

Paper for: Translating Class, Altering hospitality.

Title: Disavowals, anamnesis and the alterity of the other. Couze Venn.

DRAFT -NOT FOR QUOTATION

The thought of class today provokes a troubling uncertainty regarding what it is that one is speaking about, and thus regarding the conceptual grounds on which a political standpoint is constituted. [Of course, this goes as well for concepts of race, the ethne, the nation] The conference title already indicates that there is a problem with the concept itself, that maybe we no longer know what we had assumed we knew about class (or race, and so on). At least this is the line of thought I would like to begin with, that is, with the ‘disorder of identity’ (Derrida, 1998: 14). For, if we assume that we know already what class is, and what it means to belong to a class (or some other collective category) and if we take it for granted that we already know that the problem concerns the effects of power in making class, etc, the basis for a politics – of differentiation, exclusion/inclusion, disavowals, and so on – then there is nothing much to discuss, except the question of politics itself.

So, I thought it might be productive to begin with the bracketing of class. It is not the bracketing which characterises the kind ‘forgetting’ that has appeared in neo-liberal governance and culture. That forgetting on the one hand drives the ‘self’ further towards the disavowals of the other, already dominant in individualism and logocentrism, and the misrecognition of the self in a ‘culture of narcissism’, in the guise of the privatisation of life. On the other hand, it incites a return to the folding of the subject inside the secure hold of the collectivity-as-community - the ‘race’, the ethne, the nation, or religion - so that the forgetting is an alienation and an elision, performed through the sliding of the subject under these new, and not so new, signifiers of transcendence.

My questioning will instead explore several related themes: that of the gaze in the process of identification and the presence of the other in its structuration, the idea of narrative identity as it is developed in the work of Ricoeur and the implications for the refiguration of subjectivity, and the theoretical and political problems that arise when we prioritise the relation to alterity in the process of constitution.

Let me start with Lacan’s reference to the mirror stage in the process of formation of subjectivity. As we know, he introduces this trope in order to suggest the specular character of recognition at the pre-oedipal stage of identification, a process that puts into play an apparatus of the drive, desire, recognition, phantasy in the emergence of the I. I am not interested here in the psychoanalytic account itself, but with the problem of the gaze, or rather with the problematisation of the gaze in the problematic of identification. This problematisation for my discussion arises when we put into question the I who ‘sees’ and when we bring into the picture the tripartite relationship that Lacan describes regarding another stage in the process of formation of the subject, appearing with the emergence of language, namely, the stage of interaction between the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. We cannot get away from the fact that it is a three-term dynamic, so that each relies and refers to the other in its own

constitution. The matter of misrecognition (for Lacan) is bound up in this dynamic too. What interests me here are three things:

1. The fact that there are no independent ground on which either of the terms can be verified, so that we are already outside of the problematic of representation and must locate analysis on the terrain of a (critical) hermeneutics, thus on the terrain of signification and of narrative and discourse.
2. The contrast with the mirror phase analogy, where at first sight it appears as if we are dealing with a two-dimensional system, namely, an onlooker/seer and her/his reflection/image. Thus, at least within the framework of a realist, cognitivist interpretation, the space for a third term, specifically the place of the other, is squeezed out, or thrust into invisibility or absence.
3. The location of the gaze in the two cases, particularly with respect to the effects of culture, of the Law and of power in its determination.

