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**The Culture Mangle
Conflict and Violence
in Language and Culture**

Proceedings of a conference held at the
University of Glasgow, May 2007

Edited by Eilidh Macdonald and James R. Simpson

University of Glasgow

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Mangle 3. [figurative] Now chiefly: to render (words) almost unrecognizable by mispronunciation, or to spoil by gross blundering or falsification (a quotation, the text of an author). Formerly often (now rarely): to mutilate, deprive of essential parts, subject to cruel injury. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Conflict (where there are two or more views) is inevitable in the workplace. It is how it is managed that determines the likelihood of a positive or negative outcome. ('Managing Conflict', University of Glasgow Staff Development Service prospectus)

We should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of [...] directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. [...] Subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that includes two objective kinds of violence. First there is a 'symbolic' violence embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call our house of being'. [...] Second, there is what I call 'systemic violence', or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. (Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Big Ideas (London: Profile, 2008), p. 1)

Introduction: Culture Mangling

EILIDH MACDONALD AND JAMES SIMPSON

If the choice of terms in our title seems odd, then it is perhaps useful to begin with some account of their meaning, the tracing of which forms a curious peregrination through and between cultures and languages. A ‘mangle’ can be the ruin of previous form, cut, hacked and disfigured (see OED). We speak of a mangled imitation, especially in language. Yet at the same time, the mangle is the thing that, through the laborious application of crushing and distorting weight and pressure, removes irregularity of form and condenses together to produce the smoothness of line and tidiness of form and identity associated with finely pressed linen. This appearance of unity can be deceptive, however, especially in the field of cultural studies, a discipline famously not one, but rather, as David Forgacs and Robert Lumley term it, a ‘cluster’ [...] which has come to include ‘literature, social history, media studies, human geography, cultural anthropology and the sociology of deviance’.¹ However, although seemingly comprehensive in its intellectual scope, such a perspective does not invariably resonate in the culture under study: as Forgacs and Lumley also point out, ‘in Italy the term *studi culturali* is not used except as a rendering of the English term which has entered Italian academic debate by a side door through translations or discussions of some influential British work on popular music, social rituals and subcultures’.² In short, if the field of cultural studies is the product of a disciplinary mangle, then its reception in other (geographical) terrains can seem to partake of a similarly arbitrary

¹ David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, ‘Introduction: Approaches to Culture in Italy’, in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

² Forgacs and Lumley, pp. 1–2.

operation in which this tattered *bricolage* is further traduced into the appearance of a cohesive warp and weft. A similar Babel-Fish game can be played with regard to our title. In that sense, the idea of *a mangle* here seems to have more in common with the French term for it, *une essoreuse*, the etymology of which ties it back to a drying machine or any device that exposes what is damp or heavy to the air, *essorer*. This term is first attested in the twelfth century where it not only has the sense of exposing to the air to dry but also either ‘to take wing’ or ‘to launch’ of a bird, particularly birds of prey – (*Essorez fu ses esperviers, / Qu’a une alöete ot failli*’, Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ll. 6440–41). The flight of Chrétien’s hawk takes as both cue and target the emblematic ‘lark ascending’ of courtly love lyric. From here it comes into Middle English as *to soar*, as in Pandarus’s disingenuous denial that he has grounds for vaunting hope in his enterprise of seduction (‘I have no cause, I wote wele, *to sore*, as doth an hawk’, Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, l. 670). Clearly, in a convenient coincidence, *essorer* is related to the noun, *un essor*, the rise, spread or taking wing of cultures and movements, among which one might cite *l’essor des études culturelles...* Thus an apparently leaden and soggy-bottomed conceit can take flight in unexpected ways when brought into a cross-cultural context, revealing pressing connections where perspectives had previously seemed earthbound in their own particular corners.

The product of its own ‘culture mangle’, this volume brings together a series of essays which started their lives as presentations at a graduate conference in the University of Glasgow sponsored by and organised under the aegis of an AHRC-sponsored research training network in Modern Language Studies. Although they range widely, covering different cultures, periods, media and genres from across the field, we were struck by the shared themes and preoccupations that underpinned them. In a sense, all of the essays here deal with tidiness and messiness of form and genre, history and reception. Listening to those papers on that day, it seemed to us that such a mangle might just ‘wing it’.

