Foer can feel authentically Jewish as a result of his interpretation, even though he acknowledges it is entirely the product of his imagination. As the vehicle for attentive forms, his novel suggests one should construct history in a way that allows one to be true to immediate personal feelings in order to escape cultural imperialism. By calling into question the solidity of "historical accuracy" and the validity of its effect upon individuation, Foer's novel, a work of fiction, attempts to unmoor the individual from the biopolitical effects of identity. Identity has what Michael Warner calls "manifest positive content" (75). As such, its legibility relies upon its locus of production more than any attention paid to it

by those who claim it. It is not a matter of circulation. Whatever an identity's content may be is determined and given fixed value through the power of some independent institution (75). In this sense, identity is a means of regulating biopower. One has identity regardless of individual attention or activity. It is sent from an institution to an individual. A person either is or is not a particular race and a nation "includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose" and, we might add, willing to belong or not (87). One does not acquire identity through effort or devotion but the possession of an identity does provide an individual with a source of cultural capital. Identity operates under the assumption of attentive forms that remain constant across communication. In this sense, identity is a mode of imperialistic solidarity. Foer's understanding of the Holocaust as a source of individuation, however, depends entirely on how he does or does not choose to interact with its memory and representation. By treating its effects upon him as the result of his own affective labor, he frees the event from institutional regulation and opens it to a form of individualistic cosmopolitan play in which imaginative accuracy is just as meaningful as objective facts.

The potential equivalence of historical and imaginative accuracy he posits entertains the idea of individuation centered upon cosmopolitan networks of attentiveness rather than loyalty to the nation and the project of maintaining the consistency of its identity. His act of feeling individual makes use of a cosmopolitan repertoire of historical narrative possibilities, but continually draws these narratives inward, into private sensation. Here, a community and its claims are significant only to

the extent that an individual feels aligned with them. Treating loyalty as a particular structure of care that informs engagement with textualized historical claims rather than a text's objective affective content or the given starting point for individuation, liberates the individual from the confines of potentially oppressive given culture. Since, as Sara Ahmed suggests, affect is what "sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects," thinking about loyalty as an individually constructed affective object opens up a space for cosmopolitan solidarity when narratives circulate globally ("Happy Objects" 29). The destabilization of community through a shift toward affect justifies Foer's desire to explore the potential of loyalty to individual feelings rather than to the narrative rigidity more commonly associated with faithful testimony. His literary exercise becomes more significant and real to his experience of life and actually overcomes his need to pay attention to the Holocaust itself, along with other forms of documentary evidence. So, by expressing a commitment to individualism in a novel, Foer overtly destabilizes loyalties to one type of bounded community that the novel represents as Alex's Ukrainian nationalism while making a more subtle appeal to identify with another that is equally limited, a cosmopolitan rooted in the liberal values of American exceptionalism.

Just as Anne Frank's diary became a justification for American humanitarian intervention in Europe through its popularization in the U.S., so Foer uses a representation of Ukrainian collective memory of Jews and the Holocaust to authorize an American cultural intervention into the formation of democratic Ukraine in the present. In the novel, Jonathan's relationship to Alex is metonymic for Foer's construction of

exactly this relationship between the U.S. and Ukraine. In the fictional space of Alex's letters to Jonathan, Ukraine exists as an infantile nation looking to America as a model for its new democratic existence and matures over the course of their pilgrimage to Trachimbrod.<sup>7</sup> In fact, as Alex notes in the novel's opening pages, the story of Jonathan's trip happens to fall on "the first birthday of [Ukraine's] ultramodern constitution," modeled on America's own (4). Although the constitution was ratified on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Foer shifts the celebration to the first week of July to coincide with America's celebration of its independence, suggesting that Ukraine itself, and not just its founding document, is merely imitative of all things American. Alex's lame attempts to perform American coolness on the basis of stale 80s pop cultural references like *ALF* bear this out. Since Foer never presents Jonathan's understanding of Ukraine or America directly, we are left to intuit them from Alex's representations of Jonathan's reactions. Alex exemplifies the Ukrainian need for an American education in the value of diversity on behalf of Foer and American readers when he confesses that his idea of Jewishness is limited to anti-Semitic prejudices and textbook images which only portray Jews as emaciated concentration camp victims (32). His loveable naiveté fuels a belief in the superiority of American social values based on liberal tolerance and consequently, justifies the affective intervention Jonathan makes over the course of the novel. Alex's thoughts on Jonathan as an American Jew perceiving Ukraine creates an ironic distance between Foer and Jonathan with its suggestion that Alex's feeling of a lack of common ground with Americans and Jews is the result of false consciousness that more enlightened American readers can see beyond. This suggestion allows Foer both to

critique American neo-imperialism and to act imperialistically by depicting the historical vision Alex develops as a result of his encounter with Jonathan as eclipsing Jonathan's American perspective with a new cosmopolitan expansiveness.

Foer's efforts to distance himself from Jonathan are also ubiquitously implied in Alex's very language and Jonathan's (along with readers') response to it. Like reviewers, who nearly always praised Foer's book first for its hilarious deformation of the English language, Jonathan apparently takes pleasure in Alex's frequent malapropisms.<sup>8</sup> In his letters, Alex reveals that while composing his chapters he "fatigued the thesaurus" as Jonathan "counseled" him to and later that he has "performed the corrections" as "demanded" (23, 24). Among other things, Jonathan insists that Alex "not alter the mistakes, because they sound humorous, and humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story" (53). His insistence that Alex write in absurd, broken English asserts his own mastery of the language and dominance over Alex's poor performance of American expressive forms. Jonathan's demand that Alex perform foreign failure to adapt to English for the sake of laughter reincorporates Alex's affective labor, his attempts to be himself in light of the history they are producing in the text, within an immaterial economy centered on America. Whereas the exercise allows Foer to feel the benefit of inclusion in an authentic Jewish community, or, to come out as a Jew, Alex can only fail to attain the Americanness he seeks. The value of his performance returns to American readers, who can take pride in their sympathy for Alex.

Because Jonathan pays Alex to write, Alex feels he can only represent Jonathan in a flattering light. Foer subverts Jonathan's Americanizing influence over their text,

though, by showing readers Alex's uncorrected draft and his response to Jonathan's editorial impositions. For example, Jonathan wants Alex to invent a violent demise for Grandfather's dog Sammy Davis Junior Junior because Alex's representation of Jonathan's fear of dogs reveals his vulnerability (55). The dog Alex sees as harmless inspires a less-than-manly fear in Jonathan. Similarly, on the first night of their travels, Alex and Grandfather are stunned to learn that Jonathan will not eat any of the food their poor, rural hotel offers. He is, as he impatiently explains to them, a vegetarian. In *Eating Animals*, a book-length polemic against the U.S. factory farming system, Foer makes it clear that while he does not eat meat out of compassion for animals, his is not a lifestyle he expects everyone to follow. Jonathan's defense of the inherent value of his vegetarianism in foreign space differs from Foer's by implying a sense of inferiority on the part of Ukrainians, who do not possess even the capacity to imagine such a choice as morally complicated. All Alex and Grandfather can say in return is "I do not understand" and "what is wrong with him?" (65). This logic in turn explains the novel's Ukrainians' inability to consider the humanity of Jews or homosexuals. Jonathan's defense of his lifestyle suggests that he understands his presence as broadening Alex's horizons with better attentive forms that combat racism and homophobia. However, his declaration of vegetarianism follows his demand that Alex figuratively murder his pet for the sake of his own reputation. Grandfather and Alex do not eschew the vegetarian lifestyle because they are ignorant or cannot imagine animals as feeling. They eat sausage because they are poor and it is the food that is available.

When Foer represents Alex's hurt and confusion over Jonathan's behavior, he creates empathy for his own political and moral values and distances them from stereotypical attitudes of the Ugly American. Alex stands for Foer's revitalized American patriotism taken to a global level while Jonathan is a straw man for blind insensitivity exemplified in his demand to be accommodated at the dinner table. Foer subtly makes Jonathan a figure toward whom American readers may direct their feelings of outrage and associate with illiberal postures of cultural and economic imperialism. Alex's sympathetic characterization authorizes Foer's superficial critique of a certain kind of America from abroad – he is a vision of a more cosmopolitan humanity – while at the same time standing for the expansion of American attentive forms as the basis for a different sort of affective imperialism. This happens again when, while engaged in a typically patriotic conversation extolling the economic wonders of American life, Alex professes to “dig Negroes,” especially his hero, Michael Jackson (70). For Jonathan, the word “negro” is burdened with America's history of slavery, segregation, and racial violence. Its value is always inseparable from its embeddedness in national history. For Alex, it is most likely the term his thesaurus supplies for black. Jonathan's offense is the product of his feeling shame at having to face a national legacy of intolerance and violence in the presence of a citizen of a nation currently experiencing poverty as a result of American global economic dominance. The recognition of his implication in a history of racist violence disrupts the power structure between the U.S. and Ukraine that Jonathan's attitude attempts to maintain. Jonathan acts upon his shame by attempting to include Alex within the historical address of the word – he defines “negro” as an

essentially offensive term within a globally American history that implicates all humanity in its violence. He tells Alex that even in rural Ukraine, “You shouldn’t use that word,” even though it is not the even less admissible “n-word” (70). Jonathan instead reinforces the use of the term “African-American,” which although not objectionable, nonetheless eliminates the possibility that Alex might admire Africans beyond American influence. Alex rejects Jonathan’s cosmopolitanization of guilt and instead wonders “what’s wrong with Negroes? ... they are premium people” (70). Black people cannot be visible in Alex’s representation of American consciousness because they present American subjects with an uncomfortable realization that they are not so different from Ukrainian anti-Semites like the innkeeper who asks of Jonathan, “can I see his horns?” (107). This shame destabilizes the American desire to read urban Jewish Americans who can only think of Ukrainians in the way Foer depicts them in the novel – as backward anti-Semites – as less prejudiced than rural Ukrainians. But, while forcing Alex to revise his history, Jonathan also refuses the validity of Alex’s affective labor, of the value of his being true to his feelings and himself. His insistence on the naturalness of the historical use of the word “negro,” rooted in his own American experience and the feelings it evokes, regulates the way Alex may imagine himself as within global community. He should feel for the term, but only in a way that further normalizes a particular, American way of attending to history.