In the misreadings of the mirror phase, it is assumed that the I who sees coincides with the image in the mirror, through narcissistic identification. This misreading forgets the point of view of the imago, of phantasy and of the gaze. It is stuck in the problematic of representation, and thus jumps to conclusions about knowledge: I recognise and know myself in the image in the mirror. There is an affinity with the Cartesian problematic of the subject where the assumption is that the I of the 'I think' is the same as the existential I of 'I am', a point Ricoeur (1974) also makes in a different context. We all know that this affinity is not a coincidence. What is missed is the gaze, that is to say, the question about who 'sees', and what is seen, and, underlying this questioning, the enigmatic relation of ipseity and alterity. In Lacan's account, a series of terms intervene so that the outcome is not the consolidation of a Cartesian ego and cogito, but the emergence of a subject-in-process, held in place through the functioning of the symbolic, thus of culture, thus the intervention of an other, and others, in the location of the ego. What is veiled in accounts of identification that are beholden to a cognitivist epistemology is the imaginary character of the subject in the position of the I think and the I am; in truth, I am not who I think I am. So, who sees with my eyes?

I am going to leap to another staging of the subject in order to return to the question of identification and subject-formation with fresh questions about the place of culture. Fanon, in his famous analysis of blackness and identity, begins with the incident in which a child points to him and exclaims: 'Look, a Negro' and later 'Mother, look at the Negro, I'm frightened' (Fanon, 1970: 81). Fanon's account moves swiftly from the recognition of the 'fact of being black' to the gaze of the other, signalled in the expression of fear. In his narrative, it is a gaze that fractures his identity, splits it into the disjunct temporalities and spatialities of body, race and culture. It robs Fanon of the illusion of 'presence' (ibid.), and throws him into a search for a 'lost' or 'forgotten' past set against the racist discourses of racial fixity and the disavowals that are bound up with abjection; he is obliged to undertake the labour of anamnesis in order to retrieve from the invisibilities of what he calls 'historicity' the cultural elements for a new becoming.

What is interesting in the episode, and in Fanon's analysis, is that the disruption of the ego that the gaze of the other provokes has to do with the recognition that the 'black man' does not see with his own eyes, but from the position of a gaze that's occupied by the 'place of the master'. This disruption adds a new element to the putting into question of the subject which the gaze of the other occasions in any case, (whether within psychoanalytic theory or poststructuralist theories of the subject), introducing as it does the effects of the superego and culture and the play of the ideal ego and the ego ideal in suturing the I within an intersubjective space. In the case of black (class, female) identity, the place of culture is one already colonised at the level of the symbolic by the dominant culture, by the language of the Law, so that the relays between the different terms in the Lacanian model – symbolic, imaginary, real, ego ideal and ideal ego, lack, the Phallus, the Thing, etc – are re-routed (and re-rooted) via a double-inscription in language, such that one's own culture (or difference) is made to occupy a minor place, positioned as minority – slipped under the bar of the Subject and the signifier of the Law - with its connotations of infantilism, thus of (cognitive, and in colonial discourse, ontological) lack [See T. Papoulias (2002)]. A point about the other as remainder, as remnant [that won't go into the whole, and is thus open to a policing – See Ranciere, 1999] is worth keeping in mind for the question of anamnesis, and of transfiguration, that I will discuss later.

Fanon's text, in its different language, explores the range of effects at the level of affect and identity. The ambivalent dynamic between the force of the Law and that of the Thing (see Lyotard, forthcoming), the social and the psychic, the visible and the invisible, the accessible/presentable and the inaccessible/unrepresentable directs his search for a refigured, livable identity towards anamnesis and a poetics (the latter serving as register for the liminal character of what is inscripted - inscribed and encrypted - in the material which the former works through). His first reaction, not surprisingly, is a (cathartic) counter-violence. However, from the point of view of transfiguration, I want to highlight the fact that the strategies for survival that Fanon invents takes him to the counter-discourse of Black identity in the writings of Negritude, and the 'work' which his own writing does. I shall return to some of these issues in a moment in further exploration of what the (dis)avowals of the other means from the point of view of being-with, the welcoming of the other and the question of hospitality and responsibility.

