Writing Interculture: the Communication of Difference and the Notion of Power

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1. Intercultural writing: providing a perspective upon contemporary literary criticism and theory in general.

The New Literatures in English, at least in so far as they are produced by indigenous cultural "minorities"[1] under circumstances that can in some manner be called "postcolonial" (but cf. 1. 1.), are *intercultural* literatures — being produced "between" (at least) two cultures and making use of their respective linguistic, cultural, and literary repertoires in ways that are pervasively and often puzzlingly asymmetrical.[2] The resulting doubleness is commented upon by intercultural writer after intercultural writer; Vine Deloria's *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*, for instance, is quoted as something of a program by Vizenor:

> No matter how well educated an Indian may become, he or she always suspects that Western culture is not an adequate representation of reality. Life therefore becomes a schizophrenic balancing act wherein one holds that the creation, migration, and ceremonial stories of the tribe are true and that the Western European view of the world is also true. . . . the trick is to somehow relate what one feels to what one is taught to think. (viii)

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[1] The term obviously needs to be defined differently to suit different circumstances, and in some instances it needs to be used so metaphorically as almost to lose its original meaning(s).

[2] Asymmetry, in other words, is not only an attribute or aspect of the power relation between the cultures involved, but also of the strategies employed to bring them into interaction.

Such differences in world views are capable of multiple uses in different situations, of multiple hierarchizations (or perhaps even mediations) under different circumstances; they constitute an unstable and uneasy balance that calls for constant acts of negotiation, adaptation, and working-out. Similarly, if Berkhofer is quoted in the same place with a sketch of the doubleness of tribal/collective and individual/individualistic definitions of selfhood imposed on Indians by heritage and white politics, the multiple asymmetry of the two definitions in the life of individual and group is obvious.

It is the implicit aim, intention, and/or function of such literature *to communicate difference*, to "deal with" it, to thematize and/or act it out. In it there takes place a construction of indigenousness that takes into account historical change and "mixture" with "the other side." "Blood mixture is not a measurement of consciousness, culture, or human experiences," says Vizenor (ix), but images of blood mixture do stand in his texts for that in-between-ness that he propagates in his central metaphors of creativity; and he quotes Jacqueline Peterson's "Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Métis" to the effect that the Métis "functioned not only as human carriers linking Indians and Europeans, but as buffers behind which the ethnic boundaries of antagonistic cultures remained relatively secure." (x) The phrase about "the communication of difference" tries to deal with precisely the same ambivalent and multiform combination of connection and severance, continuity and discontinuity, relation and separation.

I have elsewhere begun to unfold some of the implications of this definition and its terms.[3] In this paper, it is my intention to develop one aspect a little further: that "minority" literary studies seem to raise some of the most urgent questions in contemporary[4] literary criticism and theory in a slightly different way than "majority" ones — and in a way that one might regard as somewhat more relevant and more interesting than theirs. In this attempt, my perspective will necessarily be a "cross-eyed" one: trying to look at intercultural writing with one eye, and with the other at current

[3] "Contemporary Maori Narrative as Intercultural Text." *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 1991/2.

[4] "Contemporary," in this context, will be taken to refer to the last 15 or 20 years, to an intellectual present that carries its own more recent antecedents along with it.

criticism. The title of this paper with intentional ambiguity refers both to the writing of "primary" or "creative" and to that of "critical" texts, attempting to cover the positioning — a positioning *in between* — of writerly acts of various sorts.

I am, in other words, using my concern with the *writing of inter-culture* as a *position* (or a concern that provides one with a position) from which to develop fragments of a critique of larger areas of cultural activity — a strategy that I believe does not do more nor less than duplicate what the writing of inter-culture itself does anyway. (Cf. 1. 1.) This is not, however, a static position; I shall move rather rapidly from a focus on intercultural writing that may at some points be only implicitly relevant to the reading of the larger context to a focus on the current scene that will towards the end be only implicitly informed by a reading of such writing. The connecting line of a concern with the status quo of the discipline should, however, hold.

To write between cultures, to establish oneself and one's activity in that area in between is to form an association and perhaps even an alliance with others that do the same thing. To concern oneself with this act is to follow the pragmatic turn[5] of (or only *in?*) contemporary criticism; but as will become apparent it is also to question, in the light of the perspectives that are opened up by intercultural writing on the contemporary literary and critical scene, certain assumptions that have permeated large areas of today's critical discussion in so far as they are associated with (and perhaps attendant on) the particular type of pragmatism that is there to be found.