When Jonathan and Alex finally find Augustine, the woman who saved his grandfather Safran, the two have a long conversation about the urban commercial sites that make America unique – Times Square, Las Vegas, Broadway – a list characterized

by ideas of greed, self-gratification, and an attempt to cover over deeper realities with a pleasing surface. As Alex reflects on his interest in the U.S., he comes to the realization that he “was not proud of everything that I knew about America. I was ashamed” (157).<sup>9</sup> The intimate knowledge he possesses is a source of shame for Alex because it indicates that he has failed to perceive who he is and where he lives as central to his imagination. He has attempted to remake Ukraine according to an Americanized façade rather than taking pride in what it actually is, as if he could value one or the other. With a renewed sense of national pride, Alex vows never to leave Ukraine or his family. His declaration of national loyalty shifts the locus of the American dream from a limited territorial place offering unlimited potential for self-transformation to a limitless deterritorialized global influence over how selves may be constructed, from imperialism to Empire. Alex validates Foer’s American value for individual autonomy and self-definition when he chooses poor, humble Ukraine over the lure of American pop culture. Being true to himself in this way, Alex Americanizes Ukrainian nationalism for Foer’s American readers who can then feel at home in Alex’s Ukraine. If foreigners were transformed according to American examples in order to be true to their inner feelings, Foer’s representation of Alex suggests, cosmopolitan love could become possible. Of course, the cosmopolitanism of this love depends on homogenization. Nonetheless, Foer’s depiction of Alex’s earnestness suggests that the common ground for cosmopolitan solidarity, which is, in fact, no more than the Americanization of foreign spaces, or the desire for it, is already present; it is merely buried by repressive foreign political regimes and cultures. Seen in this light, Jonathan’s presence enables moral and political

development within Ukraine in the name of a globally dominant form of American cultural capital. In *Alex*, Foer produces the illumination of American individualism's potential to remake himself within Ukraine. The reader's distancing from Jonathan marks a shift from one sort of imperialism and the emergence of cosmopolitan hope, but identification with Alex reinscribes that hope within a new imperialism still centered on America along less material dimensions.

The aim of Foer's collaborative testimony with an imaginary foreigner is to heal Americans from the traumatic feeling of an encounter with foreign claims to pain while simultaneously helping foreigners to come to terms with global atrocities. In the place of a past conceptualized in terms of reified events, the sense of historical memory embedded in cosmopolitan American fiction, like Foer's, translates into continual affective and inter-relational negotiations. Foer's negotiation between global and local modes of remembering makes the case that a provisional love premised on the painful feeling of forgiveness, what Jonathan calls love emerging from "useful sadness," is possible between the descendants of victims and perpetrators of Holocaust violence (266). Levy and Sznajder describe the global circulation of representations of local events as a cosmopolitanization of memory. If, as Stiegler argues, external memory is a representation of attentive forms, then memories circulating cosmopolitically compete on behalf of nations or other political entities for the loyalty of consumers' attentions to them. Whereas in the past, sociology associated collective memory with the territorial boundaries of the nation, within the globalized present, structures of memory cannot be contained predictably within any territorial boundaries. Globalization does not negate

the potency of collective memory or devalue its specificity. Instead, as Levy and Sznajder argue, local and global memories are mutually constitutive. The effect of a transition from rooted, national memory to a cosmopolitan one is to deterritorialize the sense by which ownership of or identification with an event occurs such that an event previously understood as exclusive to an individual population or identity category – the Jewishness of the Holocaust – becomes “everyone’s common property and allows people from different places to deal with it in the most diverse ways” (8). The move from rooted to cosmopolitan memory mirrors the process by which attentive forms become externalized and produce sociality through acts of affective labor.

In the case of the Holocaust, the circulation of attentive forms through its narrativization resists cultural stasis through the provisionality of the interrelationships it produces. Trauma theorists frequently claim a traumatic event is unknowable because trauma is by definition that which breaks all frames of reference. Considered from the perspective of an affective economy in which feeling generates solidarity, trauma represents a disruption in the production of social value. For global capitalism, such a halt in productivity is unacceptable. It leaves individuals with an event of immense psychological significance but unable to convert that event adequately into the object of collective attention, from which point it could circulate freely. Being traumatized leaves a victim attentively impoverished, dependent upon the intervention of an untraumatized outsider to redefine a value-producing sociability. Bearing in mind Terranova’s claim that affective labor produces sociability, trauma’s interruption to the production of attention also breaks the bonds of community through focusing attention doggedly upon

the wrong of the event. Forgiveness is the means by which such disruptions in attention become sutured. In the ordinary sense of the word, forgiveness implies a more or less straightforward set of social positions. There is a victim and a perpetrator structured around a wrong. The wrong between them is nullified through the victim's abandonment of a claim against the perpetrator. The act of abandonment restores the possibility of community. This sort of forgiveness may be possible within extremely local contexts and in matters of trivial harm, but becomes impossible when directed toward whole societies and traumatic events. Forgiveness structures the social around trauma such that relationships are permanently imbalanced. It is an act of absolute generosity that leaves the wrongdoer eternally indebted to the victim while also defining the generosity of the victim as a condition of victimhood. Forgiveness solidifies the wrong as the core of the identity of each party to its exchange even as the act of forgiveness renders guilt and wrongness null. It is the core of the identity of each but cannot be addressed or modified.

The problem of forgiveness is structured identically to the intervention into history that I find in Foer's novel: in both cases, an individual's understanding of self and other is the product of symbolic interaction with an imaginary universal object, be it collective history or trauma, in which both subject and object are mutually constitutive. By failing to make the Holocaust central to his sense of self, Foer, as he confesses, felt like "a closeted Jew." His reading of the event and his relationship to it is undertaken as an American but identifies him as a Jew with ties to the Ukrainian community and bound to the ongoing life of the geographic community from which his ancestors emigrated.

His sense of self, informed as it is by a global memory, is cosmopolitan in the sense that his narrative of the Holocaust is one circulating beyond borders, but is not in the sense that the movement of that narrative is continually interrupted by a return to national space demanded by trauma and guilt.<sup>10</sup> The novel ends when Jonathan breaks off communication with Alex after learning that Grandfather betrayed his Jewish friend Herschel to the Nazis and Grandfather, unable to forgive himself, commits suicide. Foer's insistence upon making forgiveness the affective focus of his encounter with Ukraine and between Alex and Jonathan, and more specifically the certain failure of forgiveness to repair trauma's disruption of sociability, continually returns the cosmopolitan potential inherent in his notion of solidarity along the lines of felt experience to an unbalanced, exploitative economic relationship that runs parallel to existing modes of imperialism.<sup>11</sup> In Foer's case, American identification with Holocaust trauma demands that Alex and Ukraine concede power to Jonathan and the U.S.. Given the already imbalanced state of affairs between the two nations, such a claim is hardly justifiable. A cosmopolitanism figured as globally inclusive depends upon a sense of forgiveness that treats all subject positions as flexible, that abandons the right to demand reformation on the part of offending others.

Despite the extreme duress of the situation, Foer makes it clear that Grandfather understands himself as just as much a perpetrator of genocide as the men who shot Herschel. By closing off his identity within a tragic narrative structure, Alex's grandfather acts as if his failure to appreciate the extent of Nazi hatred implicates him in the violence they committed against all Jews. His one moment of self-preservation

solidifies his place within rigid generic convention on the side of the villain rather than the hero. Because he remains true to an idea of himself as a character within the narrative structure of the Holocaust as a historical tragedy rather than a being within some less meaningful provisional unfolding, Grandfather is unable to be true to himself. His reading of trauma as a wound without closure, following critics like Felman and Caruth, reinforces the pattern of cultural ownership of historical narratives that Foer's critique of Jonathan subverts. Similarly, when critics read the novel's illumination as the restoration of Alex's secret Jewishness and overlook Jonathan's discomfort at his affection, they legitimize the superficial form of cosmopolitanism based in common identity that Foer's transgressive reading of Holocaust history speaks against by neutralizing its more radical cosmopolitan attentiveness within the retroactive embrace of normative ethnicity. Instead, illumination and a different, more cosmopolitan sociality, occur when Alex expresses a queer identity with the help of Jonathan's example of American liberal tolerance and loyalty to self. Alex's gradual embrace of his queerness is evident in his belated confession that contrary to his initial self-portrait as the essence of heterosexual masculinity, he has "never been carnal with a girl" and that "If I were to inform Father ... about how I comprehend love and who I desire to love, he would kill me" (144, 241). Instead of womanizing, Alex spends his time alone on the beach, imagining "a line ... painted on the sand and on the ocean" connecting his heart to Jonathan's (214). Jonathan's vegetarianism becomes the model for Alex's queerness – not something wrong, just the way he is.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Jonathan, Alex demands honesty toward personal feelings. He does not "command" Jonathan to "write a story that is as it

occurred in the actual,” but would “command” his story be “faithful” to love (240).<sup>13</sup> If Jonathan is unwilling to allow Alex the freedom to make their story true to their feelings for one another, then no sort of relationship between them is possible. Alex ends his final letter with an apology to Jonathan for finally revealing to him “for the first time exactly what I think,” and signing off with an intimate “Love” rather than his usual “Guilelessly” (242).

*Everything is Illuminated* begins with Alex meditating on what it means to love another. His mother has told him that to be part of a family means that “One day you will do things for me that you hate” (2). He adds that one does things for another not only out of loyalty to blood but more importantly “because they are common decencies ... because I am not a big fucking asshole” (2).<sup>14</sup> When Jonathan and Alex write down their feelings about the memories they uncover, both already know that Grandfather betrayed Herschel. When Alex describes family loyalty and common decency, he is not exactly describing his actions alone. These words do describe the person he would like to be, but more significantly, they are his request to Jonathan for permission to use his feelings rather than historical documents as the basis for his portrait of his grandfather. He asks Jonathan to give up his Jewish claim to the authority to represent the Holocaust to the grandchild of a perpetrator of violence against Jews. He wants to depict Grandfather as no less than “a good person, alive in a bad time” (145). The purpose of Alex’s desire to misremember his grandfather’s role in history is not to gloss over its violence or even Grandfather’s moment of decision. Alex knows he has to “point a finger at Grandfather pointing at Herschel” (178). What he desires to revise is the

hegemony of Jewish and American usages of Holocaust narrative that enforce a reading of Grandfather as equally monstrous as those willingly carrying out the executions that justify the ongoing regulation of the production of Ukrainian cultural identity by self-absorbed foreign tourists like Jonathan. Taken as a description for the process of constructing history through affective memory, Alex's words express a more complex demand to remain open to the possibility of finding oneself in surprising alignment with those solidified in opposition to oneself by merit of determinate historical memories of racial or national identity.<sup>15</sup> Alex's imperative translates directly to Jonathan's effort to understand his relationship to Holocaust memory and the way his representation of his relationship to it structures the possible relationship Alex may imagine with him. The loving community Alex envisions reclaims responsibility for the sociality that might emerge from his attentiveness rather than entering into a universal human community of realized potential. His love is cosmopolitan for its capacity to free affective value in a way that moves beyond the patriotism Robbins and Foer otherwise cannot find a way beyond.