For the moment the problem is: how does the gaze structure what is seen, and participates in what is rendered invisible? In the Lacanian model of subject-formation, there are two levels of the gaze, each with its domain of the inaccessible, of invisibility. At the 'mirror stage', the specular process of recognition expresses the imaginary relation with the ego ideal, that is, with a phantasised imago, that, I would add, nevertheless retains the trace of the other. In this process, what becomes inscripted in the penumbra of unconscious material is the 'real', so that already the alterity of the other takes on an enigmatic character. We could enlarge this account, bearing in mind the imaginary register in which both the other and oneself are inscribed in the early mechanism of recognition, but adding to the process the reality of embodied relationships with the other (principally, the mother), and with the world. An implication is that the existential reality of the early relation to the other is anchored in the choreography in which is produced the positions of I and other. The emergence of the 'I am', structured in relation to the emergence into language, is grafted onto this primary level of attachment and affect; it remains bound to the

economy of desire that structures the earliest process of identification. Kristeva (1974) says something similar when she proposes a ‘thetic’ phase in the signifying process whereby affect is grounded by reference to the organisation of primary drives. Her analysis of signifiante makes a systematic connection between the process of identification and the process of signification by way of the functioning of the economy of desire, so that the complicity between sign and propositionality is underpinned by the relation between the ‘semiotic chora’, as she calls it, and the semantic field, a relation in which the thetic functions as, at the same time, rupture and frontier, and thus as relay (Kristeva, 1974: 41,42). My juxtaposition of Kristeva emphasises the need to keep visible the relationship of the psychic and the social in the process of figuration and refiguration. The recognition the place of the symbolic, and thus of culture and others, in the constitution of the ego, and the intrusion of the Law in it, as one of its aspects, enables analysis to take account of other signifiers in the metonymic chain of the signifiers of Law, namely, the Father, the Nation, God. [The theme of sovereignty arises here, too, particularly by reference to its claim to authority and authenticity, and what it must exclude, and annul, in grounding this claim in the ‘bare’ or empty gap between laws and the transcendent Signifier of sovereignty. See Agamben (1998)]

Turning to the issue of ‘minoritarian’ identity, we can argue that the excess of abjection invested in the other-as-remnant – as deficient or pathological - introduces an extra disjunction, an extra lack, in the process of identification since the abjected other is unable to identify with the phantasised Signifier of culture and the Law [the Nation, the White Race, the Phallus, and so on] given that s/he cannot occupy the position of the ‘master’s’ gaze. . The link works out in this way: an excess is already at work in the emergence of the subject, arising from one’s embodied relation to the other and to the everyday world, that resists symbolisation and remains enigmatic (beyond the disavowals in ego-centric theories of the subject).[I must leave out the many ways of theorising this from Laplanche (1999) to Santner (2001) or some passages in Lyotard’s (1990) reflections on “the jews”]. The trauma of racism, the violence of such forms of exclusion and abjection, introduce another excess which cannot be translated, for the monolingual discourse of ‘identity’ has no place for the excluded, except as remainder, or as supplement; the other is thrown into the forgetting of disavowal. The complicity between the psychic and the social levels of disavowals produces a double mutism encrypting a double excess. Equally, the domain of the invisible, and thus of what one must approach in working through and anamnesis, is also doubled.

For the abjected and minoritarian other, the identity mirrored in the gaze misses or misrecognises its phantasised ideal and must recognise its lack-of-being at both levels of the psychic and the social. There are compensatory stratagems, of course, that take different forms, including disavowals, depending on circumstances of class, gender, etc. In any case, the subject must live that excess lack in the mode of a surplus of desire, and its displacements: in hysteria. Fanon’s account of abjection in his essay ranges through some of the strategies of survival open to the abjected other, for instance, the recourse to counter-violence, the work of anamnesis through the refiguration of collective and autobiographical memory, a poetic mnemonics. His text exemplarily illustrates the ambivalences that distort the relation of the Thing to the Law when social relations are subjected to forms of oppression. In such cases, the economy of desire, through the Law, is instrumentalised into the pornography of

power. Yet, the Law is necessary. So, the question for the welcoming of the other outside the calculations proper to the agonistic domain of politics is how to uncouple law from ethics, the norm from justice and judgement (and abandon the terrain of monotheisms: see Santner, 2001).