Conflict and violence appear as two subjects very much connected and yet, at the same time, often carefully divided. A

host of studies have been devoted to illuminating the distinctions and relations between the various terms involved in the field: violence, conflict, aggression.³ Yet they are at the same time often linked in titles and calls for papers or other submissions. While violence is a subject of particular social and ethical urgency, conflict in particular seems the one most likely to engage us. After all, conflict is officially part of the working lives of academics and graduate students. Approaches in various fields – not least policy documents relating to university working conditions – are careful to distinguish ‘violence’ from ‘conflict’. Thus, while the former is exceptional to the normal order, the latter, as our own lords and masters are concerned to make clear, is an inevitable part of working in a publicly funded Higher Education sector where balancing resources and demands is often difficult and very rarely a ground for anything approaching entire consensus. Such a position reminds us however of the inescapability of violence and the simultaneous occlusion of what Žižek refers to as its ‘symbolic’, and perhaps more crucially, ‘systemic’ dimensions (see above). What Žižek does not suggest is that there is no connection between subjective and objective instances of violence, but that rather the relations may be more oblique than we had perhaps thought – hence the ‘sideways reflections’ of his subtitle. That the ‘subjective’ dimension of violence stands in some kind of relation – whether mimetic, causal or, indeed, displaced – to its ‘objective’ domestications such as ‘conflict’ seems a particular instantiation of a more general and inevitable debt owed by culture to its founding violences, a thesis most prominently developed by Jacques Derrida.⁴ In that regard, while conflict appears distinct from violence, it is at the same time dependent on it in the manner of some sort of supplement as a guarantor of its authenticity and reality, as supplying the energy of its ‘SOS’. In Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove* (1964), the embattled President Muffley, on the

³ See Bernard Beck, ‘Talking Violence Blues’, in *Violence*, ed. by George Estey and Doris Hunter (Waltham, MA and Toronto, 1971), pp. 5–14 and, in the same volume, Harold I. Lief, ‘Contemporary Forms of Violence’, at pp. 15–30.

⁴ On which see notably Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

brink of unwittingly starting a nuclear war, pleads with his fractious generals ‘Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room!’, inadvertently exposing the repressed violent supplement to the decorous officialdom of conflict management. ‘Conflict’ extends not merely to the subjective instances of academic endeavour, but also is apparent in the tensions between different areas and approaches, the war for the cultural and symbolic capital that derives from marking out a privileged standpoint, a monopoly on the intellectual or moral high ground in a given subject area. The complexities of these relations and histories are the subject of the essays contained in this book.

‘Forward and Forget Nothing’: Conflicts Haunting the Curriculum

Remember not that we were freed: remember that we fought.

If postunification debates about the German past were neither historically unprecedented nor unique in comparison to other European nations, then how should one characterize the history of German memory? Is it a story of a uniquely ‘unmasterable past’ with regard to the history of Nazism, the Holocaust and the war? Or is it a story of one nation’s recurrent and consistent engagement with history?⁵

It is often said that, with the exception of its Galician ‘Celtic fringe’, Spain has no tradition of ghost stories. Such a view depends on what one means by ‘ghosts’. I should like here to draw on Derrida’s historico-materialist reading of ghosts in *Specters of Marx* [...] in order to argue that the whole of modern Spanish culture – its study and its practice – can be read as one big ghost story.⁶

⁵ Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990*, Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, 24 (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 6.

⁶ Jo Labanyi, ‘Introduction: Engaging with Ghosts; or, Theorising Culture in Modern Spain’, in *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice*, ed. by Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–14, p. 1.

The different fields within modern languages at some level derive their distinctive textures from contingent pulls and flows not merely of the national histories and cultures to which they refer, but also from the re-thinkings of key questions emerging through encounters with other subjects fields and through the changes in the disciplinary environment in which research and teaching take place. The various disciplines in the field of Modern Language Studies have their own distinct stories to tell about violence and conflict, indeed often multiple and fractured stories that seem little amenable to resolution or synthesis. Obviously, these are bound up with the specific national histories that underpin the separate language areas, emphasis moving in relation or tension with the visions of national identity emanating from increasingly embattled and fragmented national centres. The question of cultural memory here is paradigmatic of more general disciplinary problems, the specificities of national situations both a source of distinction and providing perspectives to reflect on core issues.⁷ In this context, the questions of responsibility and denial attendant on colonial history have become a central problem. In part this stems from the glaringly self-evident ethical and political urgency of such examination (especially in a context in which globalisation offers new and perhaps more insidiously occluded forms of colonial exploitation). However, there is also another more general sense in which the task of ‘narrating the nation’, to use Homi Bhabha’s title-phrase, becomes perhaps the most immediately pressing version of the wider problem of ‘telling it all’, of producing a totalising history of the culture as subject of study.⁸

In this context, the shifts and tensions in the various nation-based cultural historiographies have their own story to tell. France’s principal narratives spring from the Revolution, the Terror and then from the equally problematic questions of the tension between narratives of resistance, collaboration and deportation in the Second World War through to the disavowed

