Introduction

The title of this volume of essays, published between 1991 and 2005 in the journal *Litteraria Pragensia: Studies in Literature and Culture*, indicates diverse temporalities. The word “after” implies the end of history, both as a series of events in time, which can be recognized and represented,¹ and as a purposeful

¹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 70-74. Commenting on Hume’s statement that “repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind that contemplates it,” Deleuze interprets the change caused by repetition as “a difference, something new in the mind [...] the for-itself of repetition, an originary subjectivity which necessarily enters its constitution” (70). This “originary subjectivity” is no individual or personal phenomenon, but a specific *mental capacity*: the “contactile power” of imagination, which “like a sensitive plate [...] retains one case [element, instant, etc.] when the other appears [...] in an internal qualitative impression [...] This is by no means a memory, nor indeed an operation of the understanding: contraction is not a matter of reflection. Properly speaking, it forms a synthesis of time. [...] Time is constituted only in the originary synthesis which operates on the repetition of instants. This synthesis contracts the successive independent instants into one another thereby constituting the lived, or living, present. It is in this present that time is deployed. To it belong both the past and the future” (70). “*Passive synthesis*” (71) or “duration” (72) is not carried out by mind, but occurs in the mind which contemplates (71). In more general terms, it refers back to organic synthesis (73). It also conditions habits (73-74) establishing collective existence. In mental processes “passive syntheses” underlie “active syntheses,” in which memory and understanding reconstitute “the particular cases as distinct, conserving them in [their] own ‘temporal space.’ The past is then no longer the immediate past of retention but the reflected past of representation, of reflected and reproduced particularity” (71).
process, whether “the Kantian dream of unending progress,”2 or a movement toward some final meaning or goal: a revelation of universal truth (“veritas filia temporis”), a fulfilment of some promise (the Second Coming, the Last Judgement) or an achievement of an ultimate aim of cosmic or human existence, such as the New Jerusalem, Civitas Dei or the universal State. While in the former temporality the word “after” designates difference as the openness of repetition3 and, consequently, the openness of history to a plurality of meanings and representations, in the latter temporality difference becomes a closure, a generality determining the whole process as the only true History, “combining the teleological and the eschatological.”4

Another temporality implied in the title is that of the transitoriness and even historicity of all histories as constructs based on preconceived or schematic notions of evolution. Recent histories of the Earth and its biosphere have problematized the assumption of continuous and gradual change typical of the nineteenth-century evolutionarism founded on “Newton’s celestial mechanics”5 and eighteenth-century organismism. As David Depew and Bruce Weber have pointed out, historical research yields only “isolated sets of data that we falsely

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3 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 72. But even in this case, based on Bergson’s notion of repetition, the openness is conditioned by the closeness of binary oppositions between individual elements (Bull, “On Making Ends Meet,” 1).

4 Bull, “On Making Ends Meet,” 2. Bull refers to St. Augustine, who draws a parallel between the movement of the individual soul “from misery to beatitude,” and beyond time to eternity and the movement of the world, and adds: “if the telos of the individual life can coincide with its terminus, there seems no reason why the ends of the world should not also meet.”

aggregate into sudden large changes.”⁶ In view of this, the temporality indicated by the title of this book is more heterogeneous than puposeful: rather than syntheses, new histories represent limitless chains of “resonances” between fragmentary spatial and temporal regions.⁷ This seems to hold even for traditional articulations of history. As J. Hillis Miller suggests: “Periods differ from one another because there are different forms of heterogeneity […]”⁸

Still another temporality underlies the difference, discussed in Lyotard’s Postmodern Condition, between History as a “meta-narrative” imposing on a flux of events a universal order of origin, essence or causality, and numerous particular “micro-narratives,” involved in “language games” whose rules are subject to constant change. As a result, the complex temporality of events⁹ is mimed by the shifting rules of their representations. The essays in this volume show how the authority of “meta-narratives” has been problematized and undermined by the twentieth-century developments in the discipline of history, starting with la nouvelle histoire and continuing with New Historicism and cultural anthropology. They also trace the dismantling of this authority in the discourses of the colonial or post-colonial Other and in the spatio-temporal discontinuities including diasporas or Foucault’s “other spaces” and “other times” (“heterotopias” and “heterochronias”).¹⁰ In the closing

section of the book, archetypal “meta-narratives,” such as the millenialist and apocalyptic discourses, are discussed in the new frameworks of reference, namely language performativity (the power of rhetorical figures), fictions of popular culture and ecological histories of urban civilization. Although the last mentioned approach can be traced back to Richard Jefferies’s post-catastrophic fiction After London (1886), “interdisciplinary urban science” is still in the process of making.11

Finally, the essays assembled in this volume can be read as a kind of a “micro-narrative,” with a distinct temporality, which brings it close to “the itinerant, ambulant sciences”12 discussed by Deleuze and Guattari. Rather than as a systematizing, hierarchizing discourse, this assemblage of texts functions as a sort of ‘afterhistory,’ a portmanteau word indicating, as all portmanteau words do, the counter-actualization of events but also a specific approach to history: “following a flow in a vectorial field across which singularities are scattered like so many ‘accidents’ (problems).”13 Such has been the passage of the journal Litteraria Pragensia, born of the hopes raised by the political changes in


13 See Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 177-78: “We were inquiring into the nature of the alogical compatibilities and incompatibilities between events. But, to the extent that divergence is affirmed and disjunction becomes a positive synthesis, it seems that all events, even contraries, are compatible [...]. Incompatibility is born only with individuals, persons and worlds in which events are actualized, but not between events themselves or between their a-cosmic, impersonal, and pre-individual singularities. [...] It would be necessary for an individual to grasp herself as event; [...]. Each individual would be like a mirror for the condensation of singularities and each world a distance in the mirror.”