Foer represents Alex's desire to remember Grandfather as a loving relative as an illustration of the devastating effects of territorialized memory on personal relationships. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event," but materializes in its constant repetition through narrative (4). Likewise, Alex observes that his representation of his act of bearing witness to Augustine's testimony "felt like I was making them new again" (185). In the discourse of trauma theory, testimony's renewal of feeling produces empathy in readers and gives trauma narratives

an ethical imperative. Testimony helps people both in and outside a community to keep in mind the reality of a violence felt to be unreal and to imagine a partial sense of solidarity with victims. Alex reads the production of testimony very differently. Grandfather's death is an unnecessary repetition of the inhumanity of the Holocaust that extends its violence onto bystanders in the present. From his perspective, it prevents forgiveness and the production of new, more expansive, differently ordered, or cosmopolitan forms of sociality. The way Alex figures his own repetition as an act necessary to maintain his friendship with Jonathan suggests his pain is not the result of guilt over Nazi massacres. Instead, Alex suffers the violence produced through America's political adoption of the Jew as the object of humanitarian sympathy in its own excursions into foreign spaces. Feeling obligated to present Grandfather in the same company as Nazis is to Alex equally outrageous as Jonathan's suggestion that he is guilty of American racism. He repeats the experience not to preserve it for posterity or to enable others to feel its weight but as a self-sacrificial act for the sake of his friendship with Jonathan. He bears the pain of memory so that Jonathan can enjoy the pleasure of feeling himself the victim in the hope that Jonathan will respond by feeling something for him. Making new again in the form of testimony, as Alex understands it, should not require such pain. Renewal is an opportunity filled with the potential for love. Writing subverts hegemonic politics because it gives individuals "second chances" beyond history, for Alex to "be not like I am" but as he would like others to see him (144). He refers to this flexibility as being "nomadic with the truth," a felicitously cosmopolitan error (179). If remembering Grandfather's actions within received narratives of the

Holocaust divides Jonathan from Alex, then why not represent it and transform the feeling behind what is known in a positive way? He views Jonathan's disavowal of his feelings as an act of cowardice and a waste of potential because he demands a repetition of historical guilt when he can also perceive feelings of love in the present. Jonathan's refusal to cede an ethnically centered narrative of traumatization reifies the Holocaust as the source of identity in the present. Invested with objectivity, Jonathan's rendering of Holocaust memory forces upon Alex a disembodied feeling of responsibility for suffering, an inescapable sense of guilt, and silences the space in which their love could achieve expression.

As a response to Alex's call for a nomadic truth, Jonathan suggests in his novel that it is necessary for both to feel the consequences of their respective national and ethnic histories. He illustrates his claim in a short anecdote about a vision or hallucination experienced by his grandfather Safran. In the vision, a statue of Safran's great grandfather, the Kolker, tells him about his marriage and the way his great grandmother grieved when he died. His marriage was tragic, challenged by the uncontrollable moods he suffered following a traumatic head injury at the local mill. "We were supposed to sleep in separate rooms," he tells Safran, "but every night" his wife just came to him anyway (264). The wall was present in their lives, but only as a show for others. The two "paid it no attention." The Kolker's wife Brod patiently bore his abuse "and so many more, things I would never tell anyone, and she never even loved me." "Now that is love," the statue concludes of Brod's suffering on his behalf (264). As an extended metaphor for globalization and the sort of relationship Jonathan

and Alex might have, the story is baldly apologetic for the suffering the world's powerful have caused the weak. The Kolker beat his wife mercilessly every night and she simply took it despite appearances because she had nowhere else to go. Ukraine should expect to receive the same treatment from the U.S. if it is to become a modern developed nation. Jonathan suggests his own refusal to love Alex by recognizing his interpretation of history, his right to claim the affective value of his labor upon their moment of contact, does not mean he does not love him. The statue goes on to say that bearing the memory of traumatic loss is like living next to a waterfall. At first all that the home's residents can attend to is the maddening sound of the rushing water. Its noise pervades all aspects of life. Eventually, though, the sound ceases to register. It is still just as present but no longer has an effect on the lives of the residents. In this way, Brod *"wakes one morning, perhaps after years of pure and unwavering grieving, to realize she slept a good night's sleep."* Brod is still sad, still tied to her loss, but *"grief is replaced with a useful sadness."* The transition from overwhelming grief to useful sadness is the seed of love: *"Every love is carved from loss. Mine was. Yours is. Your great-great-great-grandchildren's will be. But we learn to live in that love"* (266). By feeling that pain rather than altering its truth in a pleasing way, Jonathan suggests, Alex proves his love for him, even if it is one he can never enjoy and one that leaves him entirely dependent upon the mercy of a self-obsessed and violent master. His sacrifice means that Jonathan gets the final say on how history can be recorded and strips Alex of all real power. Alex can be himself, but only if being himself validates history and geopolitics as Jonathan understands them.

The novel's final, unanswered letter, Grandfather's suicide note, addresses Jonathan in order to break the structural dependence between America and Ukraine and Jonathan and Alex. He tells Jonathan that although it is important to know what kind of man Alex is, Alex and his family "must begin again .....cut all of the strings ... with everything they have ever known" (275). His death marks an absolute break in Alex's focus on America and the production of affective value for American attentive forms. Jonathan may have taught Alex to feel more and to be himself, but Grandfather realizes that he can only do either in a meaningful way if Alex can also claim the right to produce his own history. The story Alex and Jonathan negotiate over is the vehicle for political solidarity, and its shape determines the shape of community that might emerge in the cosmopolitan space opened through their contact. This community, and its political significance, is the true end of the affective labor in which Jonathan encourages Alex to engage. Through their efforts to make sense of their strained relationship, Foer puts the movement of affective capital on display. He even shows its rootedness in America, the exclusivity of identity, but cannot entirely admit the collusion between "feel more," its promise of "just be yourself" and something like "work harder." The affective economy of his novel is a new way of communicating the American Dream, but this time to the world. The real trauma Alex must endure becomes not the legacy of the Holocaust, the violence of USSR totalitarianism, or the crushing poverty that continues thanks to U.S. economic dominance, but simple the fact that he, like Ukraine itself, has not been true to himself. That Foer imagines death and dissolution as the only resolution to the confrontation he stages upon Holocaust memory makes the promise of

this dream a renewal of imperialistic patriotism. By encouraging us to focus on how the failure of Jonathan and Alex's personal relationship feels, Foer distracts our attention from the way the history at the heart of its failure moves affective value from a global periphery towards its American center. Yet, while the cosmopolitanism that might have been possible between Jonathan and Alex is doomed to failure, Foer's representation of its failure does open the possibility to reconsider the basis for America's interaction with the world, to feel its place in the world differently, in a way that might even lead to love.

**“What's the Harm in a Little Imagination”: Sentimentality, Violence, and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Circle K Cycles***

The inflexibility of Foer's straw man, Jonathan, and the utter likeability of Alex make for a seductive critique of an outdated mode of American exceptionalism, one I argue is committed to the validity of the very same exceptionalism it dismisses. The defining qualities of Foer's America are not identifiable in terms of the surface of its globally exported cultural production, of its literature, films, or music. Instead, the nation is of global significance to his cosmopolitanizing mission because he imagines it as the heart of universal liberal values that sustain the individual and promote the validity of unique human existences apart from consumer culture. As the defender of human diversity, Foer's exceptional America is the epitome of the Holocaust's lesson learned and a model for Ukrainian political development, even though he invents entirely the contents of his Holocaust narrative. His agonistic transfer of liberal values from Jonathan to Alex and Grandfather advertises the success of his brand of American globalization. By helping Alex come to terms with his own self-worth, reinventing what

it means to be Ukrainian in terms of the value of American values, Jonathan frees him to make his world one Americans can take pride in living alongside, and that pride nationalizes cosmopolitanism using the affective labor of foreign bodies. The success of Foer's globalization of American exceptionalism depends upon the conflation of fiction and nonfiction throughout his novel, *Jonathan and Foer*. As I have argued, sustained attention to the artifice of his text shows Foer's efforts to reincorporate Ukraine within an expanded sphere of more subtle American influence.

A similar rhetorical dynamic is at work in Karen Tei Yamashita's mixed-media novel, *Circle K Cycles*, although she imagines American cosmopolitanism in the opposite direction: as a consumer culture independent of local values. In it, Yamashita continually shifts between nonfictional travelogue, fictional immigrant stories, and found objects to create a document testifying to the poor state of race relations in Japan. Across the shifting genres, Yamashita develops two main plots and elaborates a set of philosophical reflections. The first plot concerns her family's stay in Tokyo and involves their everyday experiences as American consumers setting up their home or attending sold-out exhibition soccer matches. They are at turns surprised by Japan's excessiveness and pleased with the ease with which they become a seamless part of its daily life. The second presents three narratives of different forms of violence against Japanese-Brazilian guest workers, who Yamashita refers to as just Brazilians because Japan only allows immigrants of Japanese ancestry. Interspersed between the two are her meditations on recipes, newspaper headlines, and rules generalizing cultural behaviors, all of which comes together in the image of the Circle K convenience store to

create a neoliberal capitalist vision of cosmopolitanism as the ecstatic experience of free choice and roving consumption. What I explore in this section is the question of why Yamashita juxtaposes her three fictional testimonies with the non-fiction travelogue and the meditations on globalization, both of which emphasize American transnational capital's production of cosmopolitan sensibilities in a largely uncritical, celebratory manner. By attending to the concept of attention economy and its relevance to the production of American humanitarian identities, I argue that, on the one hand, Yamashita relies upon her nonfiction to depict herself simultaneously as authentically Japanese and an outside American observer who doesn't believe in racial essentialism to lend credibility to her fictions, and on the other, puts her fictional narratives of real events to use as the source of interest that sustains readers' attentions throughout the self-indulgent and trivial accounts of her family's extended vacation. The need to investigate and document Japan's internal affairs that her text creates justifies the lifestyle Yamashita and her family enjoy, along with their pleasurable experience of feeling cosmopolitan in Japan, and our attention to the images of suffering she creates in the novel produces the means to support it without addressing the matter of the suffering itself.