⁷ See, for example, Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

and occluded violences of Indochina and the Algerian War.⁹ Indeed, the place (or non-place) of colonial engagements in French collective memory has been a particularly productive, if fraught, area of discussion with massive implications for the wider study of French postwar culture. As Kristin Ross's highly influential *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* highlights, the smooth, distinctly unmangled forms of French consumer modernity appear as an attempt to forget the mess associated with France's highly tarnished record in its withdrawal from colonial power in North Africa.¹⁰ A recent chapter in this debate is then the place of France's colonial past in the national history and collective identity, and especially attempts to produce an 'official' school history that pays 'proper' attention to the place of that history in the Republic's *mission civilisatrice*. As commentators have emphasised, one of the central tensions here is that France's image of itself as resisting nation, the focus of a historiography of memory, is one of the myths that stands in sharpest tension with the rather murkier history of the colonial engagement and which teases most uncomfortably with the unfinished business of exploring France's complex role in the war and the question of collaboration. This is exemplified in new curriculum staples as Didier Daeninckx's detective novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), in which the murder of an academic investigating the role of the French administration in the deportation of Jews during the Occupation is hidden in the chaos of the Paris riots of 1962, or more generally in works by Georges Perec such as *Les Choses* (1965), *La Disparition* (1969) or *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975). One key problem highlighted with regard to Daeninckx's novel is that it runs the risk of reducing the Algerian war to a subsection of a 'bigger' question for French identity, and so addresses the question of outside involvement only for the national history to then turn back in on itself. Yet this is precisely the problem of violence: the more it is displaced, the more it returns in a spectral form, all the more pervasive and

⁹ See among others Jim House and Alan MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture*, October (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1996).

insidious for its apparent lack of solidity. Thus Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005) presents the seeming banality of modern urban life haunted from an impossible point of view by the question of the Franco-Algerian conflict.¹¹ The paradox here is then that the greatest violence leaving no trace, but rather appears as a silent reorganisation and sanitisation of pre-existing material.

Such preoccupations with memory and history appear as part of the *lingua franca* of contemporary European cultural studies. As various studies have made clear, Germany's tale is one of the legacy of the Second World War, the separation of East and West and then the uneasy reconciliation of the post-*Wende* period with its own revisiting of the various closets of not merely the war and the Holocaust but also the archives of the Stasi (*Das Leben der Anderen*) and more generally the question of incorporating the memory of Socialism into a conception of Germany after reunification (*Goodbye Lenin* or Daniela Dahn's novel *Westwärts und nicht vergessen*).¹² As Rudy Koshar comments, the slogan adopted by some demonstrators in the last days of the GDR, 'Forward but forgetting nothing' (taken from Bertolt Brecht's 'Song of Solidarity', written for the film *Kuhle Wampe*) was a source of pain and conflict.¹³ However, denial and forgetting are not limited to former 'colonial superpowers', as Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller comment:

The collapse of Italian colonialism in the context of wider military and political defeat, and the fact that Italian colonies did not undergo any real process of decolonisation, had long-term repercussions for how

¹¹ On *Caché*, see notably Max Silverman, 'The Empire Strikes Back', *Screen*, 48.2 (2007), 245–49. In that sense, Haneke's films frame the study of visual and libidinal dis-ease in the form of anti-national epics, whether the Austria of *The Piano Teacher* (2001) or his more recent examination of exclusion and disavowal, *The White Ribbon* (2009). In this context, one of the critical 'master texts' examining what one might term the history the rot at the heart of the national thing is of course Eric L. Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹² See, among others, John McCarthy and others (eds), *The Many Faces of Germany* (2004). Also Koshar and Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹³ Koshar, p. 1.

Italian colonial history has been written and remembered. Presumably as a result of such anticlimactic ending to Italy's half-century of colonial rule, the end of Italian imperialism occasioned little public reflection. Instead, political elites and colonial circles generated a culture of 'myths, suppressions and denials' that managed the image of the still-desired lost object – Italy's empire – by suppressing knowledge of Italian atrocities and fostering strains of popular memory that perpetrated images of Italian colonisers as benign.¹⁴

No simpler picture of Italy itself emerges in the *Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Zygmunt Baranski's introduction paying deference to the overwhelming complexity of the subject, and indeed advocating that the reader react against any temptation to be seduced by the volume's compartmentalisation by approaching it in an 'open and flexible manner': 'in particular, they should consider the ways in which chapters can usefully interact', a move which positions the ideal reader as a 'critical friend' of Italian Studies.¹⁵ In Hispanic Studies, one of the central focuses is the dominance of Franco in the post-war period, Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) seems tailor-made to exemplify Jo Labanyi's description (cited above) of modern Spanish culture as 'one big ghost story', serving as a convenient illustration of how the unfinished business of the Spanish Civil War lingered on after the end of the seemingly larger global struggle against Nazi Germany.¹⁶ Del Toro's old gods – not just *el fauno* himself but also the nightmarish child-devouring Saturn,

¹⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, 'Introduction' in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, Italian and American Studies (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 2. The reference is to Angelo del Boca, 'Myths, Suppressions and Denials', in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Literature from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by A. Palumbo (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 17–36.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Baranski, 'Introducing Modern Italian Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Baranski and Rachel J. West, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), pp. 1–15, p. 2.