14 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 372.
Central and Eastern Europe after November 1989, through the currents, eddies and vortices of the recent interdisciplinary trends in the humanities.15

The first section of this book, “The Truth of the Past: Discipline, Desire, Utopia,” opens with Mark Poster’s reflection of the dehierarchization in the domain of historical studies, where cultural history became equal to more traditional varieties, especially political history. As a consequence, the discipline has been split by the problematization of the status of truth, which is no longer grounded in the continuity of historical time and an “unmediated relation of the historian to the past” but includes also the links between the text and the context or extratextual reality. Moreover, as Poster points out, feminist and deconstructive approaches have problematized the status of the text, drawing our attention to “the text [...] as interference between the historian and the truth. [...] In Derrida’s case it is as much a sign of the absence of the real as it is itself an inscription of reality.” Foucault’s theory of discourse emphasizes “the productive materiality of the text,” and, like all other poststructuralist approaches, questions “the way a text organizes itself as a form of knowledge, as truth,” for epistemological as well as political reasons.

The two essays by Natalie Zemon Davis, “Stories and the Hunger to Know” and “Censorship, Silence and the Resistance: The Annales during the German Occupation in France,” confront the naive desire for historical “realities” (“this appetite for the facts of what actually happened”) in the post-communist countries with the problems of historical research published the Annales, the principal venue of la nouvelle histoire. The complex position of this pioneering historical journal under the German occupation of France included self-censorship, the impossibility of maintaining political neutrality, manoeuvring between the

15 The first four essays in this volume are based on the papers delivered at the “Varieties of Historicism” conference, organized by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of California at Irvine in early February 1990.

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extremes of open resistance to Nazism and nationalist historiography or folklorism, but also led to the affirmation of “the existence of a scientific community beyond nation or race” and the birth of new methodological trends: “structural history” (“histoire structurale”) substituting history of “political events” (“histoire historisante”) and the study of the language of historical records, “semantic shifts” of words, underlying both “truths” and “lies.” In this way, Davis demonstrates the relevance of microhistories, which “should never ignore the enduring social-history questions about the communication—that is, about the production, dissemination and reception of cultural forms.” In contrast to the “we want realities” approach, microhistories will have much to tell about macrohistory […] as a richly analyzed case available for comparison with other settings, as a local power cluster receiving signals and influence from and sending them to other clusters and authoritative power centers.

Exploring microhistories, cultural history can “track the changing interplay among schools of thought and language patronage and power of financing and control, teaching traditions and elites,” that is, make us aware of the discursive workings of power.

In the following essay, entitled “In Mendacio Veritas (In Lies There Lies the Truth),” István Rév traces the strategies of the totalitarian communist power blurring the difference between fact and fiction or reality and desire. He demonstrates how the Stalinist regime manipulated the difference between the class origin of the victims of the communist show-trials and the facts of their individual lives. In the enforced statements of defendants, their origin functions both as an impersonal historical force and as the absolute guilt, a secularization of the biblical original sin. Without this metaphysical agency, facts lose their importance: they lack ‘objective’ foundation and become mere allegations of a ‘criminal’ subject constructed by the state apparatus. Conversely, invented stories are fabricated
as legal documents and even the records of their fabrication are kept in the archives. In this process, “language manipulation play[s] an important role in constructing the story” and the words “true” and “false” lose their conventional meanings: “false information” means everything diverging from the official representations of the case. As Rév suggests, the strategies of communist investigators resemble “pornographic texts” and testify to the conflation of the ideological representation of the regime, political technologisation of individuals and poetry: “The interrogator told György Faludy when forcing him to write a long and usable life history: ‘You are a poet, use your imagination!’” As a result, fictions fabricated during the show-trials contain “partly formalized traces of history” and may be analyzed as historical accounts:

Although they are self-conscious, deliberate lies, they contain the truth. The truth about those, who composed the text, who fashioned the play. Those who wrote the fictitious texts, wanted to present them as real historical documents, as real evidence about those, whose lives they wanted to create. But while writing the faked life-histories, they created their own stories, their own lives. As in the case of the orgy-accusations in the Middle Ages which reveal the thinking of those who composed them, rather than the practices of the accused, the documents in the archives of the secret police tell the history of the interrogator.

In the documents of the show-trials, the private pleasure of pornography is transformed into public manifestation of the power of the regime. The state represents itself—in a perverse way—as a scapegoat as well as God. Thus the show-trials are integrated into a circular pattern which may represent the end of history but cannot function as its closure for it brings new information about the totalitarian power and its practices.

In contrast to the totalitarian attempts to blur the difference between history and utopia as its desired end, Stephen Greenblatt’s essay “Utopian Desire” explains utopia—in a
Foucauldian way—as a discursive strategy whose main purpose is to control desire by means of a political technologising of individuals, Greenblatt refers to his earlier interpretation of More’s *Utopia* as “a profound exercise in imaginary self-cancellation” and a “radical alternative” to “a strategic adaptation” of an individual “to a particular social and political milieu”16: “More imagined a world where his career, with its complex, ironic, alienated staging of social identity, would be not only unnecessary but impossible.” Having pointed out that “utopian society is strikingly and insistently organized around families,” which, after the abolition of private property, are no longer economic units but primarily power structures controlling sexual desire, Greenblatt traces the Christian roots of More’s project: “More is echoing a deep and venerable Christian anxiety about sexuality, a longing for chastity that extended into the marriage bed itself.” However, instead of expressing mere “suspicion of sexuality,” More’s schema is specifically designed to grant to sexuality a natural, legitimate, acknowledged place, a place that does not entail a violation of integrity or an act of violence. And for More such a place is precisely utopian. It involves a cancellation as decisive as the abolition of private property.