The way Yamashita accounts for her own sense of self and situates it in relation to her project is a good case in point. Although Yamashita does document the conditions of Brazilian guest workers extensively, and gives a discussion of Japanese immigration and employment laws, neither Brazilians' struggles nor Japanese efforts to integrate Brazilian immigrants is the focus of her novel. Instead, it is a deeply personal

story that takes the nation's ongoing collective struggles as an illustration of her own conflicted identity.<sup>16</sup> Her story of Brazilians and Japanese trying to make sense of their unlikely collision creates a powerful narrative persona.<sup>17</sup> To tell the story of her personal interest in the conflict *Circle K Cycles* documents, Yamashita gives readers a brief history of her studies in Japan and later life in Brazil, her marriage to a Brazilian architect, and her transnational family. During her undergraduate years in the early 1970s Yamashita spent a semester abroad in Japan researching her family's roots. Unlike Foer, she was not concerned primarily with uncovering the stories of individual relatives or finding ties to major historical events. Instead, she explains, she wanted to connect her Japanese heritage with her sense of identity as a Japanese American, to understand "the essence, the thing that might survive assimilation and integration into a new culture and society, the thing that tied communities in the North to those in the South and to the Far East" (12). Her desire was to understand her own sense of transnational identity as the center of a unified, cosmopolitan project of common humanity. However, despite her clear interest in the idea that Japanese history and culture inform her personal identity, Yamashita vacillates between her desire to merge with the past and to define herself in terms of present-day liberal individualism, free from the limitations of racial, ethnic, or national authenticity. Her desire for transnational authenticity to become the site of cosmopolitan unification continually returns her inquiry to the site of the nation, as it privileges cultural and political values she associates with the U.S. as the key to understanding the essential thing of a cosmopolitan common buried in illiberal Japan.

Through her research, Yamashita traced her ancestry “back fourteen generations” and established an undeniably pure racial pedigree (11). Whenever she discussed her findings with Japanese locals, she invariably evoked the conclusion “*you are a pure Japanese*” (12). At the same time, she “developed an intuitive grasp of mimicry” of traditional Japanese mannerisms, almost as if their memory resided in her blood (12).<sup>18</sup> Her pure ancestry facilitates her immediate performance of Japanese cultural norms and marks Yamashita as the sort of authentic commentator who can speak to outsiders of a culture’s most intimate issues. Instead of fulfillment, Yamashita’s confirmation of Japan’s vital influence on her daily life and the welcome of locals became a source of nagging unease. Her encounters with older generations of Japanese who include her on the basis of her appearance, speech, and mannerisms leave her confused, feeling “hurt and resentment.” America is for her “a country where many people, including my own, had long struggled with the pain of racism and exclusion,” and as her investigation of Japanese Brazilian immigration reveals, these struggles continue unaddressed in Japan (12). These conflicting feelings are provoked by her internalization of American liberal multiculturalism and the way its values have trained her to focus her attention on others. She feels her ability to reconnect so easily with her Japanese roots runs counter to these values. Much to her frustration, she comes to the realization that despite thinking racial purity was “not something [she] valued or believed to be important,” she was none the less “trying hard to pass,” making her complicit to some degree with Japanese treatment of its immigrant population (12). Yamashita, unlike her Japanese contacts, has a deep appreciation for the complexity of humanity as a result of her cosmopolitan life. Her

deep attention to both Japan and Brazil does allow Yamashita to speak as an expert. However, despite her excellent qualifications to do so, she tends to rely more on the appeal of her family's Brazilian heritage and her Japanese ancestry to authenticate her commentary on facets of Japanese culture that the Japanese are unable or unwilling to see.

In the book's prologue, Yamashita explains the Japanese foreign policy decision that inspired her interest in Brazilian guest workers. In 1990, Japan began to allow first and second generation Japanese-Brazilian immigrants to return as guest workers on temporary visas of one to three years (13). In an interview prior to publication, she adds that the government determines the length of work visas according to the number of generations since emigration from Japan (Gier and Tejada). At the same time, the guest labor law increased restrictions against immigrants of non-Japanese ethnicity. The idea behind the program was to "replenish the loss of unskilled factory labor" and to "replace non-Japanese foreign workers with the more familiar faces of Japanese descendants who should ... integrate more easily into Japanese life" (13). The logic of the exclusion is the same as Yamashita's own guiding impulse, to get in touch with that essential cosmopolitan thing that perseveres across generations and migrations. She describes the work program as maintenance on a cultural time capsule. As if forecasting the calamity of World War II Japan, "to save the race sent away colonies of their people to South America" where they could preserve its values and the biological purity of its race (33). Migration was like "sending people to the moon" and now Japan was calling "them all back to do the work of the nation" (33). Yamashita's anecdote is important because it

shows the extent to which she perceives the relationship between Japanese and Japanese Brazilians as determined by Japan's exclusively racial understanding of both Japanese and Brazilian identity and tainted by paranoid suspicion of contamination. Japanese Brazilians make better immigrants because they retain a typically Japanese appearance. In this sense, they have fulfilled the cultural mission Yamashita describes and can resume doing the dirty work native Japanese have no desire to do themselves without disrupting the visual composition of Japan's workforce. However, because they insist on offering only limited residency, the Japanese government adopts the contradictory and equally racist assumption that by merit of their time abroad, Japanese Brazilians have failed their mission and ceased to be purely Japanese. They do not, however, perceive this same adulteration in Yamashita, who merely visits and does so from the U.S.. She does not invite unwanted attention and her presence promises economic returns for the nation.

The displacement of attention from the real subject of exploitation and violence to a fictional creation of the author indicates a judgment on Yamashita's part of the potential value of her subjects to create attention and a displacement of the text's returns. According to trauma theory, a victim is traumatized because his or her capacity for voice is compromised. It might produce sociality indirectly, by eliciting empathy in distanced readers, but a victim on display cannot claim this value in a way that leads to a recuperation of this sociality's economization on its own. Instead, testimony restores a victim to a state of abstract productive potential by generating an attention field around its image that redefines human worth as an object lesson saturated in pain and pity.

Since trauma theory assumes a victim's voice cannot be heard correctly on its own, to attract profitable attention, that is, attention that restores productive capacities to victims, a testimony must piggy-back on the cultural or political reputation of its mediator. In other words, the author of the text must command a certain level of social prestige. In the present case, though, there is nothing in particular about Yamashita's text, apart from her appeals to cultural authenticity, that promises to hold her readers' attention. She needs to transform testimony into spectacle in order to gain the prominence necessary to secure a return on attention sufficient to guarantee her effectiveness as a witness. She does so by making her subjects fictional. Fictionalization allows her to attribute whatever sentiment or political value she believes will strike a chord with readers.

Boltanski argues that for the production and consumption of images of distant suffering to be moral, they must inspire action, even if only in the minimal form of communicating how the sight of suffering affects one. For Boltanski, flat factual description is never adequate to the task of testimony because facts are never simply facts and their production as such requires an uneven distribution of humanity amongst non-suffering recorders and sufferers (24). The need for elaboration should play to Yamashita's favor. She claims more authority when speaking of her own experiences and less when representing those of others with her clear generic distinctions she makes between her own travelogue and her testimonies, which she writes according to noir and sentimental romance conventions. However, the tone she establishes in her fiction, which is important in gauging the emotional effect of each piece, is largely playful. Describing her aesthetic, Yamashita remarks that "If it's possible to plummet sadness, in

its complexity, humor has a way of holding in hilarity the ache of a sob” ( Brada-Williams 2). From her comments, it is evident that she finds what she documents deplorable, but she indulges in fascination and intrigue for the pleasure of readers. Her emphasis on stylistic play indicates the attitude readers ought to adopt in regard to the subject matter: it is serious enough to merit attention, but not so much so to demand action. Instead, Yamashita’s attention produces an object readers can use to expand their sense of cosmopolitan solidarity without the risk of actual discomfort or sacrifice. The text effectively informs her limited readership of the legal and historical contexts for Brazilians’ suffering and may broaden their sense of global awareness. However, it does little to move beyond imagination and empathy in the form of meaningful action. As Jo Littler suggests, humanitarian concern, like Yamashita’s, “acts, in marketing terms, as a kind of ‘brand extension’” for public figures and is an “extremely cost-effective” way to maintain a high attention profile (241). It is no innocent coincidence that *Circle K Cycles* is generously sprinkled with advertisements. Her text, as Jonathan Beller puts it, “sells eyeballs to advertisers,” economizing the humanitarian concern of her readers by directing a portion of their energies to the goods it puts on display (“Paying Attention”). The novel’s cultivation of humanitarian interest is intertwined with a simultaneous interest in cultivating cosmopolitan consumer identities.

In a section titled “Touch Your Heart Circle K,” Yamashita composes a collage of advertisements, notices, and newspaper headlines that seem to be the source of her fictional testimonies. While many are mundane descriptions of dating services or unique Japanese products, woven throughout are incidents attesting to racial violence.

Particularly, there recur police blotter descriptions of desperate Brazilians' violent crimes. Less frequent, but still noticeable, are direct commentaries on the controversial immigration policy and its effects that correspond to the plot of Yamashita's fictions. For example, one snippet describes a Brazilian lawsuit against a Japanese employment service that embezzled their wages (46). In another, Yamashita records an in-store announcement alerting Japanese shoppers that "Foreigners have entered the premises," and encouraging them to "secure your personal belongings" (47). Still another attests to the Emperor's attempts at good-will ambassadorship, remarking during a visit to Brazil that he hopes guest workers make friends while they engage in productive work "before they return to their country" (49). Another describes Japanese frustration at Brazilians "having barbecues" and their appeals to the police for intervention (50). As the headlines prove, Japan is aware of its problem, its awareness just isn't breaking the surface of its big cultural dialogues. Racism is repressed but discussed everywhere. The failure to add up the pieces of the puzzle Yamashita lays out shows the need for her outside, cosmopolitan perspective. The combination of serious and hard-hitting information with comical translations of advertising slogans makes Yamashita a familiar and safe guide for voyeuristic American readers.