¹⁶ The political and social underpinnings of Spanish 'modernity' are the central focus of collections such as Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Spanish Cultural Studies – An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) or Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas (eds), *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000).

along with the ironically recuperated anti-Trinity of the dying daughter's final vision – speak of a complex heteroglossic archive resisting attempts to impose a narrowly paternalist vision of national identity. Indeed, this vision finds other fertile grounds in visions of pre-Reconquista Spain, as is apparent from the essays contained in Stacy Beckwith's *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain*, a volume which sketches a rich ghostly counter-history, mapping the traces of Jewish and Arabic cultures in the relation of modern Spain to its medieval other.¹⁷ But then again, Hispanic Studies is also centrally bound up with the question of the conquest of the Americas, a source of further hauntings, not to mention livelier contestations. As a distant mirror, it is argued that the 'war' between the 'ancients' – focused on the Golden Age – and the 'moderns' – focused on gender theory, cinema and postcolonialism – that split departments on both sides of the Atlantic often along generational fault-lines.¹⁸ In the context of East European and Slavonic Studies we have seen a history of a discipline continuing to manufacture more history than it can readily consume at home. In this context, the conflict between different versions of the past becomes particularly clear. Dovile Budryte's study of the independent Baltic states underlines the difficulties inherent to reconciling individual and 'collective' memories of the Soviet era and '[making] the transition from collective victimhood to a de-politicized commemoration, [...] an attribute of a mature, tolerant political community'.¹⁹ The solution, Budryte suggests, must involve a balance of discursive power between the official 'guardians of memory' and the memoirs and

¹⁷ Stacy N. Beckwith (ed.), *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain*, Hispanic Issues, 21 (New York and London: Garland, 2000).

¹⁸ For an autobiographical account of the emergent discipline of Chicana/o studies in US Hispanic studies departments, see Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 'Reflections on Thirty Years of Critical Practice in Chicana/o Cultural Studies', in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, ed. by Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies (Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 397–405.

¹⁹ Dovile Budryte, *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005), p. 179.

family histories popularly preferred – especially by the young – as sources of information about the Stalinist deportations.²⁰

More often than not, these different tendencies and impulses can find themselves diametrically in tension as different national perspectives and agendas on what is politically, socially or culturally urgent – conservative assertions of unity as opposed to greater accommodation of diversity; the embrace of or resistance to ‘globalisation’ – impinge on one another in the manner of shifting gravitational fields centring on changing master narratives. This tension is in part a product of a degree of latency in the dialogue between observer and object in which the question of the relation between university curricula in the United Kingdom and the United States and the evolving histories of national identity in a global area has often been far from direct. This sprang in part from a sense that curricula were out of step with the ‘modern nation’ and the problems facing it, although increasingly the distance from the object is critical. If in French studies the traditional conception of the timeless pantheon scarcely seemed to reflect the complexities and changes of postwar France, then recent approaches, chiefly springing from within postcolonial studies seem no more interested in offering back a servile reflection of the image of a modern France unified and whole and keen to advertise its attempts to come to terms with its history or taking at face value recent reiterations of the ideals of Republican Universalism.²¹ ‘Remember not that we were freed; remember that we fought’ has been appropriated as a rallying cry in recent re-evaluations of the involvement of European cultures in the slavery trade and for the attempts of various bodies to memorialise that implication and the guilt associated with it. The cultures in question profit then in the past from the actual labour and in the present from the symbolic capital accruing to them as they mythologise themselves as generous and enlightened emancipators, making the industry of commemoration also one of

²⁰ Budryte, pp. 188–92.

²¹ On which see Marie-Pierre le Hir and Dana Strand (eds), *French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

domestication, the attempt to hold a decorous state funeral for such live issues as racism, deportation or the Terror proving more likely to waken ghosts than allay them.²² More widely still, this in turn sparks an energising resistance from not merely those areas of French studies specifically engaged with those immediate questions but also other areas where Republican paternalism is perceived as a ‘colonial’ position, any reassertion of which is to be contested with regard to questions of regionality, internal order and gender. To write about syphilis and prostitution in the nineteenth-century novel is still to cock a snook at Nicolas Sarkozy’s Napoleonic stylings, not to mention his now infamous sneer at the utility of Early Modern literary studies.²³