A difficulty arises for theory because within the phallogocentric and egological narrative of subjectivity – including most of psychoanalytic theory – the problem of identification is posed from the point of view of accounting for a self-sufficient I, the ego cogito, who, ideally, would emerge from the vicissitudes of subject-formation as the autonomous, unitary self (even if ‘normality’ and autonomy are paid for in repressions and sublimations). In this narrative whereby the ‘I think’ coincides with the ‘I am’, the other and culture are folded without trace within the autonomous subject. As I have indicated, this can work only at the cost of the disavowal of the other (whose trace is ‘lost’), and the forgetting of the shadow of the other in oneself, for the gap between the I think and the I am is the place of the other, of being-with and of being-in-the-world. The egological discourse of the subject limits the theorisation of the functioning of culture and the inter-subjective ground in the process of subject-formation, and limits the analysis of the effects of power, inscribed in class (and racial) difference, to the field of rational calculations, that is, to an instrumental political sphere. This problematic of subjectivity obscures the mechanisms for the transfiguration of subjectivity, since it leaves out the ‘psychic life of power’ (Butler, 1997) and cannot theorise the work that one does on oneself and with others in the process of change.

To address these issues, I shall turn to Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity that, because it is an account of the self that explicitly prioritises the place of the other in the emergence of the I, will enable me to displace the problem from the terrain of the psy sciences. The problematic of self in Ricoeur arises from a specific set of ontological and phenomenological positions to do with the question(ing) of being, developing a number of Heideggerian motifs, including the idea that temporality is the essential dimension of being. The avenue that he follows is to explore the possibility that narrative is the form in which we can overcome the aporias of time relating to its unrepresentability and to the fact that we are encompassed by it. Narrative he claims is the device by which we express the lived, or phenomenal, aspect of the temporality of being. The underlying proposition is that the act of telling a story "can transmute natural time into a specifically human time" (1984: 17). In Ricoeur's approach, the term narrative identity seems to join up two thematics, one concerning subjective identity, and the other concerning the relation of history and fiction in the process of the figuration of temporality. In the elaboration of his position, Ricoeur draws a distinction between identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*), arguing that identity is not the sameness of a permanent, continuous, immutable, fixed entity; it is instead the mode of relating to being that can be characterised as selfhood. Self is not a fact or an event, it is not reducible to the facticity of things-in-themselves. The identity of a person, or a group or a people, takes the form of stories told.

As a device, narrative emplots the events of a life according to the rules of story-telling, relying upon models and styles of emplotment already existing in a culture. Furthermore, the sense of narrative identity that Ricoeur develops

stresses the view that every identity is "mingled with that of others in such a way as to engender second order stories which are themselves intersections between numerous stories... We are literally 'entangled in stories' " (Ricoeur,1996: 6). However, although "(L)ife is woven of stories told" (Ricoeur,1988 : 246), these stories are not purely imaginary or fictional, for they make reference to a domain of reality that can be verified. On the one hand, the stories we tell about ourselves are segments of other people's stories about themselves and us, so that a self 'happens' at the point of intersection of many real lives. On the other hand, some of these narratives tell of events involving - indeed, constituting - a whole community or period of time, that is, they inscribe a history and a memory, so that every self occurs "at a point of intersection between fictive and historical narratives" (Ricoeur,1991: 186). The process whereby biographical accounts include narratives of the nation or the 'race', as in Fanon, would be a case in point, investing concepts like 'race' with an experiential thickness that unites self identity and racial (national, etc) identity in the imaginary. But, one may ask, how do we choose them, how do we know which scripts apply to us? Is self-recognition the retroactive effect of a process of constitution, recalling in part the Althusserian concept of interpellation, and in part the process of (self)disciplining and normalisation that Foucault has described? Is narrative identity but a supplement to these other ways of accounting for the emergence of particular subjectivities?