Given that Yamashita is so determined to position herself within the discourse of American multicultural diversity and in opposition to outmoded Japanese racism, it is ironic that she develops her thoughts on Japanese, Brazilian and American culture, the three constituent elements of her transnational sense of self, through a set of rules generalizing the essential beliefs, values, and behaviors that define them. According to

her lists, Japanese are obsessed with decorum, immersed in superstition, plagued by sexist workplace practices, and too politely introverted to dare object to consensus (107). Meanwhile, Brazilians are the polar opposite, an unruly, extroverted bunch of touchy-feely anarchists who are self-indulgent while at play in their machismo culture but get discouraged easily when it comes to hard work (110). The two make a hopelessly mismatched pair. Not surprisingly, Yamashita also has strong feelings about Americans, who are more properly Ugly Americans, complete with a sense of entitlement, lack of awareness of the rest of the world, and an individualism she summarizes in the slogan “Just Do It” (112). While there is certainly some truth to her descriptions, as well as a tongue-in-cheek humor, Yamashita uses her gallery of stereotypes as the explanatory model with which to explore racial tensions throughout the novel. By identifying the faults of typical Americans, she implies she is their sensitive, accommodating, empathetic opposite, and an unbiased witness to the Japanese-Brazilian conflict. Supporting the rules themselves, she develops a brief example involving condominium life in which Japanese residents understand themselves as the natives and owners of the complex they inhabit and Brazilians as guests they accommodate. These assumptions lead them to expect Brazilians to behave according to the standards of strict decorum Yamashita details in her Japanese list. The Japanese demand for quiet after hours contradicts the compulsion to party that is the essence of her Brazilians, dooming the encounter to constant tension. In this case, the Japanese residents come across as cold and uptight, but then, who wouldn’t object to neighbors who habitually “throw objects or trash out of apartment windows” (108). The moral of her contrast is that both

nationalities are just living up to their natures; they are the products of an essentializing geographic, national culture rather than an essentializing biological race. The problem Yamashita identifies is a lack of mobility and curious consumption of worldly products. The Japanese are being as welcoming as their culture allows and the Brazilians are already “as quiet as Brazilians can possibly be” (110). Neither can stray from their own rigid set of rules.

To solve their problems for them, Yamashita invents her own set of transcendental rules, named for the reassuring presence of Circle K’s familiar logo that she finds everywhere she looks. These cosmopolitan rules begin simply, by asking readers to “Immigrate into your own country,” as she has done (114). The rule treats all spaces as equally foreign. The presence of Circle K is the common of humanity, a symbol of both our hunger for exotic, mass-produced commercial foods and our tendency to turn to whatever is most convenient, rather than what is most nourishing or healthy, in order to satisfy our urges. It is the familiar food-court metaphor for cosmopolitanism, a wide array of superficial products that deliver a generalization of international identities ready for easy consumption. With Circle K, the world is both excitingly foreign and a safe, familiar place just around the corner. The underlying suggestion of the rule is that by setting into global motion the products and goods that animate the daily life choices of ordinary consumers, Circle K cosmopolitanizes all local sites of consumption to an equal degree; therefore, there is no necessary distinction between domestic and foreign, and one’s outlook becomes that of the curious cosmopolitan tourist across all global spaces. The implications for witnessing here are

clear: cosmopolitanism collapses the distance between Yamashita and the people she observes. Likewise, readers who become cosmopolitan by consuming the text may attribute their own feelings to its characters as generalizations of what the people Yamashita actually observed also felt.

The economic consumption inherent in the association of Circle K with citizenship echoes in Yamashita's ensuing rules, which address consumption at a more literal level. It is the duty of the Circle K citizen of the world to "Learn to cook your favorite meal" and "Ask the next question." These are the only rules and unlike Japanese, Brazilian, or American rules, none limits the identity one may possess within Circle K. All one really needs is enough economic capital to make purchases without limit and the social capital to efface boundaries. That Yamashita closes her meditation on a real conflict between Japanese and Brazilians with her rules guiding cosmopolitan consumption shifts the emphasis of her intervention. Where the surface of the text describes their conditions, the affective tenor of her appeals evokes the satisfaction readers might feel after broadening their awareness. The link between one's favorite meal as the outcome of curiosity and the text's images of violence stabilize the real inequalities of global politics within the comforting Circle K brand. The assumption connecting Yamashita's rules to her illustrations is that the curiosity she envisions, when directed toward those conditions that render the world a uniformly precarious, foreign place, will reward cosmopolitan subjects with the comforts of a nourishing meal. This dynamic is what Chouliaraki calls ironic ethics, "a self-oriented morality, where doing good to others is about 'how I feel,' and must, therefore, be rewarded by minor

gratifications” (*The Ironic Spectator* 3). Humanitarianism drives politics by carefully orchestrating the scene of affective production. Individual imagination enables empathy and identification, which in turn are the foundations for cosmopolitan solidarity. So, curiosity becomes of fundamental importance for Yamashita’s ideal subject, but her rules return the humanitarian interest that this curiosity might produce to the level of self-reflection rather than justice. It is a way of manufacturing pleasing consensus out of the conviction that our empathy for her characters indicates a common human essence.

If paying equal attention to the world normalized the political relations of its inhabitants, Yamashita’s liberal cosmopolitanism would be wildly successful. However, simply taking notice of others and their interesting differences does not produce meaningful changes in their material lives or their capacity to improve their own standing. What it actually does is render the world a valuable affective resource that can satisfy a hungry attention. Consider Yamashita’s elaboration. Where the first rule seeks to overcome the unequal distribution of rights that differentiates between nations and between classes within nations, the second theorizes belonging beyond the limits of economic transaction. To belong, in a world continuously stratified by uniform, non-threatening array of consumer choices, requires a cosmopolitan enthusiasm for investigation that takes as its object the global space of foreignness. The success of the cosmopolitan subject depends on its reaction to those particular differences consumed in the course of life’s personal voyage. The object of the consumer’s curiosity, the witnessed victim, compels those who read the text or consume within Yamashita’s global convenience store to do the work of value creation, taking the form of notice, on

her behalf. So, in *Circle K Cycles*, Yamashita holds up Brazilians as an object lesson in the need for cosmopolitan curiosity for readers who labor upon their image in order to produce Yamashita as this ideal observer and to justify the expense of her trip. Nativity is of no consequence within her attention economy, only the capacity to attract and hold attention, and just as with Foer, Yamashita's fictional inquiry into violence becomes the evidentiary equivalent of her travelogue. By imagining the lives of victims, she seasons her life with their suffering and allows others to do the same. As fictions rather than people, they supply Yamashita's text with sentiment, arousing empathy. In the process, her Brazilians become disposable, or better yet, consumable, like snacks. In the metaphors of convenience store browsing that is the through-line of the novel, Brazilians are equally of value to her production of interest as the found objects Yamashita inserts alongside their stories.

To make sense of the chaotic jumble of consumer choices in the constantly shuffling array of options within the global convenience store, one must fix preferences, in ways that can be internalized and reproduced. Cooking is the ideal means to achieve this end. One's favorite meal incorporates the flavors of individual encounters and renders one's own cosmopolitan identity the object of literal consumption for others. Just as appetites continually change, the hungry cosmopolitan palate demands new recipes for being. Taken as a whole, Yamashita's *Circle K Rules* exude a sense of playful optimism for the possibilities we find in what even she recognizes as a wildly stratified, unjust global society. While it is possible that she means to use her personal experience as an elaborate demonstration of complicit critique, à la Linda Hutcheon, if

this is the case, it is not entirely successful given that the testimonies are at no point in conversation with the events of her travels and that her family's pleasant vacation overwhelms her meditations on injustice. They enjoy Japan and seem unaffected by or oblivious to the suffering Yamashita documents. Nor does she offer any thoughts on how the Brazilians she depicts are supposed to find consolation, let alone fulfillment, in cooking a meal or asking a question, or perhaps worse, realizing that they feel out of place in the homeland whose memory sustains them. Her consumerist cosmopolitan lives in a world of unfettered mobility in which one's identity, tied as it is to flavorful consumption and self-gratification, never has to pause long enough on any single flavor or question to address that which is not pleasing. Yamashita expects Brazilians to be flexible, to take on the spirit of a privileged cosmopolitan consumerism without the benefit of limitless income and political rights, while she enjoys plasticity, adopting and refusing what she will. Her vision of consumer ambassadors is a delightful one, but one that is hardly sustained by the unsavory world whose exploitation makes her own enactment of Circle K Rules possible. The curious openness is only possible when the real material conditions for the consumption it demands are not the object of the Circle K cosmopolitan subject's persistent inquiries.

I've described how Yamashita's text sets up a complex rhetorical situation in which she gains credibility as a witness to Brazilian exploitation in Japan on the basis of her ability to claim a race-based Japanese identity and to disavow the essential value of race from the perspective of liberal multiculturalism. In doing so, I argue, Yamashita puts to use the testimonies she includes in her novel to generate capital within an

attention economy that supports the production of herself as an author. I want to conclude by looking at the testimonies Yamashita imagines in order to think about what she documents and how her interpretation of what she has learned effectively commodifies American humanitarian concern.

Yamashita's first testimony imagines the absolute failure of a Brazilian worker, Zé Maria (33-42). Zé loses his hand while working a boring and repetitive job on an assembly line. While recovering in the hospital, and after losing his job, Zé becomes involved with a relief worker who informs him of his basic rights, which include coverage under Japan's public health care, worker's compensation, and job security. Despite the abjection of the work experience Yamashita describes, throughout the episode, she emphasizes her belief that "No dekasegi [immigrant worker] is a poor victim" (34). Although Zé is maimed because he works extensive hours without rest, it is his choice to do so and he makes better money than he could have imagined in Brazil. Working conditions are not ideal, but they should not be our primary concern. What really matters is that Zé does not know how to take care of himself or how to access the support of public institutions, something Yamashita describes as "easy" (34). He is a victim of his own lack of informed curiosity, of his failure to abide by Circle K Rule number 3. The experience inspires Zé to partner with a wrongfully imprisoned Brazilian woman he meets through his own activist work to start a more responsible employment service. The business quickly succeeds because Brazilians recognize that Zé is being honest with them about the risks of working in Japan and helps them to avoid his errors,

at least until his partner embezzles the company payroll and flees the country. In the end, Zé throttles an unsympathetic embassy worker and is deported to a Brazilian prison.