Establishing utopia as a political technology, an instrument invented to transform sexual desire, make it public, give it a stable and legitimate location based on the necessity of procreation (utopia as a heterotopia), More erases the older discourse of utopia, the tales of the Land of Cockaygne: the dream of the world without economic, moral and social constraints. As a result, *Utopia* can be read as a textualization of sexuality in the form of a social power. Rather than a no-place, More’s imaginary island is *the other place*, a heterotopia of the late

feudal, absolutist state, and a discourse anticipating modern management of bio-power.17

Under the heading “Shifting Boundaries: Periods and Canons between Ideology and Popular Culture” essays in the second section deal with the articulation of historical narratives and totalization of source texts. As case studies of two important cultural phenomena, the period of Romanticism and the canon of Shakespeare’s works, they question traditional periodizations, historicize canons and explore their relations to political ideologies and to mass culture.

Jerome J. McGann’s study “Rethinking Romanticism” draws an analogy between social history and cultural historical approach: “civil wars” and “ideological struggles,”18 in order to “clarify the distinction between ‘the romantic period’ (that is, a particular historical epoch) and ‘romanticism’ (that is, a set of cultural/ideological formations that came to prominence during the romantic period).” According to McGann, Romanticism is no abstract concept but “a disputatious scene whose internal tensions re-present the strife of historical differentials and ideological conflict.” The romantic period is more difficult to determine not only because “it [...] was an unstable and conflicted phenomenon,” but because “it continues to mutate as it is subjected to further study.” McGann’s discussion demonstrates the transformative power of the new historicist approach, which recognizes the otherness of historical moments. As a consequence, these moments are neither assumed in their wholeness as traditional objects of knowledge nor subsumed under conceptual or narrative closures: “the New History subordinates narrative (closure) to dialectic (engagement).”


18 “The distinction is important not merely because so much of the work of that period is not ‘romantic,’ but even more, perhaps, because the period is notable for its many ideological struggles. A romantic ethos achieved dominance through sharp cultural conflict; some of the fiercest engagements were internecine—the civil wars of the romantic movement itself.”
Since historical narratives cannot be totalized, McGann turns to canons, and particularly to anthologies, as texts foregrounding “local units of order:”

Possibilities of order appear at different scalar levels because the center of the work is not so much a totalized form as a dynamically emergent set of constructible hypotheses of historical relations. Built into the anthology form are what topological mathematicians might call “basins” of contradiction: orderly, expository, and linear arrangements that stand at a perpetual brink of chaotic transformation. [...] An anthology of this kind necessarily constructs a literary history, but the historical synthesis is subordinated in the formalities of the collection. The anthology focuses one’s attention on local units of order—individual poems and groups of poems.

In his approach, order is a freely chosen structure, which does not have to exist in ‘reality.’ Its choice does not impose a “master-narrative,” or a dominant concept:

Tracing a historical course by spots of poetical time (rather than by unfolding expository sequence) entails a necessary fall from the grace of one great Mind into the local world of the poem, where contradiction—the ceaseless dialectic of “opposite and discordant qualities”—holds paramount sway.

Understood along these lines, anthologies are not alternative versions of historical narratives nor attempts at historical classification. Rather, they are close to what Derrida called “the supplement of reading.” Anthology, claims McGann, “solicits revision, supplementation—it solicits your critique.”

The link between historicity and articulation of historical narratives is an important theme of another essay on Romanticism, “The First Generation Poets: Historicity, Neurosis, Private Mythology,” by Denis Bonnecase. Analyzing the complex historicity of early English romantic poetry, Bonnecase notices a close relationship between references to geographical and historical places and the “strategy of displacements (from [8]
the topical to the spiritual, from the particular to the universal, from the object to the symbol, from landscape to inscape.” As a result, historical events are transformed into, and re-articulated in, “a private mythology.” Bonnecase’s subtle argument only appears to look back to its phenomenological origins: in fact, it conceives romantic poems as Foucault’s enunciative field: “The literary text will accordingly be taken as a document in so far as history works from within its fabric.” In his study of early romantic historicity, Bonnecase comes close to what Foucault, in contrast to Kant’s metaphysical a priori, called a “historical a priori” (what happened in history is prior to any theory). Unlike the former a priori, superimposed on the totality of history, the latter a priori is no mere system of temporal dispersions but a “transformable group.” The following analysis of subjectivity in early romantic poetry shows how this transformative group refigured the relations between the “two major psychological effects” of the French Revolution (“the disintegration of the ideological self” and “the disintegration of the existential ego”) and the “objectification” of the “I” in early romantic poetry as “the mirror-like poetical text in the very act of writing.” All these transformations finally lead to a re-articulation and subsequent redefinition of a historical period, found especially in Coleridge’s writings: “the aborted revolution” becomes the moment of birth of a new age of “utopian humanism,” whose bearers are “intellectuals,” eulogized as “the deep-principled minority” and “creating a much hoped-for norm from a marginal situation, universalizing national concerns and sublimating them into a cultural myth.”

The ideological and political aspects of the last mentioned process are further explored by Ian Frederick Moulton in “Stratford and Bayreuth: Anti-Commercialism, Nationalism and the Religion of Art.” The ritual performance of Shakespeare’s plays at Stratford-upon-Avon used to have many similarities with the Wagner festivals in Bayreuth. The principal

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ideology was that of racial union of the white, English-speaking population and the recreation of the originary Indo-Germanic unity in cultural, ethnic and political terms. This unity, called a future “Aryan Empire,” had to be achieved by means of wars. Here Shakespeare functioned as an analogue of sacred, biblical poetry: “the Wars of the Lord” led by the Israelites were supplantled by the imperial wars of the British, concluded by “an apocalyptic ‘victory over the beast,’” which would complete the union of the ethnocentric nation. The only alleged deficiency of Shakespeare’s work in the context of this mythology, the lack of “experience of sexual passion,” was to be compensated by staging Richard Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*, where “the mystery of sex” and “the ideal of Divine Love” were intertwined: “In keeping with Bayreuth orthodoxy, *Parsifal* should conclude Stratford programs as a sacred event rather than an entertainment.” This transformation of the Shakespeare canon was intended to be the first step to the formation the National Theatre, whose repertory, including also “the plays of Yeats and Shaw, the choral works of Elgar, Greek tragedy in translation, morris dances, folk-songs, and English games,” would become a synthesis of British performative culture, most powerfully expressed by the absolute universality of Shakespeare as a sacred myth and a global power: the voice of God and the unity of “a fantasy Empire in which the Thirteen Colonies never declared independence and India has been fully anglicized.”