If all of these different areas have seen their own versions of the conflict over the subject matter of their fields, then to some extent, that history is part of an evolving higher education sector in the United Kingdom, from expansion in the Sixties and early Seventies to the broadening of scope that was in large part driven by the distinctive intellectual agendas emerging from the then new polytechnics. In addition to the challenge to the canon provided by social and cinema studies, all of these areas have seen their versions of the ‘theory war’, with attempts to incorporate the challenge of avant-garde inspired postwar thought into the programme, and indeed to reflect the contribution French thought has made to debate internationally.²⁴ This process has continued over the past two decades, in which conceptions of a curriculum centring on a traditional canon of literary and intellectual classics

²² On funeral processions as part of the Republic theatre state and as performances of collective identity and memorialisation see Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Of course a key figure here in recent times has been the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint Louverture, on whom see especially Charles Forsdick, ‘Haiti and Departmentalization: The Spectral Presence of Toussaint Louverture’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 11:3 (2008), 327–44.

²³ On French fiction in the nineteenth century as a reflection on questions of sexuality and policing in France see in particular Jean E. Pedersen, ‘Nana and the Nation: French Cultural Studies and Interdisciplinary Work’, in *French Cultural Studies*, ed. by le Hir and Strand, pp. 29–48.

²⁴ See Max Silverman, *Facing Postmodernity: Contemporary French Thought on Culture and Society* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

have been decisively challenged by the emergent discipline of ‘cultural studies’.²⁵ The conflicts then continue as departments try to square the circle of fitting this more than quart of enriched and amplified conceptions of culture and cultural history along with vastly expanded geographical domains into the increasingly cramped pint-pot of a university curriculum.

Russian Ark: ‘My European’ in the Culture Mangle

The Guardian: Tell us a secret.

Slavoj Žižek: Communism will win.²⁶

If a sense of constraint has been seen as one of the forces that has most hampered and mangled our understandings of cultural studies, the pressures brought to bear on the conception of university curricula can at the same time draw on a vast diversity of culture mangles, serving as allegories of these disciplinary concerns and conflicts. A case in point is Aleksander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2002), in which a Russian narrator suddenly finds himself in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg in the company of a French diplomat, Custine (played by Sergey Dreiden), who claims to have found himself inexplicably transported there and no less astonished to find how well he speaks Russian.²⁷ As in one of its cinematic models, *L’Année dernière à Marienbad*, the museum is transformed into a temporal and historical labyrinth, a screen for the confused dreams of the newly dead. However, its exploration of the relation between identity, dream and loss also has clear parallels with one of Sokurov’s major influences in Russian

²⁵ See for example Frank Trommler, ‘Is Literature Still Central to German Studies?’, *German Quarterly*, 80:1 (2007), 97–105.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, Interview by Rosanna Greenstreet, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2008.

²⁷ For brief but illuminating account of and comment on Sokurov’s labyrinthine narrative, see William Johnson, *Film Quarterly*, 57:2 (2003), pp. 48–51.

cinema, Andrei Tarkovsky.²⁸ Although cast emphatically as a single point of view (indeed, the film consists of a single continuous steadicam shot, the longest of its kind in cinema history), its narrative and the interaction of the characters emphasises bewilderment, fracture and dissonance. The museum itself is not neutral terrain: rather, as the film's present moment lurches backwards and forwards through history, the space of the Hermitage gradually resumes its function as part of the winter palace complex of the Russian royal family, with access increasingly controlled by hostile, albeit extravagantly costumed, court officials and military personnel. However, in a giddy dance reaching back from the present as far as Peter the Great (1672–1725) and Catherine the Great (1729–1796), then to sweep forward to the great ball of 1913, the central characters remain disoriented and uncertain as to what version of that space they are occupying at any given point.²⁹ In that sense, the central feature of *Russian Ark*, the camera's restless movement among the paintings, objects and interlocutors in the Hermitage museum, speaks of what Stephanie Sandler sees as a preoccupying anxiety revealed through the dialogue between motion and fixity reveals about the terrifying void at the heart of subjectivity, an anxiety notably explored in films such as Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.³⁰ Similarly, while the diplomat is quite happy for the most to walk in the company of the Russian narrator, like some sort of secondary character in

²⁸ On this, see in particular Stephanie Sandler, 'The Absent Father, the Stillness of Film: Tarkovsky, Sokurov and Loss', in *Tarkovsky*, ed. by Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog, 2008), pp. 126–47.

²⁹ Indeed, as Johnson point out, the same characters reappear in different scenes and thus in different periods: 'Curiously, the eighteenth-century guests who enter the Hermitage at the beginning of the film include several who reappear at the 1913 ball and also in a smaller group about halfway through the film, in each case too prominently to be explained by a random shuffling of more than 1,000 actors and extras. It's possible that Sokurov is pointing to the static condition of Russian society under the rule of the tsars. Or he may simply be following his assertion that "there is no past or future in history, just as there no past or future in art, only the present".' (Johnson, p. 49).