In the second testimony, Yamashita presents a detective narrative about the murders of a single mother and her boyfriend Mario, whose bodies are discovered brutally slashed after the two also try to start another employment business with the backing of a Japanese investor. The investigation of the crimes goes nowhere because the Japanese press suspects Mario's brother – he is shiftless, frequently drunk, and prone to violent domestic outbursts – whereas local Brazilian reporters investigate their backer, who seems too calm and too reticent with them. Throughout, the identity of the killer remains uncertain.<sup>19</sup> Her investigators fail to solve the crime because they are stuck operating according to stereotypes about one another and themselves and consequently fail to ask the right kinds of questions. The Brazilian psychologist who advised Mario over the phone believes the killer “may not have been Brazilian” because “a Brazilian would never use a knife” and the “effort to clean up after the killing, even to hide the crime, might not be in the Brazilian mind set” (120). Likewise, the Brazilian reporter assumes the Japanese backer's guilt because he tells her to let the police handle the investigation. She takes his remark as an indication that he has something to hide and also as a sign of his typical Japanese distrust for women and Brazilians. However, Yamashita shows that he might only be acting circumspectly. In Japan, “reporters work in concert with the police, carefully agreeing to publish only information released by official police reports,” and speaking with unauthorized reporters could damage their

investigation (122). The inability of the investigators to detach themselves from their given assumptions prevents resolution and justice.

The dangers of a sentimentalized national imagination are clearest in Yamashita's tragic tale of Miss Hamamatsu, a beautiful young Brazilian woman working under questionable circumstances in an illegal VHS reproduction center. Miss Hamamatsu, "the full measure of occidental beauty, all gracefully accented in the exotic," is the embodiment of the hope for cosmopolitan community founded on curiosity and sensory pleasure that the Circle K rules describe but is also obsessed with the idea of Brazil she consumes as she watches countless hours of Brazilian *telenovelas* on a wall of video monitors. As she sits in her dark office, Miss Hamamatsu puts her imagination to work, dreaming "of working somewhere else, in the open, in an office that had a window at least and young men passing to and fro who would of course turn their heads to appreciate her beauty" (20). She wants to be the object of attention rather than endlessly paying attention to her videos. The tapes, whose data provides the endlessly repeated images that make up the walls of her office, endlessly flow together, one set immediately replacing another. Not only is she not noticed, her attentiveness is unrequited. Each repetition of the act of recording further removes the product from its originally transmitted form, introducing distorting noise into the picture until almost nothing remains visible. Reflecting upon this, Miss Hamamatsu realizes that like the tapes she makes, her idea of home "was a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy, farther away than she could imagine" (20). The episode Miss Hamamatsu watches tells a romantic story about Italian immigrants in 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazil. *O Rei do Gado*, The

King of Beef, in an ironic reversal of Brazilians' plight in Japan, wins Miss Hamamatsu's sympathies by suffering a plague of squatters who refuse to leave the land he is using, which he only eventually reclaims through lengthy legal proceedings.<sup>20</sup> In the process, he wins the heart of Pilar, the most beautiful of the squatter women. The story shamelessly plays upon its poor female audience's identification with Pilar. Watching the relationship unfold, Miss Hamamatsu felt "it was all so romantic" and wells up with a renewed hope for her own prospects: "it was her story too, the story of her Italian side," and as a fellow immigrant, she too could hope to be rescued and become a modern day Queen of Beef (23). She "appreciated the message of the downtrodden," finding it similar to her own (27). Just as she wants to control her body to generate a prosperous future, she feels the squatters "had every right to take over the land held by absentee landlords and make it productive" (27). As a work of nationalist propaganda, however, *O Rei do Gado* steers the desire for justice it stirs in the hearts of viewers toward the banal fantasy of rescue by the show's sexy king.

Like Pilar, Miss Hamamatsu dreams she too "would one day meet a powerful and princely Japanese executive who would sympathize with her plight and fall madly in love with her" (27). It seems, however, that at present her hope for a Japanese prince has taken the form of her employer, another Brazilian worker, Jorghino, who makes a point to stop by her corner to let his eyes wander "lovingly over her bottom" and to encourage her fantasies with visions of a glamorous and luxurious life of international celebrity as a model (26). He describes her beauty as the source of wealth and independence for both of them, as a way to attain the better life she watches on display

in her videos. Where she recognizes her body attracting his not wholly unpleasant attention, Jorghino proposes to economize that attention to liberate himself from financial mediocrity. To him, Miss Hamamatsu's good looks are an untapped "tropical gold mine," and the rest of Japan "doesn't even know it" (22). Jorghino, however, is certain that he can exploit its potential without interference or competition. While she dreams of a loving partner who will save her from poverty, Jorghino imagines the money he can make by convincing Miss Hamamatsu to pose nude for Brazilian magazines. Her beauty will help lonely men imagine a fantasy similar to her own, that they too will be able to rescue a helpless, beautiful woman and find happiness. "What's the harm in a little imagination?" he asks (27). The sentimentality of her optimistic dream of transfiguration into the Queen of Beef is interrupted by the harsh reality that the only way she can become what she desires is in the form Jorghino imagines. He presents her with the reality that everyone must "start somewhere," even if somewhere is being exploited in pornographic movies (27). Under his direction, the Queen of Beef transforms from the sentimental image of a persecuted woman restored to a life of pleasure to the suggestion that Hamamatsu too could pose "naked except for a cowboy hat and boots," becoming the beef itself served up for hungry male consumers (26). The perversion of her dream in turn mutes the loneliness of male workers with overactive sexual imaginations and helps keep them in place in Japanese assembly lines. The privileged cosmopolitan fantasy of constructing a better world wherever one finds oneself when transferred to middle- or lower-class contexts also keeps men fantasizing about a woman like Hamamatsu waiting for them while the fantasy of romantic rescue

keeps a woman like her dependent upon the predations of men like Jorghino and gives the false sense of hope that a horrible beginning will naturally and inevitably lead to wonderful opportunities. The injustice of her exploitation at Jorghino's hands, however, mirrors the use to which Yamashita puts Brazilians in her novel. They are the untapped resource she alone appreciates and their suffering becomes the main dish of her cosmopolitan spectacle that readers take pleasure in consuming.

The net result of these testimonies is to shed light on some serious problems in Japan, many of which Brazilians seem to cause for themselves, but the humanitarian worth of Yamashita's project is compromised by her stylistic decision to render her testimonies in fiction and to embed them in her own nonfiction. The purpose of a testimony is to attract attention to an obscured or overlooked subject. In the context of contemporary media, testimonies use subalterns to produce celebrity, or if not celebrity exactly, then notoriety, which from a practical economic standpoint amounts to the same thing. Beller argues that "celebrity is not an individual but a social relation characterized by the accumulation of attention" ("Paying Attention"). His observation has significant consequences for the rhetorical structure of testimonies. In the case of Yamashita's, by directing our attention to a state of affairs that on its own was incapable of producing value within an attention economy, she hopes to restore the political and economic value of Brazilian guest workers' lives. However, the big revelations of her exposé, apart from the attention-grabbing spectacle of mangled body parts, is that her guest workers are, in fact, hard at work, and reaping the economic benefits of that labor in what are generally pleasurable lives.

Since Yamashita's intervention does little to direct attention toward the people whose lives she documents, these people are left to work out their problems within the unrepresented space in which she found them. The struggle to hold onto "mere survival beyond the frame of representation," especially when no one recognizes its value, is also work, as Beller notes. In terms of humanitarian intervention and interest, the documentation of this sort of labor is exactly what justifies the allocation of resources necessary to achieve a better standard of living or meaningful reform. In effect, the multi-media witnessing milieu Yamashita orchestrates transforms all individuals to an equal degree, into the status of a metaphorical consumer good that can add flavor to life when purchased and ingested, waiting on the shelves of the world's Circle K stores. The difficulty, of course, is that this transformation is not equal. She undertakes it willingly and sees her self-inclusion in the global marketplace as a way of augmenting her already supple array of productive capacities, whereas the guest workers for whom she acts have to leave their country and accept the hard conditions they find in Japan because they have no other means of producing value.

Yamashita, as the epitome of that cosmopolitan lifestyle, is perfectly situated to comment, a part of but not exclusively attached to any national community. She organizes the complex textual screen of transnational awareness for her attentive readers. Her mobility and curiosity enable her to put into practice the liberal value for difference that defines multicultural tolerance. A value for difference is one thing, but the multiculturalist discourse Yamashita evokes takes on a different sense. As it circulates globally through her representation of curiosity and interest as the central values of

cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism becomes, ironically not a way to encourage interest in others, but to protect consensus, promoting tolerance rather than respect and superficial but safe encounters over risky engagements. As if entertaining the very romantic idea at the heart of her other characters' suffering, at the close of her book, Yamashita imagines a cosmopolitan vision of hybridity that speaks back to her earlier performance of purity and the feelings of alienation it evoked. Marcolina, a non-Japanese Brazilian woman who "was always fascinated by Japanese culture," is the fulfillment of Yamashita's Circle K Rules. Led by her curiosity, she fills her life with emblems of Japanese culture, all the while believing "that in another life she must have been Japanese" (137). It is only natural, Yamashita narrates, that Marcolina "always preferred the Japanese boys," or Brazilians in Japan, and "learned to cook Japanese food" after marrying Paolo, a Japanese-Brazilian (137). Unlike Marcolina, who is ethnically Brazilian, Paolo grew up immersed in stories of Japan but "never cared about Japanese culture the way she did." Instead, he feels at home in Brazil. Each is racially marked as other to the community for which they feel interest. Like Yamashita's other characters, Marcolina and Paolo immigrate to Japan when he loses his job. Marcolina, with her natural love and curiosity for all things Japanese, "adapted very quickly and learned enough Japanese to get around," starting a successful childcare business (138). Paolo, however, has the typical *dekasegi* experience, working "all day and sometimes nights in a factory painting batteries," and "thinks only about the day when he can return to Brazil." The two fulfill a desire for cultural home in the other, but both cannot share the experience of belonging with one another. The example of Paolo's pain at having to

live a Japanese life in order to provide for his family while Marcolina flourishes in a foreign state reverses the logic behind the dekasegi program. Paolo blends in perfectly where Marcolina stands out as foreign but isolates himself from the life of the community, unwilling to assimilate culturally. Marcolina starts a business that improves the economy and provides her family with financial stability, completely internalizing Japanese values. She is racially unacceptable, but otherwise fulfills the dekasegi mission. Yamashita rewards Marcolina, who embraces the values of Circle K. Her husband, however, lacks the capacity for expansive, imaginative consumption, probably because he is miserable and exhausted. The lesson of the vignette is clear: cultural citizenship is a construct of the imagination, which is driven by acts of consumption. Marcolina is the better consumer of Japanese ideas and goods, and so becomes more effectively integrated within the Japanese economy than her homesick husband. His longing to feel at home or to return to the place where his feeling of home resides, prevents him from taking pleasure in his cosmopolitan state. Marcolina feels alive and useful, like she is where she belongs, but can only stay in Japan because of Paolo's racial status. While she remains so, he will always long for elsewhere, torn by the powerful feeling of a "saudade," a "longing, homesickness, nostalgia" (134).