1.1. Intercultural writing as *postcolonial writing* — what's in a name, after all?

In a recent article, Thomas King attacks the assumptions that he finds in or behind the critical notion of *postcolonial writing*.[6] His concern is not

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[5] My interest in the particular angle here pursued has been revived by discussions with Balz Engler, ardent advocate of pragmatics, and participants in the course "The State of the Discipline" at Basel (Summer Semester 1991).

[6] ". . . the term itself assumes that the starting point for [the] discussion [of Native North American literature] is the advent of Europeans in North America. . . . the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. . . . it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward

so much with methodologies and theories as with the associations the notion might elicit in general discourse, in the culture at large; his concern, in other words, is ideological. He rejects the term *postcolonial* as a descriptor because he finds that its implications are conducive to a preservation of the very hierarchies, the very hegemonial relations that are addressed in the methodologies associated with it.[7] My reaction to this attack is at least ambivalent.[8]

Postcolonial is a term that has its "existence" and function also (not exclusively, perhaps not primarily, but certainly in part) in the self-examination of dominant (or, if there is such a thing, "ex-dominant") Western discourses: in *their* communication with themselves, in their attempt to place themselves in history and to determine discursively the directions of their own future development(s), and in their acts of self-legitimation. The term need not be accepted as a "proper" descriptor by native authors or readers, and may still have its functions. At the same time, it will of course be legitimate for such native authors and readers to relegate it to a non-native context, and to stigmatize it as irrelevant to their own concerns — as a descriptor in which they do not recognize themselves. In so doing, they highlight *the merely local validity or legitimacy* of the term. And this is what intercultural writing does in a very general and no less

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is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. And, worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. Ironically, while the term itself — post-colonial — strives to escape to find new centres, it remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism." (11f.)

[7] "I cannot let post-colonial stand — particularly as a term — for, at its heart, it is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become." (16)

[8] The question of the relation between interpretive models and their objects that is here embedded is, of course, complicated by the fact that arguments shape reality, and that models predispose one to certain types (not only of perceptions, but also) of actions.

programmatic way: reflect on local limitations of cultural legitimacy and authority.

There is, however, a second and equally interesting answer to King. *Postcolonial* need not be taken as a descriptor of people, groups, or texts so much (though this is undoubtedly the way it has predominantly been used) as in a different way: as referring to a situation (of change) in which certain problems arise and need to be addressed, and thus to *a* function (one of many possible functions) of texts in this situation. *Postcolonial* is then a *situational* and *functional* term that should not be (mis)taken to describe fully or adequately the things to which it is applied. In other words, the term may be more widely acceptable as soon as one evades or curbs its tendencies towards reification. And this is what intercultural writing also does pervasively and programmatically: highlight the instrumental nature of terms and ideas, countering reification in a spirit of *engagé* nominalism.

Both aspects or functions of the intercultural text can be understood more fully if one looks upon it as a forum in which the differences of cultural or interpretive communities can be acted out: a type of *Oeffentlichkeit.*[9]

1.2. Intercultural writing as a type of *Oeffentlichkeit.*

On one level every intercultural text *concerns itself* with an *Oeffentlichkeit*, with a public realm in which differences are negotiated: it deals with the question, for example, what rules, laws, values, etc. constitute it, and how it accommodates the value of difference without coming apart at the seams. Every such text, in other words, thematizes (and often "mirrors") the intercultural environment in which it is being created.

Within this general concern, and on a level of somewhat greater specificity, the communicative, aesthetic, and cultural-political value of the intercultural text may very well lie predominantly in the exploration of the difference(s) between the discursive and cultural systems that come together in it. Discourse here, as elsewhere, is argument, and this in a double way: the different cultural discourses that come together "contain" their own arguments about the shape of the world and man's place in it, and the discursive mechanisms that are employed to bring those systems

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[9] A "public" — with a lot of Habermasian overtones intended.

together "contain" an argument about their relationship, thematizing egalitarianism, hierarchy, violence, and the like. One encounters in intercultural writing a proliferation of differences that are constantly being negotiated, in a dynamic process; if differences are viewed as static in some types of rhetoric outside the text, they are dynamized inside it in explorations of choices that point out how arbitrary such choices themselves and the resulting uses of this or that rhetoric of difference are in one respect, at the same time that their necessity for survival is acknowledged or postulated. The further tension between arbitrariness and necessity, too, then needs to be negotiated in acts of questioning and authorization.