³⁰ Sandler's principle reference here is Joan Copjec, although the theme of the subject as either void or night is also extensively explored in Žižek's work, often in relation to Deleuzian treatments of the cinematic image (on which see notably *Organs Without Bodies*, pp. 60–74).

Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, he also manifests an obdurate independence and, in conformity to national stereotype, at one point disappears to follow an attractive woman into a side-gallery. Finally, at one point he refuses definitively to accompany the narrator any further. Why would I bother being *your* European?

It is at this point that the film can be seen as a complex reflection on the ambivalences and conflicts that underpin the process through which Russian cultural and historical identity has been shaped by dialogue with other cultures. Although centred on a certain unity of perspective and voice that is emphatically, poetically Russian in its language and heritage, at the same time the desire to show this heritage to another returns obsessively. Indeed, not merely national identity itself, but also cultural exchange appear as objects of nostalgia. As the narrator travels on, he finds himself speaking longingly both of and to the figure he refers to as 'my European', a designation that, in locating Custine as a 'lost father' places in question any settled, monological construction of Russian cultural paternity or patrimony. Through this relation the film asks questions of the nature of Russian culture, history and identity. Obviously, the overall setting of the film speaks of Russia as waking up and finding itself 'living after' a particular moment that it now only can recover as a mixture of museum archive of artefacts that seem mostly inspired by or brought from elsewhere (the Second Empire vases the diplomat comments on in the early part of the film – themselves the pretext for an excursus on French and Russian perspectives on Napoleon – are a particular example) is an allegory of an uncertain post-Soviet present. Moreover, the film's central relationship highlights the question of borrowing and imitation, the 'colonialism' of social mores that shaped Russia's French-influenced court society, and with it the whole question of the nature and identity of Russian history as either native or internationalist, doomed to find itself unable to settle into the easy sleep of a single consciousness. Indeed, the narrator's recurring phrase 'eternal people!' seems profoundly in conflict with the nightmarish, amnesiac style of the film's narration, asking precisely in what 'eternity' the dream of community and nation can be said to exist. Crucially, the

withdrawal of the French diplomat can be read precisely as an assertion of singular identity, as the withdrawal back into the self of a foreign element that finds its own identity unacceptably and traumatically troubled by the *bateau ivre* drift of the central narrative.³¹ Through the persona of the diplomat, the French are implicitly given to see something of what it is to be ‘European’ from another nation’s point of view and, seemingly, to decide that they don’t like it.

In this regard, *Russian Ark* bears comparison with other documents that explore and foreground the conflicts, tensions and dissonances between pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial time, a case in point being the engraving of Amerigo Vespucci’s encounter with the indigenous population of America produced by Jan van der Straet, Theodor Galle and Philippe Galle in the 1580s.³² Although the drawing ostensibly shows the arrival of the master conqueror bearing sword, astrolabe and pennant – artefacts that have been termed variously by Michel de Certeau ‘the weapons of European meaning’ and by Anne McClintock ‘the fetish instruments of imperial mastery’ – commentary on the engraving has drawn out its more subversive and questioning aspects.³³ Crucially, Amerigo seems far less assured in his stance than the female native, and indeed seems to quail at what Michelle Warren describes as the danger of ‘sexual and bodily dismemberment’, at cannibalism’s ‘corporeal confusion of differences’.³⁴ In similar wise, the film stages an arrival of a

³¹ On which, see Roland Barthes, ‘Nautilus et bateau ivre’, in *Mythologies*, Points (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 80–82. The interesting point here is that the narrator appears in a sense as a version of Captain Nemo who is both comfortable in the ‘enfermement chéri’ (Barthes, p. 82) of museum history and, towards the end, looking beyond it to a dissolution of identity and history reminiscent of Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979). The question therefore remains as to whether the Frenchman, ostensibly more impatient of the libidinal attachments framed in the space, actually leaves.

³² Our discussion here also draws on Michelle R. Warren’s reading in *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300*, Medieval Cultures, 22 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 248–51.