For Yamashita, *saudade* is a uniquely Brazilian feeling for a universal human desire for what we lack, for "the familiar that is distant and out of reach" (135). To feel a *saudade* is to become partially aware of the complexity of one's attachments, enmeshed within a "net of sensations: joy for life, sadness for time passing, hope for the future" (135). *Saudade* is the feeling we have as a result of our subjective production of

a relationship with places, people, ideas, and customs with which we have no means of direct contact. It is the feeling Miss Hamamatsu experiences as she determines that *O Rei do Gado* tells her story and experience while at the same time realizing that the tape it plays from is a copy of a copy of a scripted performance of a fantasy. To feel a saudade is to transform oneself as a subject as well as the object one perceives as informing subjectivity. The place lives on in imagination or belief as that which drives life, taking one form in Paolo's desire to return to his adopted native home of Brazil and another in Marcolina's childhood dreams of feeling at home in a land she has never set foot in. As Yamashita says, "saudade is made possible and complex by memory" and that memory is created just as much by global imagination as by concrete experience (135). Watching life on video or collecting travel posters sets memory alight as much as blood ties, folktales, or direct contact.

Like Foer's nomadic truth that invents new possibilities for people to recall their interrelationships, saudades are "transformed by the imagination of a New World" (136). Part of that imagination is the wonder at the possibility of an entirely new and innocent place, but another is the reality of the after-effects of the horrendous and bloody violence enacted in the name of claiming that purity. Like religious belief, it "links the past to the present and lives in the magical reality of everyday life" (136). The attention economy is seductive from the perspective of power and wealth, but always is undergirded by labor held apart from the attentive gaze it seeks. Its continual redefinition of memory and identity by feelings and experiences make possible the cosmopolitan spirit Yamashita finds already evident in the globalized world within which she travels. But to

create the feeling of continuity across global space has meant that the spilling of innocent “blood and guts happened because of and for saudade” as it “continues to travel” beyond reach or limit (136). The answer seems to be the object of one’s desires, that to which one seeks to pay attention. To recognize the feeling of saudade beneath global movement and cosmopolitan identification is to universalize humanity around a universal need to fill always specific and incommensurable lacks – Marcolina needs what causes Paolo to feel apart but which lies somehow within him. In Brazil, the craving for what one lacks that marks the saudade is dealt with by coming to feel at home where one is. To do so is to “matar a saudade” or to kill it (135). Given the bloody history of cultural particularism and the racist violence she imagines in her novel, Yamashita leaves readers with the question, “What saudade must be killed to belong, to make a home, to realize desire?” (136). Although her own rules imagine moving about the world as an experience filled with wonder, it is one always countered with pain and suffering. To feel at home in cosmopolitan space, it seems, means making someone else feel unwelcome. But is it really necessary for the world’s immigrants to metaphorically kill their affective ties to distant homelands in order to succeed at being cosmopolitan? Or does it merely make them better assets for the global market? Although nearly unmentioned in the novel, for Americans, whose spirit Yamashita condenses into the slogan, “We are the world,” this realization carries with it damning consequences: we may exuberantly celebrate our global mobility, our ability to put on the appearance of fitting in anywhere we like, to identify with the circumstances with all types of people in all places, but beneath the festive images of a cosmopolitan marketplace alive with

empathy and compassion lies the reality of how others, whose voice we cannot yet admit to hearing, feel about our presence.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Within politically powerful societies, there is the tendency to conflate an inability of less powerful foreign subjects to accurately narrate their own traumatic experiences with the authenticity of victimhood. For example, Slavoj Žižek argues that “the very factual deficiencies of the traumatized subject’s report on her experience bear witness to the truthfulness of her report, since they signal that the reported content “contaminated” the manner of reporting it” (*Violence* 4). The consequence of this conflation within humanitarian texts is that our process of recognition deliberately prevents unsightly victims from contributing to the narration of any national identity. The victim, like Brik, may serve as an emblem for national vengeance or justification for the domination of dehumanized others, but does not possess the ability to adequately narrate his or her condition and history, or to reconstruct a stable, cohesive identity.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the definitions and distinctions between modes of legal testimony, see Kusch, 336–8.

<sup>3</sup> Carr places the burden of responsibility for the testimony’s reception principally upon its writer, whose ethos encourages readers to approach a narrator metonymically or allegorically. Beverley, however, associates this sort of writerly agency with ethnography and oral history, whereas he finds testimony narratives depend heavily on “the intentionality of the narrator” (“Margin” 14). Neither critic accords authority for a text’s meaning to its readers, however.

<sup>4</sup> Warner’s reading of publics is indebted to Saussurian linguistics. In addition to his destabilization of the sign, Saussure also suggested that linguistic structures predate the existence of any individual who makes use of them. Linguistic possibility “is already determined in advance” and “the community, as much as the individual, is bound to language” (71). A specific language structures the possibilities by which its users can manifest themselves. “A language,” he writes, “is always an inheritance from the past” that one “can conceive in the imagination, but no one has ever observed it taking place”; linguistic structures are always already in place (71).

<sup>5</sup> Most critics assume Alex discovers he is Jewish. Menachem Feuer argues that Alex’s grandfather is “not really an anti-semitic Ukrainian; he’s a self-hating Jew, who to the very end of the novel insists that he was protecting Alex, perhaps from finding out that he was Jewish, not that he murdered his best friend” (46). See also Berger, 156; Codde, 679; Collado-Rodriguez, 67. There is plenty of textual evidence contradicting these readings, particularly Grandfather’s explanation that “Just because I was not a Jew, it does not mean that it did not happen to me” (246). Instead, he tells Alex, he lied about the past because “a father is always responsible for how his son is” and he wanted Alex’s father to “live a good life, without death and without choices and without shame”

(247). He lies in order to escape what Michael Andre Bernstein calls “backshadowing,” the passing of judgment on individuals’ or characters’ actions in the past based on knowledge of what was then the future (16).

<sup>6</sup> Hardt and Negri argue information is the product of affective labor. Generally, we think of the facts pertaining to something as the basis for its value. Michael Goldhaber makes a compelling case that the reverse is more accurate, that information is abundant and attention is the scarce resource. Consequently, the attention paid to information is what holds value, and information, texts, and cultures must compete for individuals’ attentions.

<sup>7</sup> *Everything is Illuminated* follows a narrative structure Lauren Berlant identifies as “infantile citizenship,” in which the innocence of an infantile character is a means to expose the contrast between some utopian fantasy and reality in order to reframe “the machinery of national life” (29). In reality, Trochenbrod, as the town is named on maps, was the only exclusively Jewish village in Europe. Between 1942 and 1944, the town, which had about 6000 residents, was literally destroyed – all its wooden buildings were burned to the ground and its one paved road pulled up. Records suggest that as many as 60 of the town’s residents, Foer’s grandfather Safran among them, may have survived. For a more comprehensive history of the town and pictures of it in its prime and at present, see Avrom Bendavid-Val’s *The Heavens Are Empty: Discovering the Lost Town of Trochenbrod*.

<sup>8</sup> Notably, Francine Prose wrote of the novel, “Not since Anthony Burgess’s novel ‘A Clockwork Orange’ has the English language been simultaneously mauled and energized with such brilliance and such brio.” Similarly, Laura Miller writes in *Salon* that Alex’s “version of English resembles an out-of-control garden hose turned on full-force and allowed to thrash away on a summer lawn” for an effect so compelling, his sections “far outbalance the book’s weaknesses.”

<sup>9</sup> I read this passage as a clear indication that Alex is disappointed because Jonathan is not a romantic hero, is not someone endowed with the superhuman beauty and capacities that underwrite his fantasy of an escape to a better life than the one he knows in Ukraine. Contrary to my reading, Alike Varvogli argues that Alex is let down by Jonathan’s appearance because it indicates how “the myth of America has invaded all corners of the earth,” or that Ukraine is already just like America (84). That Alex’s attempts to read Odessa’s landscape of former Soviet concrete-block housing complexes onto New York refutes this suggestion. America differs profoundly from Ukraine but does not correspond to the fairy tale Alex feeds off of, at least not in Jonathan’s nerdy appearance.

<sup>10</sup> Lauren Berlant notes that within trauma theory, “the present is seen as a symptom, the detritus of the significant relation between lived and remembered pasts and occluded futures” (848). Trauma theory privileges the significance of the past to such an extent that actions in the present can be felt by those associated with trauma to have little affect. (Whether this means those claiming it feel history will never change for them or by those

witnessing who feel victims will always feel a trauma foremost among their experiences). Testimony, addressed globally as the record of an event without bounds, consists of the recognition that one's desire to recognize all people as included within human community is frustrated perpetually by our equally entrenched desire to orient ourselves to others in terms of owned experiences, histories, or memories. Testimony, by my reading, is a desire for an impossible cosmopolitanism in the face of violence or that fails to be extinguished by violence.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida defines forgiveness as an exceptional relationship founded on the impossibility of the circumstances it demands. Wrongdoing requires retribution, compensation, reformation, and reconciliation. These acts constitute the process of ordinary justice and are "an *economic* transaction" that returns dialogue to the level of justice initiated and mediated by the state rather than through the agency of the victim ("On Forgiveness" 34). As an economic transaction, forgiveness is further compromised by the political sites from which victim and perpetrator address one another. By attempting to enter into a dialogue or relationship of forgiveness, both parties are fundamentally transformed by the attitude or recognition of the other "it is no longer the *guilty as such* who is forgiven" but rather that the address of guilt no longer entirely applies to one now partially included within that of forgiveness (35). Not surprisingly, like cosmopolitanism, Derrida's forgiveness is both necessary and impossible.