It is in this manner that, being concerned with the signification, construction and communication of difference, intercultural texts constitute individually, and intercultural writing as a collectivity of texts constitutes collectively, an *Oeffentlichkeit*: each text and each body of texts is a public arena of communication, discussion, and the working out of cultural problems — notably differences. And in so far as such a public environment does not yet exist fully in reality, intercultural writing becomes an emblem and anticipation of it. (This perspective can, of course, be extended to include other forms of writing. To theorize the text, or a group of texts, as a form of *Oeffentlichkeit* has certain advantages that become particularly apparent in the instance of the intercultural.)

There exists a link between this perspective and quite traditional views of literariness and aestheticity — of what distinguishes the literary experience from other experiences of language, and the aesthetic experience from other experiences. Intercultural writing "overcomes" cultural conflict in the curious way in which the aesthetic is said to sublate the deficits and insoluble problems of a given situation. As K. O. Arvidson puts it with regard to Polynesian literature, the reader of such texts

> undergoes a cultural exposure so aesthetically binding that the *validity* of the emotional and moral logic one experiences is rarely in question. The problem of assent arises only after the aesthetic experience, and would seem to exist properly in that inscrutable area of the mind in which art impinges upon life. (95)

The pragmatics of the intercultural text has something to do with a provisional, but intense eschewal of the practical that takes place in all

literature, by virtue of its being language (*partly*) of a different order than other utterances. The pragmatics of intercultural writing, like literary pragmatics in general, has to account for the gap between aesthetic and practical assent.[10] The double-edgedness of the process — that the aesthetic text both highlights conflict and (almost?) inevitably makes it less urgent, by enveloping it in its own *Scheinhaftigkeit*, its own "seemingness," its own quality of "as if" — may acquire paradigmatic clarity in minority texts, in so far as their primary aim is to establish the conflict at all, by establishing a perspective that embraces both cultures and focuses on their points of objective difference. Such "seemingness" will have its legitimacy when it overcomes the silence (absolute or comparative) that goes with minority existence in a situation characterized by the absolute hegemony of the majority. The morally and ideologically dubious provisionality of the aesthetic may be the necessary condition (and therefore inseparable from the process of legitimation) of such accommodating discourses.

2. Authorization and the horizon of powerlessness: the utopian nature of (intercultural) literature.

We mostly derive the authority of the text from the author or from the reader, or from their interaction. In doing so, we do recognize that authors and readers are making use, in acts of authorization, of a repertoire of textual conventions that have and convey authority at that particular historical moment; but our perspective being momentary, we tend to overlook the contingency of textual authorization: the fact that it takes place in a historically changing *field* or *environment* of discourses of varying authority, in which the interaction between author and reader takes place. The authority of the text is in fact largely an intertextual phenomenon. It is in large part derived from the accumulated authority of other texts. Forms of textual authority and authorization should therefore not be discussed exclusively or primarily in terms of authorial creativity or originality, of reader implication in the actualization of the text's potential, or of author-reader interaction; they need also and above all to be seen in terms of

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[10] At some point it also has to account for their interrelations! Arvidson's argument is useful for my present purpose, but its should not be taken for a full view of the subject.

discourses, genres, etc. — i.e., of the conventions of the institution of literature.

Any form of writing (type, genre, mode — whatever) that falls between the established categories will naturally have problems of legitimation and authorization. Intercultural writing will in some manner and degree (almost) automatically fall between categories and therefore have such problems. The very way, however, in which I am presently speaking about it — the fact that I can designate an area of writing in this manner, as *intercultural*, and that I can use *intercultural writing* not only as a general, but as a generic term, without having to explain what I am referring to — indicates that intercultural writing has (albeit recently and perhaps tentatively) been established as a type, a mode, or perhaps a genre of writing: a decisive step in providing a framework for the authorization of individual intercultural texts.