The use of Shakespeare canon in American mass culture is discussed by Chandra Mukerji’s “Shakespeare in L.A.: A Commentary on ‘Shakespeare and Modern Commercial Culture,’” which makes a revealing comparison between the appropriation of Shakespeare and of traditional African American music by the commercial media:

Shakespeare is not so much trivialized in American mass media as “covered,” brought into the world of feints and masks around identity that has shaped American mass culture.
“Covering” is a term frequently used to describe commercial practices in American popular music used between the 1920s and 1960s to produce a sound for the radio and records, using African-American songs that had been “cleaned up” for the white market. “Covering” reinforced racial social segregation even while it was providing an undercover form of cultural integration.

In both cases, mass culture is deprived of its originary value, the popular tradition,20 which, however, remains “intact” and continues to be productive in its own specific ways. According to Mukerji, the “covering” of Shakespeare started in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when his work was reinvented as a ‘sacred’ literary value, an icon of Englishness and a sign of upward mobility, and was subsequently commodified. The resulting ambiguity of Shakespeare as the highest canonic value and as a deeply alien element, incompatible with consumerism, has been efficiently used by Hollywood as a substitute for other, more threatening ambiguities, such as those of race or Englishness: similar to “blackface” replacing blackness of skin in early Hollywood films, “covered” Shakespeare became a fetish instrumental in managing racial tensions and Anglophobia by administering small doses of Anglophilia, which, as Mukerji argues, “is behind the ‘charm’” of movies like L.A. Story and “vindicates L.A. as a site of human life in spite of its odd culture of freeways and film deals.”

In section three, “‘History that Haunts the Text’: Ruins and Heterotopias,” contributors trace the changing status and

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20 Quoting Lawrence W. Levine in “William Shakespeare and the American People,” Rethinking Popular Culture, eds. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) 157-97, Mukerji points to the function of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century America as a power of cultural integration, making “America into a common culture that could embrace a continent […] the kind of culture that celebrated character, and could fortify people against the difficulties of the frontier.”
functions of texts in discontinuous historical time and heterogeneous social spaces.

Aleida Assmann’s “Literary Reflections on Ruins” are introduced by the quotation from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 64: “Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate.” Her point of departure is the traditional hermeneutic assumption and “the central axiom of an old metaphysics of writing” that “written texts […] contain a pure spirit that speaks to us in an eternal presence […] in which space and time are suspended.”21 From this viewpoint, texts and ruins would be “polar opposites.” Yet ruins are no mere decayed material objects: they “can be interpreted as signs in various ways” (signs of “decay,” of “a lost […] past” and of “forgetting and deprivation”). Using Krzysztof Pomian’s term “semiophor” (the carrier of a sign), Assmann distinguishes between the original functional value of ruinous objects and their resulting semiotic (symbolic) value. Another distinction she makes, between the ‘use’ and the ‘display’ of the object, is more problematic, since, as Derrida demonstrated, in viewing ruins, “the act of perception has been replaced by the act of memory, which, however, can never ‘restore a past (once) present.’”22 Therefore, the ruin as “an impossible totality […] is not in front of us; it is neither a spectacle, nor a love object.”23 Following Pomian, Assmann tries to recapture this fundamental discontinuity of time in the ruin as a continuity—the circulation of objects linked discursively by their symbolic function as semiophors. Although this “semiotic cycle” seems to reproduce the paradigm of value exchange, it extricates the object from its temporal determinations and transforms it into a timeless monument of the past. Rather than “an object of discussion and gestures,” a renovated factory is a

cumulative symbol of diverse historical processes and social forces, of “many possible attitudes to the past.”24 Against the ruin as a sign of absent plenitude of meaning, recalling the traditional approach to Roman ruins as *mirabilia*, Assmann later sets the otherness of ruins as a sheer absence of meaning. Using the example of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, for whom “writing and image, monument and book were no longer rivals, they both became important media of cultural memory,” she argues that the lost meaning can be retrieved by imagination with the help of modern representation technologies. In the conclusion, she disputes the deconstructive approach, claiming that “to consider the text as a ruin would demand different practices of reading, not the open semantic universe of endless combinations and possibilities but the careful and meditative though melancholy habit of deciphering traces.” Nonetheless, it can also be argued that “deciphering traces” is not a “melancholy habit” but a historical practice affirming in “endless combinations” the openness of the “semantic universe.”