<sup>12</sup> Departing from the norm, Lisa Propst does not read Alex's confession as an admission of Jewishness, but an expression of remorse over his complicity with the Ukrainian murder of Jews. As she observes, Alex's frantic speech makes the "outside of words become their insides as if the men were losing the boundaries that demarcate their identities" (41). Despite the tension in the idea of two men coming together in a way that dissolves all boundaries between them, Propst does not tie her observation to sexuality, but rather offers that their unbounded state opens up a space in which moral judgment is suspended (43).

<sup>13</sup> Foer's text illustrates the violence inherent in assuming the identity between an event and inherited national character, imagining coincidence between American, Jewish, and Ukrainian uses of traumatic Holocaust memory, through the relationship between his narrators, Jonathan and Alex. The struggle between the two over how to record their experience represents, as Naomi Mandel suggests, an irreconcilable problem of how to remain faithful to the event, in Badiou's sense of the word. Under the harsh illumination of their mutual journey, Mandel suggests, "the distinctions between those who murdered, those who betrayed, and those who survived fade," and "fiction comes to the fore as the object of fidelity *and* the site of justice" (250, 251). The Holocaust itself may not become knowable, but the conjunction of failures to live up to the other's conception of its essence generates a moment in which healing might occur. Mandel makes a great argument for the tension between fidelity to history and the aims of fiction. The realization of this healing, I argue, however, is contingent upon both characters assuming Jonathan's liberal values as the universal given grounding the cosmopolitan solidarity emerging atop the forgiven breach.

<sup>14</sup> Alex's call for decency to all people on the basis of the ability to perceive them as deserving universal human decencies echoes nearly every argument for a liberal concept of cosmopolitanism. One of the more direct articulations of this idea comes in Robbins's introduction to *Cosmopolitics*, in which he suggests that "if you can say yes to the nation, you can also say yes to units larger than the nation" and, alluding to Benedict Anderson's claim that the nation is the imaginary effect of individuals' engagement with print capitalism, that "If people can get as emotional as Anderson says they do about relations with fellow nationals they never see face-to-face, then now that print-capitalism has become electronic- and digital-capitalism, and now that this system is so clearly transnational, it would be strange if people did not get emotional in much the same way ... about others who are not fellow nationals" (5, 7).

<sup>15</sup> Although, of course, Foer is not giving license to any sort of imaginative play with history.

<sup>16</sup> Jinqi Ling argues that Yamashita's novel has two primary humanitarian aims: to expose Japan's exploitation of mass media to create a "misrepresentation" of its economy as one offering "opportunity for the hard pressed Japanese Brazilians" and to critique "bureaucratic concealment, by both governments" (65). I agree that these do seem important goals of the book, but his suggestion that Yamashita's "conscious decision to authorize facts and to demystify fictions, from the intersection of her role as a narrating subject and her actual participation in the migration process" exaggerates what she is able to accomplish (64). As Yamashita herself notes, she is "not a war refugee but really a pretty privileged and blessed person" (Brada-Williams 2). While Yamashita does document her own life of continual movement and competing cultural claims, her travel is not the equivalent of that experienced by global migrant workers, nor does she experience any real risk of violence or poverty during her travels.

<sup>17</sup> Lilie Chouliaraki argues that this dynamic within humanitarian texts invites readers to identify with the ecstatic pleasure of the cosmopolitan author rather than suffering cosmopolitan victims and redefines cosmopolitanism as the pursuit of self-actualization rather than justice ("Cosmopolitanism as Irony" 79).

<sup>18</sup> This idea of cultural memory suggests an entirely more extensive idea of inter-generational structures of care than that which Stiegler advocates. The biologism Yamashita describes here is reminiscent of the immortal cellular transmission of identity Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

<sup>19</sup> Ling suggests the crime had two perpetrators: Mario and Fatima, the two victims. As he reads the scene, "it can ... be concluded that Mario and Fatima [because of the long hours they each worked], though drawn together by emotional need, could not sustain their relationship in the midst of the mounting economic pressure and growing psychological consequences of living as dekasegi in Japan" (76). This may or may not be the case. The criminal's identity is not the point of Yamashita's story, which is instead about the crime of suspicion and the need for cosmopolitanism.

<sup>20</sup> This is essentially a reproduction of the plot of the Mexican American novel, *The Squatter and the Don*.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: AMERICAN OBSOLESCENCE AS COSMOPOLITANISM

In Chapter 2, I described David Foster Wallace's writing as an appeal to masculine nationalism as a necessary corrective to the influences of globalized media upon the life of the American nation. For him, television's expansion of free choice and content options was a threat to America's virility that a turn to serious fiction might correct by presenting models for right living and active decision making. I close by considering the different possibility for America and the white male American as its representative in the apparently already materialized global society Dave Eggers depicts in *A Hologram for the King* (2012). In the novel, the fate Wallace feared is an accomplished fact. Its protagonist, Alan Clay, is a worn down middle-aged relic of America's glorious past. He reflects obsessively on the years following the War when American men did meaningful work, building actual things that really mattered, and when an American's presence commanded special attention worldwide. In the present, Alan finds himself sapped of the energy to do anything decisive by his faltering career, diminished by the continual offshoring of factory work that he helped oversee and by a mysterious lump on his neck that embodies America's enervation within the global economy. Drifting purposelessly through life, Alan has taken on the job of selling a massive IT contract to Saudia Arabia's King Abdulla Economic City and is frustrated that he cannot get an audience with the King and that his millennial co-workers are shiftless and unmotivated.

The problem America and Alan face in Egger's novel is the systematic destruction of the basis for masculine individuality accomplished through globalization's

offshoring of industrial labor and the decline of manual labor that technological development has rendered irrelevant. Alan is paralyzed in his personal life, unable to perform sexually or effectively parent his college-aged daughter, because without a meaningful job tied to the production of a material product, he is left to explore his feelings. Alan's introspection produces only a profound sense of inadequacy. His feelings, rather than a productive source of inspiration that might motivate him to do something different with his life, are the problem. Too much concern for them leads to the state of flaccid passivity that has led to his mismanagement of the resources of the companies whose outsourcing he has overseen during his career.

If he had not been so obsessed with feeling like a man, Eggers suggests, he might have acted the part of one and put his foot down to save American labor. Instead, men who no longer have to work with their hands and make actual decisions have forgotten the value and thrill of the pursuit of freedom through individual responsibility. "The age of machines holding dominion over man," thinks Alan, "was the down fall of a nation and the triumph of systems designed to thwart all human contact, human reason, personal discretion and decision making" (146). All people want is to give over the right, or responsibility, to make choices. This is the problem of offshoring as well. America has come to depend on the steady delivery of products it has no role in making. The nation, Eggers seems to say, cannot stand firm and do the hard work worthy of commanding the world's attention. His own impotence is a case in point. With nothing real to sell, or whose manufacture he can oversee, Alan has no purpose in life and cannot muster the stamina to pleasure the women who throw themselves at him in the novel.

Instead, he depends helplessly on Hanne, a Danish consultant, to supply him with mind-numbing alcohol and Zahra, a Saudi surgeon, to remove the benign lump he insists saps him of his vitality. His dependence on foreign women to mobilize him is yet another sign of his failure to be the man America really needs.

That the novel is meant to whip apathetic readers into a state of fervor, to inspire them to act where Alan has failed to, is evident in the novel's two key moments. In the first, Alan recalls the moment in which the spirit of his close friend broke. A fellow salesman, Terry had worked for months to secure a contract for his company to install glass for the World Trade Center, only to lose the bid at the last moment to a rival American company which is outsourcing its production to a Chinese company to whom Terry's own company has licensed its patented process. The moment is so crushing for Eggers because in it, the symbol of America's economy is produced by its greatest competitor, making it a sign of the nation's vacuousness. Alan's reflection on the injustice of it all reminds him of the point at which he should have acted decisively to restore the honor of American industry. In KAEC, in the present, things are more resigned. Americans may continue to do excellent and rewarding work, but not on behalf of the nation. Instead, as a decorated and successful architect informs him, "in the U.S. now there's not that kind of dreaming [about the biggest and tallest] happening. It's on hold. The dreaming's being done elsewhere for now" (151).

That his work can only be useful when backed by the resources and energy of someone else, someone foreign or female, is a conclusion to which Alan becomes increasingly accustomed. When, repeating the failure of his friend Terry, King

Abdullah awards his contract to a Chinese firm Eggers implies is also using American technology to undercut American bids, rather than return home to set his life in order, Alan pleads his case to the King's assistant. With a wave of relief, he realizes that in the end, "He wasn't being sent away, after all ... he would stay" and the King and his economy would find something for him to do (331). This posture of ingratiating servitude, of manufactured occupation, is the future America has to look forward to unless it manages to act decisively, the novel concludes.

We could easily respond to Eggers's polemic with a return to the masculinity and nationalism he poses as an alternative to obsolescence. A reconsolidation of the national economy might improve the lives of Americans in the short term. While there is certainly some truth in Eggers's assessment of the devastation caused to America's working class by globalization, his argument that what America needs is a return to masculine assertiveness and brash salesmanship is less than compelling. Instead, might it not be more productive to take the state of the nation, in which a man like Alan can approach foreigners with humility and vulnerability, and refashion its collective identity? Does America need to be the center of the world the globalization it has helped to set in motion might create? Contrary to the appeal of Eggers's story, I find the idea of a less domineering, less decisive, and more sensitive American a positive development, even if it might mean something less than absolute domination of the world's economy. As Alan reflects, a part of why he is in such dire straits is that he was, for so long, able to exist under the assumption that he would always be able to get hold of any resources he might need to fulfill his dreams. He never imagined he might have to do work, meaning

work he did not find pleasurable or fulfilling, work that is labor, to get there. What his vulnerability makes possible is a new, and I think, more cosmopolitan way for America to proceed, one in which Americans do not simply command the attention of the world, but must work in concert with them to make something within a shared space. One kind of American nationalism may be obsolete, but that does not mean the downfall of the nation or the end of meaningful being for Americans living in a globalized world.

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