One of the advantages of Ricoeur's approach is that it provides new conceptual tools for examining something which the latter accounts do not explain very well, namely, the problem of subjective change. It does so in part through the three mimetic functions as described by Ricoeur. Mimesis 1 refers to the prenarrative, prefigurative features that express basic human desire; it describes a 'semantics of desire ' (1988: 248). We could understand the prefigurative, from the point of view of a particular subject's configuration of experience, to refer to the corpus of the already-known and the already-said, the stock of narrative understandings of the world and of subjects, inscribed in the lifeworld. It forms a cultural unconscious

Mimesis 2 arises from the creative process of the configuration of experience, the implication being that emplotment is not automatic or routine but involves the imagination in the selection and ordering of elements, linking the fictional dimension of the story to a domain of reality, so that the narrative refers to real events that can be verified through testimony. This mimetic function is ever open to repeated rectifications that occur in the course of the subject's reflection on her life. For Ricoeur, narrative identity is the result of these rectifications, proceeding by way of the third mimetic function. Thus, the third mimetic relation relates back to the first by way of a transformative praxis applied to the second. (1988: 248). In this way, every narrative identity is a refigured identity involving the action of a *poiesis* which interlaces the phenomenal and the cosmological dimensions of being, and weaves the fictional into the historical narrative to constitute a 'third-time' (1988: 245). The narrativity of identity, it is clear, does not abolish the 'reality' of the who, but shifts the question of the truth of subjectivity onto the ground of inter-subjectivity. Indeed, self-reflection is the process whereby we apply to ourself

historical and fictional narratives sedimented in our culture, so that "self-constancy refers to a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself " (Ricoeur, 1988: 247).

The diachronic dimension in the process of subjective change is taken up in Ricoeur when he refers to the inscription of a notion of 'traditionality' located in the conceptual space bounded by the three-fold relation of mimesis. The concept of traditionality, irreducible to tradition, is used to try and account for the effectivity of history upon us, the way in which the past affects us independently of our will and the way we respond to the effect of history through an articulation of the past and the present. In that sense, traditionality can be understood as the term referring to the interweaving of two 'temporalizations of history' (Ricoeur, 1988: 219) that cross each other, constituting particular identities at the points of intersection. A 'who' appears at that point of intersection where the history of a culture, sedimented and transmitted in its stock of knowledge, its sayings, parables, songs, myths, that is, the narratives and 'texts' that constitute and inscribe a 'structure of feeling', cross the history of a named subject, constituting a particular consciousness. This is the mechanism by which we are so to speak sutured in history. It is this identity which is refigured through the application of particular types of narratives existing in a culture.

Thus, at the level of the social, the self-reflective activity of the examined life performs a hermeneutic and critical function: a critical hermeneutics. It is promoted by particular kinds of narrative and artistic practice, specifically those that function to reveal or make visible or make present the liminal or invisible or unrepresentable aspects of being-in-the-world. We saw an example of this practice at work in the counter-hegemonic and deconstructive text of Fanon and in the register he employs in his interrogation.

At the level of the psychic, we should add to the analysis of the refiguration of particular selves the standpoint of 'working-through', by analogy to what takes place in psychoanalytic practice. My discussion has indicated that anamnesis must also proceed by reference to the work accomplished in the process of remembrance when the biographical content of narrative identity encounters the historical rectifications performed by historians. So, anamnesis forces into the open the disavowal of the other at two levels so that the hermeneutics of desire is no longer an ego-centric project, but must be allied to the kind of critical hermeneutics I have sketched. The latter brings into view themes of the welcoming of the other, of responsibility for the other on the basis of the recognition of the constitutive functioning of the other, and the fragility and alterity of the other. A different exploration of difference and singularity beckons, elements of which appear in the texts and positions to which I have (too sketchily) alluded.