³³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. xxv; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

³⁴ Warren, p. 249.

coloniser in a terrain that is and is not already his, and indeed which he ultimately refuses presumably because its own narrative, set in a place in which French cultural and political power has been so evidently and voraciously cannibalised and assimilated, threatens to devour his own sense of identity and difference. Indeed the question of eternity's devouring maw looms large in both documents: Theodor Galle's rubric to the initial drawing 'Americen Americus retexit et semel vocavit inde semper excitam' ('Amerigo repeats "America" and, once he spoke, henceforth was [it / she] always ready.') highlights the desire of both coloniser and colonised. His naming of America inaugurates an eternity ('inde semper') in which the desire of the woman as the embodiment of the land is the major driver. In the same way, the 'eternal people' of *Russian Ark* find themselves absorbed by a desiring narration that speaks more troublingly still. The French diplomat's astonishment that he is able to speak Russian so well is but the first sign that his subjective self-mastery is under threat.³⁵ And yet precisely at the same time the film is able to open a space in order to avert a crisis of cultural desire and identity, albeit at the price of loss and nostalgia. The cinematic intertexts are here illuminating: what *Russian Ark* seems to both explore and refuse is the possibility of a fusion that manifests itself in threateningly incestuous form in *Marienbad*.³⁶ Certainly, the constant presence of the mellifluously voiced narrator, endlessly pressing the other characters with both anxious instruction and cooing entreaty, appears as a masculine version of the use of Doris Day's disembodied voice singing 'Che sara sara' in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a scene that has been read by Michel Chion and Slavoj Žižek as giving cinematic form to the spectre of a threateningly

³⁵ An obvious comparison here is the scene from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) in which the central character's revenant wife, looking at herself in the mirror, reasons that she must be a figment of his imagination, unable as she is to remember what she has been doing when he is not present.

³⁶ On *Marienbad* as an incestuously masochistic narrative, see Keith Reader, 'Another Deleuzian Resnais: *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* as conflict between sadism and masochism', *Studies in French Cinema*, 8:2 (2008), 149–58.

incestuous desire.³⁷ By contrast, in *Russian Ark*, the presence of the narrator's voice is constantly countered and interrupted by sudden shifts in the acoustic field and environment as the visitors move from one room to another, the surrounding ambience changing dramatically as they move from small room to great hall, from wooden to marble floor, from their close-whispered conclave to the more distant but more sharply interrogatory shouts of other figures. One reading here is then to reverse the gaze in the manner of Žižek's rereading of Freud's account of the 'fort-da' game: the point may not be for the child to come to terms with the absence of the mother, but rather for him to assert his subject status and open the space of desire in the face of the mother's overwhelming presence.³⁸ Accordingly, an alternative reading of the close of the film would see it as casting the coloniser aside as the Russian narrator looks out through the door of the palace to an unimaginable beyond. In that sense, the film both reveals and conceals, affirms and undermines any seemingly univocal assertions of identity and subjectivity, centre or margin, coloniser or colonised. Yet, this should not be seen as any sort of benign resolution: one of the principal models for the central conceit of Sokurov's film is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and at that level, we are left uncertain as to what we have seen or indeed what lies beyond is heaven, purgatory or indeed hell. Nonetheless, the film's emphasis on identity and area, on difference, fracture and alienation, on the singularity of performance in relation to its putative models, all of these have challenged our conceptions of identity, whether gendered, historical or cultural, in the field of modern languages. Different communities inhabit not merely different places but different 'timespaces' (as Miguel Lopéz has argued with regard to Chicano poetry), sometimes, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, 'several centuries at once'.³⁹ One element

³⁷ See Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In and Out of Hollywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 118–19.

³⁸ On which, see Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, *Short Circuits* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT, 2003), pp. 55–61

³⁹ On timespaces see Miguel R. Lopéz, *Chicano Timespace* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2001). Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial*

conspicuously sidelined in perhaps one of the more significant violences the film does to history is Communism, referred to laughingly merely as an ‘unfortunate episode’. This moment positions the Communist period rather ambiguously in terms of the dream narrative, ostensibly excluded from it, but at the same time hovering as the violent event that hangs over everything, especially the final dispersal of the guests from the 1913 ball, a scene pregnant with the suggestion that, for Tsarist Russia, the party is over. Thus, as the missing other of the Hermitage dream, it appears as a sort of repressed element, an event that is either then identifiable with the surrounding sea of eternity or refuses to encompass it. This uncertainty in terms of the structure of the film seems to reflect an ambivalence in Sokurov’s own views: while not opposed to Communism, his emphasis on aesthetics and love of nineteenth century art and literature set him at odds with the authorities – apparently *malgré lui*.⁴⁰ But does this imply Communism wakes Russia from the baroque delusions of the imperial dream or does Sokurov present it as a simplistically mangling slice through the multi-layered complexities of historical processes and national identity? As Slavoj Žižek comments somewhere, reality is for those who cannot bear to live in the dream.

Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 49. See also Jeffrey Cohen, ‘Introduction: Midcolonial’, in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 1–17.

⁴⁰ As Johnson comments: ‘It’s not easy to assess Sokurov’s political views, but he has said of his early experience as a filmmaker: “The problems the government film institutions had with me – they had no political grounds. Because I had no questions about the political system, I had, let’s say, less or no interest.... I was always driven by visual aesthetics, aesthetics which connected to the spirituality of man, and set certain morals.... On the one hand, the films that I made were forbidden to be shown publicly [under the Soviet system], on the other, my new ideas were always approved”.’ (Johnson, p. 50).