In contrast to Assmann’s emphasis on the assimilation of the otherness of ruins into the continuum of cultural memory, John Joughin in “Shakespeare’s Other Spaces: Counter-sites in *Measure for Measure*,” demonstrates the significance of discontinuous spatial and temporal structures in social history, but also in myths and artworks. In his view, “other spaces” or “heterotopias” are “counter-sites’ of society itself—simultaneously real and mythical,” since, as Foucault points out using the example of theatre, they can juxtapose “in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”25 Functioning as “a space of illusion that exposes every real space […] as still more illusory,”26 heterotopia


26 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.
produces “a countermemory,”27 which Joughin explains both as a history of crises and, in keeping with the theory of the Frankfurt School, as a realization of “the independent truth potential of the aesthetic.” Referring to the process of reform and modernization, Measure for Measure “appears to juxtapose two inter-related spheres or orders of authority:” “institution” founded on the “discourses and practices which were grounded in custom and ritual,” and “institutionality” based on the deployment of power across various emergent discursive formations (sexual, penal, etc.). In the course of the 1590s, London underwent “socioeconomic dislocation [...] a gradual breakdown of the remaining familial and guild structures themselves” accompanied by “a partial separation between occupation and location, ownership and utility.” Vienna in Measure for Measure can be understood as “a third space” between traditional institutions and early modern “institutionality,” a space of dislocation with “a history that haunts the text”28 and “a virtual geography which configures a complex interrelation between place, performance and memory,” helping us “to understand precisely how the redeployment and redistribution of space is ‘fundamental in any exercise of power.’”29

The essays grouped in “The Other in History: Language, Communication, Acculturation” focus on the use of language by the colonial subject, the meaning of micro-narratives and literary genres in post-colonial situation and on the


28 Cf. Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 106: “the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to which haunts it.”

incommunicable moments of the encounters with other cultures.

Louis Armand’s essay “Spectres of Sovereignty” takes as its point of departure Stephen Dedalus’s debate with the dean of studies about the word “tundish” in Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The scene brings the reader “to the fundamental issue of authority over cultural discourse,” the problem of the “detention […] of the signifying movement of language.” This problem has theological, aesthetic as well as political dimensions: in using language, we are kept from “a metaphysical absolute, something that would invest language with the possibility of unequivocal and direct meaning,” and the language must be authorized by some dominant institution or ruling power, such as—in Joyce’s case—the Church, Jesuit education or British colonial system. As a “colonial subject,” Stephen is reluctant to accept the alternative to the metaphysical absolute, the “monolinguism” of the other.30 Rather than a simple “disenfranchisement by virtue of being internally ‘foreign’ or ‘other,’” Armand explains Stephen’s crisis as a result of an “exercise, on the part of the colonising power, of arbitrary authority over the relationship between the colonial subject and language.” In Joyce’s text, the problem of sovereignty (of the writer as well as of the language and the nation) is articulated in terms of the father-son relation, where “the ghostly name of the father” (of the Jesuit priest) not only signifies “duty, service, and ethical or moral responsibility” but also, as Levinas has it, “the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is none the less a stranger to me.”31 Whereas Levinas interprets this paradoxical relation as “the return of ego

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30 See Jacques Derrida, Monolinguism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 1: “I only have one language; it is not mine.” “[This monolinguism] is impassable, indisputable: I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me.”

to itself,” seen in “the perspective of the future opened by eros,” 32 Armand points out how Joyce, using the themes of Dedalus in A Portrait and Hamlet in Ulysses, connects this impossible affirmation of paternal egoism (and English sovereignty) with “a kind of spectrality, a haunting of the paternal will exercised in absentia,” and also with “an ambiguous flight from, and return to, the maternal figure: Ireland, at the end of A Portrait, and Stephen’s dead mother in Ulysses.” The solution envisaged by Stephen is the assertion of “writerly sovereignty as duty to none and responsibility to all,” which, according to Armand, “is a central paradox of Joyce’s text.” To overcome it, Stephen resorts to Aquinas’s philosophy and “translates the maternal figure into a figure of rhetoric.” Instead of English, as a dubious “mother tongue,” Latin is used as a “lingua franca.” “Against this play of languages,” claims Armand,

there unfolds the ironic pseudo-drama, which is also a critique of linguistic colonialism, scripted in the “disquisition on the tundish” […] the dean himself is enacting a legacy of former colonisations, recalling the displacement of Anglo-Saxon language and culture by that of the Norman invaders. With the colonial situation reversed, the English dean speaks in the language over whose memory, or cultural archive, he bears a compromised symbolic authority.

Apart from the “return of a linguistic repressed,” the episode points out the problematic status of Ireland as Stephen’s home and the impossibility of asserting sovereignty over English, a language which itself has gone through the stages of colonization and renascence. As a result, Stephen’s well known declaration of artistic independence can be read as an unwittingly ironic, uncanny statement, in which “[t]he egodeistic ‘I’ dissolves into the implied, though unvoiced, ‘us,’ […] ‘the uncreated conscience of my race.’” This statement

32 Levinas, “Time and the Other,” 52.
confirms both the spectral nature of sovereignty in Joyce’s text and Stephen’s position of the “colonial subject.”

The next group of essays, discussing problems of the communication of the past in postcolonial narratives and drama, opens with “Narrative and Communication,” Ondřej Pilný’s exploration of the Field Day Project. This cultural movement, initiated in 1980 by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea as a theatre activity responding to the violence in Northern Ireland, became a monumental publication activity aiming to create, under the influence of Seamus Deane and a number of major Irish writers, an “atmosphere in which different versions of the Irish past and of national identity could co-exist in mutual tolerance and understanding.” Instead of “meta-narratives […] responsible for most atrocities committed in the twentieth century,” the Field Day Project emphasized “micro-narratives,” using them not as a means of searching for the truth of the past, but as “a critique of current stereotypes pertinent to the Irish situation,” especially abstract ideas of the national or cultural essence, “the literary revival and the accompanying political revolution.” The problem with this approach was that instead of being based on Lyotard’s “language games” loosely connecting the individual “micro-narratives,” the Field Day Project was supposed to establish a kind of organic unity of these narratives,33 an impossible closure interpreted too optimistically as “the endless fecundity of […] reading.” As Pilný points out:

The presumable openness [of the project] is disqualified by three crucial features of the anthology and its Introduction: by the fact of selection/marginalization, by the admission to a particular Field Day meta-narrative and, once again, by a rhetoric which seems to imply totalization—the use of expressions like “our own history,” or calling Irish literature “autonomous, ordered.”

33 “[I]n every corner of the anthology one could find contained, in parvo, the whole scheme and meaning of it […]”
The ideological aim of the project was to shift the emphasis from the aesthetic sphere (Field Day as “an artistic fifth province” of Ireland) to the “political state,” where “art can function as a unifying […] force.” In this context, the conceptual framework, which can be referred back to Kant’s teleology of aesthetic forms, Schiller’s notion of “aesthetic state” and phenomenological concepts of the intentionality of aesthetic object, served as an effective substitute for meta-narratives. In Friel’s plays, these philosophical notions are historicized or mythologized. They seem to promote “the Revivalist myth of the superiority of Irish to English,” but at the same time this myth is being deconstructed: neither language nor ritual are efficient means of individual as well as cultural communication.

The following essay, “Black Pastoral: 1990s Images of Ireland” by Nicholas Grene, focuses on the problem of genre in post-colonial literature, and on its impact on the representations of the past and the present in drama and narrative. In the traditional pastoral, frequent in the Irish Literary Revival and still present in the works of leading contemporary authors, such as Seamus Heaney or Brian Friel, spatial and temporal differences are employed to idealize the past and rural settings (“the imagined west” of Ireland as the place “where we all came from”) as the ideal origin of family, culture, society or nation. In contrast to this, present Irish literature abounds in “counter- or anti-pastorals, from the fierce polemic of Kavanagh’s The Great Hunger to the bleak realism of John McGahern’s fictions or the grimly unromantic scenes of Tom Murphy’s plays.” Rather than to dystopias, these pastorals are related to “black comedy,” which, in contrast to traditional comedy, “makes laughter out of unhappiness, suffering, death, all the things traditionally ruled out by the comic mode.” “Black pastoral” in the plays of Martin McDonagh or the novels of Frank McCourt and Patrick McCabe mocks the efforts to search for the ideals in the past, representing it as “brutally unidyllic” and even going beyond it to expose the no less brutal reality of the present. The result, evident especially in McCabe’s
The Butcher Boy and in its film version by Neil Jordan, is that contemporary reality of Ireland can neither be accepted as “grotesquely unreal” with ironic distance and laughter, nor regarded with “emotional empathy” and “the assurance that in the end all will come right.” Its representations are imposed on the audience as “a desperate distortion,” a “deranged phantasmagoria,” making the play with Ireland “as pastoral other” utterly impossible. This disqualifies an important literary pattern as a means of emplotment of post-colonial narratives.

A deeper insight into the functioning of a traditional genre in post-colonial literature is provided by Clare Wallace’s essay “‘A Crossroads Between Worlds’: Marina Carr and the Use of Tragedy,” discussing the work of one of Ireland’s leading contemporary playwrights. Rather than representing the post-colonial condition, Carr’s plays, similar to McDonagh’s “Leenane Trilogy,” seem to “negate the interrogation of conditions in which such images are produced and have their points of reference.”

The Greek idea of irrevocable destiny is connected by the playwright as well as her audiences with an atavistic urge [...] directed, not primarily toward a narrowly defined Irish cultural or historical past, but toward a legitimising connection with moral values and dilemmas understood as part of a tradition of tragic drama.

Instead of providing consistent references to the state of Irish society, Carr’s plays are focused on “the conceptualisation of the tragic hero and notions of fate or destiny.” Wallace shows that “this tragic mode is not a return to antiquity—ritual, order and destiny are clearly reconfigured and signify differently.” The central themes Carr’s tragedies, the experience of “irreparable loss” and the “obsessional compulsion to repeat or return to the past,” a drive transcending “a desire to survive,”

make catharsis impossible and prompt the audiences to “interpret the struggles of the heroines as part of an inevitable narrative of tragic destiny where the individual finally succumbs to a Dionysiac self-destructiveness.” The ahistorical nature of the tragic in Carr’s plays, drawing “its energy from the immediacy of violent, extreme emotions and sensations,” speaks more about the Nietzschean concept of tragedy and Deleuze’s notion of intensity. As Wallace suggests, the tragic in Carr’s plays can be seen as a product of deterritorialization existing at “a crossroads between worlds” and conflicting representations of the past.

Unlike the previous approaches, Michael Frank’s essay “‘I Could Never Grow Native’: The Acculturation Taboo in Edmund Spenser and Robert James Fletcher” foregrounds the “cross-cultural dimension” of European colonial expansion, which was not given a sufficient attention in many earlier studies of colonialism. Rather than by “transculturation, […] a mutual exchange producing an independent, hybrid culture,” the encounter of alien cultures during European colonial expansion can be described by the term “acculturation,” usually defined as a transfer of cultural forms and values from the colonizer to the colonized. However, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his Discourse on Inequality (1755) as well as some present-day writers, such as the German anthropologist Karl-Heinz Kohl, show that the process also runs in an opposite direction: other cultures often refused European customs and manners and, simultaneously, numerous Europeans accepted the values of these cultures and decided to live among the colonized. As a result, colonial attitudes to other cultures and the question of acculturation are “marked by an ambivalence, a tension between attraction and repulsion, which can be interpreted in terms of Sigmund Freud’s theory of taboo and Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection.” As Frank’s comparison of Edmund Spenser’s View of the State of Ireland (circa 1596) and Robert James Fletcher’s Letters from the South Seas (1923) demonstrates, this ambivalence has not substantially changed over the centuries. In both
accounts it is connected with “the transgression of cultural boundaries,” which “seems to represent a taboo in Sigmund Freud’s sense of the word,” manifesting itself not as “a part of a fixed normative system,” but “as an internal conflict between desire and anxiety.” Using Kristeva’s and Robert Young’s conclusions, Frank points out that the state of abjection is mainly connected with acculturation and miscegenation, strong subversive powers believed to cause dissolution of personal, cultural and racial identity. As a consequence, the otherness of the acculturated colonial, as well as postcolonial, subject consists in her uncertain, contested position of between discourses, cultures and races.