Overview of Chapters

The essays that make up this volume cover a diverse range of subjects from the Middle Ages to contemporary cinema, from Europe to the New World, as well as a range of genres and discourses. However, looking across them reveals a network of shared themes and preoccupations.

For one, all the essays have some focus on the construction and contestation of models of national and communal identity, as well as anxieties about the purity and preservation of cultural artefacts and patrimony. In that sense, a central focus of the essays is the extent to which form or genre becomes a site of sensitivity, or in which, *mutatis mutandis*, the formal framing of a particular subject matter might itself stand as cultural provocation. Thus, in Baker's study of the cultural context of early Mexican bandit fictions, the novel is appropriated as a frame in which to explore the complexity of border troubles and boundary pressures, as well as to validate *mestizaje* or miscegenation. By contrast, Simpson's essay explores Arthurian narratives as both national romance and national B-movie, locating apparent impulses towards cultural bastardisation in the suturing and mangling practices of the medieval texts on which modern adaptations draw. A similar concern informs Serravalle de Sá's treatment of Brazilian horror film, where the profanation of social and religious values is politicised and given energy by the material constraints impinging on the process of production. All the chapters stand in an intriguing relation to Peacock's study of the place of Molière's plays in the national canon. In that regard, the hero of the culture mangle is perhaps the UK's own dark angel of history, Dr Who, the question being here one of imagining the comments and reactions of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Geoffrey Hill, Milan Kundera, José Mojica Marins and, indeed, Chrétien de Troyes could one bring them together for breakfast – in Paris, of course – to discuss their reactions to the issues raised in reviews of productions of *L'Ecole des femmes*.

'In Paris, of course' ...: inevitably, the location and language of conflict and violence are central preoccupations here. Reid's piece,

although focused on Gide and his perception of Hitler, reminds us of a long-standing connection between violence and cultivation notably expressed in Burgundy's discourse on the garden of France in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (V. 2). In kindred manner, Baker, Macdonald, Simpson and Whiteley all explore relations between exile, identity and outlawry, examining the extent to which that violence is 'off the map', in the sense of being disavowed in the context of national narrative. Reflections on the uneasy place of torture and brutality in national mythologies and histories can be seen in Serravalle de Sá's work on Brazilian horror film, Simpson's examination of scarring and massacre of the innocents in Arthurian fiction, or Whiteley's study of the formation of medieval and modern military identities. In Serravalle de Sá and Pollard's work, we see a concern with artists who refuse to see artistic production as a quasi-pastoral or bucolic site for the easy disavowal of 'real-life' conflict and take it as subject matter for both avant-garde and populist artistic production. In a larger frame, Palladino and Švéda show the stresses and strains underlying Kundera's attempt to cultivate the garden of Central Europe in an essay that just happened to first appear in French. The appropriative nature of acts of remembrance and preservation are explored in Palladino and Švéda's appraisal of Milan Kundera in the context of political nationalism, as they also are in Peacock's assessment of Molière's place in France's cultural heritage. However, all of the authors and works studied here seem to fight on at least two cultural fronts. In that regard, in Serravalle de Sá's account, Mojica seems as ready to do violence to Hollywood convention as to Brazilian sensibilities, while Pollard and Simpson both deal with material looking back to the politicised oratory and poetics of Virgil's Rome.

Genre and generic characteristics are another recurrent theme as the various studies show different forms asserting their place in different cultural and historical contexts, as they narrate, compose or perform collective or individual identity. An example here is the concern with drama and the conflicted genesis of cults in both Macdonald and Peacock's studies, which explore the question of staging, whether in the form of the performative dimensions of

hagiographical narrative or the role of production in transforming interpretative community. In this regard, Alexis and Zé do Caixão are revealed as mutually illuminating uncanny doubles, the latter appearing as an ‘ethical hero’ in the mode of Don Giovanni even as he casts light on the trouble and indeed fundamentally provocative ‘monstrosity’ of sainthood’s mission to produce the coming community. Likewise, Pollard’s concern with lyric expression echoes with the focus on the distinction between the Aristotelian categories of *epos* and *melos* that underpins Sveda and Palladino’s account of central Europe’s ‘war cry’. The concern in both essays with authorial status has clear connections to Peacock’s treatment of Molière and his afterlives. However, Pollard’s essay opens a key space in the collection for the place of poetry, all the essays raising in their own ways the question of the function of poetic language in imagining histories and speaking with communities.

These, and many other, cross-cultural and cross-generic resonances and parallels will come to light as the authors turn their attention to the material caught in the folds and creases of ‘mangled culture.’ Time to turn the handle...