The fifth part of this book, “Diasporic Narratives,” examines stories told from another contested position: of migrants who are victims of military, political or racial violence, economic pressures and social or natural disasters.

Roger Bromley’s essay “Belonging beyond the Nation: The Role of Diasporic Narrative Communities” opens with a statement that narratives told in and about contemporary diasporas cannot draw on any available concepts of collective or individual identities (ethnicity, nationality, individual self): “they are […] concerned with developing appropriate metaphorical resources for constructing identities through tropes of agency, cohesion, and continuity which are not simply recognised as ‘ethnic,’ or ‘different.’” This process, called “storying,” aims at a recognition of specific ‘selves’ and ‘others’ “sustained and mediated through cultural vocabularies, freshly shaped legibilities and ‘linguistically expressible’ histories.”36 Instead of referring to migrants as ‘ethnic minority’ or ‘mixed


race,’ diasporic narratives use a “double vision”\(^3^7\) or “double-voiced discourse” similar to Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, which can temporarily erase the categories, labels or stereotypes imposed on the migrants by dominant societies and lead to “recovering that continuously ‘othered’ self narratively.” The “double-voiced discourse” does not reproduce the migrant’s speech but treats it “antagonistically” against the pressure of the “othering discourses” of colonialism, racism, western values, etc.. In this way, “the third space” of the dialogical narrative emerges (different from the dominant society or diaspora), which “draws in,” as Bakhtin wrote, “the other’s replies, intensely reworking them.”\(^3^8\) This reworking affects the relation of individuals and communities to the past, which “is not so much recovered, or even discovered, but brought into being, invented, made and unmade” and, as a refigured time and in-between space, “interrupts the performance of the present.”\(^3^9\) Another deeply transformed feature is subjectivity, which no longer represents the end of individual and collective self-determination but becomes a point of departure of the deterritorializing process, whose “point of arrival, provisional and deferred,” is in Bhabha’s words, a “social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” authorizing “cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.”\(^4^0\) These hybridities belong “at the same time to several ‘homes,’” and they “cannot simply dissolve into a culturally unified form.” Against “historical narratives that naturalize a particular, territorially orientated view of sovereignty” and are still dominant in contemporary global communication, Bromley sets “diasporic communities […] fabulated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on the land people call their own and in exile.” These narrative

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40 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.
communities are vital for the transformation of “European self-understanding” which, as Derrida showed, has so far been based on the aporia between “self-enclosed idioms or petty little nationalisms” and a centralizing “grid of intelligibility.” As Bromley points out, “the presence of the diasporic community [...] within the ‘host’ society dramatises [this] aporia and stages the possibility of an ethical encounter in a postnational context.” The migrant threatens to disrupt national identities “because s/he lacks the vestments of the local/national territory — colour, language, accent, religion, cuisine, etc.,” and displays all the dangers of disorder, loss of civilization, but also everything desirable in terms of transgression. This “state of exception” is a complex heterogeneous zone—a “topological zone of indistinction, which had to remain hidden from the eye of justice,” where the state of nature and society, violence and law mingle. Articulating this condition, diasporic narratives may become vital forces forging new cosmopolitanism, based, among others, on “transnational communication networks among diasporic communities.”

The discourse this new cosmopolitanism in recent narratives of Native American authors is explored by Thomas Claviez in “Cosmopolitanism and Its Discontents: The Politics of Sherman Alexie’s Reservation Blues and Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead.” Both writers tend “to transcend their singular embeddedness in Native American tradition” by establishing an alternative cosmology based on myth. Averse to “stubborn indigenism” but also to universalism connected with a mythical perspective, their stories resemble diasporic narratives in their effort to transcend ethnic boundaries and to negotiate “their own tribal particularities with ‘other,’ both mythic and non-mythic, world views that surround Native American life-worlds.” An interesting example of this strategy are the “parallels between capitalism’s commodity fetishism and the

fetishism of myth and ritual” made in both novels. Although some Native American critics argue against the tendency toward hybridization of traditional cultures and “a pan-Indian, non-specific representation of an Indian community,” in Alexie’s and Silko’s works they are shown to overlook the value of “the metonymic connection and mutual penetration of Native American, African American and European mythologies” which facilitates intercultural communication; thematizes the tensions in traditional notions of cosmopolitanism, especially between “the local, mostly conceived as homogeneous” and “the heterogeneity connoted with the global”; and highlights their political implications. Another opposition between utopia and dystopia, often seen as the resolution of the previous antagonism, is deconstructed in Silko’s novel: while dystopia is a narrative fiction, which can function as an object of desire beyond any efforts of its verification, utopia is a mere schematic “figure” which solicits comparison with ‘reality’ and therefore fails to acknowledge its complexity and heterogeneity. As a result, dystopian features of diasporic narratives can be regarded as productive means of intercultural communication.

The essays in the final section “Ends of History? America as Myth, Empire and Apocalypse” discuss three different forms of closure of historical narratives and developments in relation to the political and cultural histories of the country most often connected with both utopian and dystopian visions of modern history.

In “The Myth of America” Sacvan Bercovitch sees his country in a way somehow resembling the approaches to diasporic narratives: as a conglomerate of races, languages, histories, religions and cultures, defying “the standard definitions of nationality.” America’s only identity comes from myth, understood as “a pervasive and elemental fact of human reality [...] a complex of stories, held together by a dominant narrative, and a cluster of symbols and ideals, flexible enough
to accommodate changing times.” Mapping “the American difference” in terms of “modernity” as “the point of coherence between the processes of nation-building and myth-formation,” Bercovitch points out the characteristic feature of the American myth: the overcoming of binary oppositions used to hierarchize the society and its historical narratives—the sacred and the secular, Protestantism and capitalism, Manifest Destiny and military expansion, spiritual rebirth and technological progress. In the Myth of America, he contends, nothing is preordained: “all depends on vicissitudes and human initiative.” The openness of the myth, the linearity of its time, (contrasted with the cyclic temporality of other myths), is linked with American optimism, which consists in the reinterpretation of “the apocalyptic history […] (without abandoning the vision of apocalypse) as perfectionism, the endless progress of humanity.” The problematic aspect of this approach may not be what Bercovitch calls the paradoxical connection of “nature” and “nation” in “this mythic self-definition” of America. This paradox is also present in European ideologies of romantic nationalism, invoking the authority of Nature as divine law, generative power, organic unity, source of language and folk wisdom. Instead of the focusing on the reification of romantic spiritualism in American ideology, one should be sensitive to the rhetorical character and power of its statements. For instance, the phrase “nature’s nation, nation’s nature” is a chiasmus (or antimetabole) which does not merely represent the imaginary reciprocity of society and its environment but also stresses “the rhetoric’s […] synchronous functions in the text.”

In the case of American myth this may eliminate the crucial distinction between cyclic and linear time: the end of American history (perfection of society) is justified by “nature”

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as its very origin. This rhetorical power, later admitted by Bercovitch as a “persistent ritual-symbolic displacement of history with the word,” consists in the interplay between the openness and closure of the American myth. This interplay seems more important than the interpretation of the myth as the general power of America’s history. While the rhetorical effect of the myth is undoubtedly integrative, in discursive terms the myth opens the difference between the unifying power of the “Logos” and the power of “logocracy,” using the very same rhetoric for their own political, economic or military ends. This difference, noticed already by John Adams and Washington Irving, is acknowledged in the final part of Bercovitch’s essay, quoting a passage from the beginning of Kafka’s Amerika, where the Statue of Liberty, first seen as a torchbearer of “a new light,” suddenly brandishes her sword against “the free winds of heaven.”

In contrast to Bercovitch’s emphasis on the integrating power of American myth, Fay Ringel’s “Medievalism, Imperialism and American Gothic” demonstrates how the desire and power in American business, politics and mass culture invoke entirely different value paradigms than those of progress and “endless perfectionism.” Since the foundation of the United States, readers were consuming the fantasies of a past that never existed in their country, and the powerful were pursuing their visions of imperial splendour. According to Ringel, “the first popular, throw-away fictions in America were Gothic romances—especially in the form of ‘shilling shockers,’ those early pulp fictions excerpting the exciting scenes of longer Gothic novels.” With the emergence of industrial tycoons, nicknamed “Robber Barons,” parallels were made “between the transfer of ownership, by the popular sovereignty in America, […] to a small group of strong men, and the ancient acts of seizure by force and collusion” by the feudal lords. The period between 1890-1914, when the U.S. started to project itself as an

imperial power especially in the Pacific, “was [...] characterized by the triumph of medievalist genre romance” and even by the use of a Gothic story as a propagandist tool in the 1898-1902 Spanish and Mexican war. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, American “populist medievalism” started to be exported back to Europe in the form of “pulp fiction, films, video games, and theme parks.” The ideology of Americanism, American Gothic and global consumerism became amalgamated in The Lord of the Rings movies, “appropriated to justify America’s current trend of dynastic empire-building and crusading.” The visions of decline from the opposite camp, such as Gore Vidal’s The Last Empire: Essays 1992-2000, were also cast in a Gothic manner, resembling the coda of the Arthurian cycle: “the old order is gone forever and the brief hegemony of the white race is drawing to an unmourned close.” Nonetheless, the affective power of these representations has been redirected and reclaimed by other subjects: “In the new millennium,” contends Ringel, “everything old is new again. The ruling rhetoric of American leaders can be traced to the epic fantasies of the Middle Ages and to the fantastic medievalism of imperialists and robber barons.” Rather than the traditional cyclic patterns of history and the prophecies of inevitable decline of empires (epitomized in Thomas Cole’s Empire Cycle), the interwoven stories of American Gothic and imperialism tell about the importance of changing perspectives and new beginnings: “Rome did not decline and fall: it was liberated by the Goths.” What matters more than specific histories and their emplotments are the shifting frameworks in which these narratives are contextualized, re-told and re-activated as discursive strategies.45

45 See Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 68: The “function that the [...] discourse must carry out in the field of non-discursive practices [...] is [also] characterized by the possible positions of desire in relation to discourse: discourse may in fact be the place for a phantasmatic representation, an element of symbolization, a form of the forbidden, an instrument of derived satisfaction [...].”
Rounding up the final section of the book, my “Apocalypticism in American Cultural History” attempts to go beyond traditional meanings of apocalyptic myth, tracing numerous versions of “apocalypticism” as discursive strategies in American history, religion, politics, literature and mass entertainment. The usual schematics of time (linear versus cyclical) is referred to the general economic patterns underlying the apocalyptic myth, and to its secularized forms employed to structure the events of American history. While the synthesis of revelation and revolution, epitomized by Bancroft as the new interpretive framework of American history, has problematic features noticed already by Hawthorne and Melville, the actual transformative potential of apocalypticism in genres and discourses of mass culture has not yet been sufficiently appreciated. It can bring patterns of popular experience and imagination closer to recent scientific approaches to reality. It can also change the perspective in which the present disasters are observed: no longer as the forebodings of the end of history but as the opportunities to refigure major cultural myths and to rethink critically the existing meanings of historical narratives, cultural phenomena and political ideologies, placing them in different epistemological, interpretive and discursive frameworks, such as the theories of complexity, environmental history, mass culture or the new media.

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