It is apparent, however, that changes in the institution of literature and in the perception of its cultural function(s) will entail changes in modes and principles or criteria of authorization. This is particularly true with regard to the relationship between textual authority and more general notions of social and cultural power — a relationship that comes to the fore in intercultural writing. Very broadly speaking, intercultural writing, in view of its origins, cannot but face the question of "literature (or culture) and power" squarely. In addressing questions of authorization, it addresses more programmatically than other forms of literature the connections between its own authority and sociocultural power, and between (various forms of) power and powerlessness, or non-domination; and it depends, for more than one reason, on its stance vis-à-vis this question for its authorization and legitimation. Since the very notion of textual authority is intimately and in a complicated manner related, via conceptions of sense-making, meaning, and knowledge, to generally sociocultural power, it is not irrelevant to recognize that a considerable number of intercultural texts (and only these will be addressed or implied by the present discussion) establish what amounts to a horizon of powerlessness or non-domination that shapes their entire perspective. By paying attention to this trait, the critical discussion of intercultural writing can develop (perhaps most fully) the utopian potential of such notions of powerlessness that it would be useful to explore in other areas as well.

The ("minority") utterance of powerlessness is, of course, always already in some sense an act of empowering, but it frequently embodies a

refusal to accept certain forms or degrees of power. Writerly strategies that appear to privilege the power aspect in a more or less clearly "majoritarian" way may be perceived as denying the text the ability to express the knowledge of powerlessness — not just the knowledge of the fact of it, but also the knowledge that comes out of the experience, and thus the capacity to effect certain changes. Similarly, critical discourses that privilege the power aspect in foreshortened symmetrical phrases of the type "knowledge is power, and power [is, makes for, gives] knowledge" talk about society in terms of a basically static, or at least self-regulating system that does not admit of any productive challenge to its own mode of functioning. In both areas, to privilege the power aspect seems to imply a paralyzingly conservative despair of the possibility of significant change.

Such considerations, which link notions of power and powerlessness with views of history-as-change, become relevant in discussions both of minority/majority (or "colonial") situations, and of avant-gardism. According to a late modernist view, "in a modern industrial culture, the artists constitute, in fact, an 'ethnic group,' subject to the full 'native' treatment [which consists of acts of 'othering,' exploitation, and 'imperialism' — the latter Deren's own term]" (Deren 7), and the perceived similarity has been a fruitful axiom within the alliance between modernism in literature and twentieth century anthropology.[11] It is no wonder, then,

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[11] Or, to put it more broadly, the analogy between the artist and the "native" is interesting for at least two interrelated reasons. It points at a relationship of loose cooperation and mutual reflexion that has existed between Literature — both the creative and the critical activity — and Anthropology since early Modernism; and it can be used to support the notion that problems of innovation and experimentation that characterize twentieth century literature recur in minority literature(s). A discussion of the ongoing self-reflexion within the discipline of Anthropology is, therefore, to my mind an indispensable component in any serious discussion of the overall contemporary concern with questions of power and authority. The broad analysis of cultural discourses inevitably becomes interdisciplinary. In addition, this concern establishes a global perspective from which one can view the indubitable fact that literature has (never more than today) concerned itself with minority rights, with the negotiation of tolerance and intolerance, and of their limits, with the question of the amount of dissent that can be borne by a social system, or that is necessary, perhaps, for the health of a community.

that the question of the relation between power and powerlessness recurs in minority literature and its critical reception, as well as in discussions of the possibilities of avant-gardist innovation between Barthes and Deleuze/Guattari. Powerlessness becomes prominent, in the context, as the informing ideal of a potential or future that is opposed to a guilty past, or (in less programmatic form) as a principle that, though not necessarily "innocent" itself, can be used to question a necessarily "guilty" power principle.

There occurs here a questioning of the legitimacy of positive power that stands in a twentieth-century tradition of negativity, of a distrust of everything that is, and that implies a questioning of simple notions of empowerment. More specifically, it places the very notion of empowerment, in the discussion of minority literatures as well as of the avant-gardes, within the tension between established forms of power on the one hand and both the fact and an ideal of powerlessness, on the other. It is in this context that the very general empowerment that takes place in any utterance can aim at the avoidance of established forms of power.

The example of Vizenor,[12] for instance, suggests that notions of process, of situationally determined workings-out (and -through) of discursive patterns will be central to intercultural writing in so far as it addresses this problem. Vizenor destabilizes all relations, above all power relations, through his Métis/trickster narrator figure and through "tricksterish" strategies of narration; thus:

> "Balance is not balance, no idea or event *is* what it is named, there are no places that are known but through the opposites, nothing is sacred but what is not sacred. . . . No thing is in balance but what is confused and in discordance," said Captain Shammer. "The trickster seeks the balance in contraries and the contraries in balance; shaman tricksters avoid the extremes, but not with extreme humor or intense manners."   ("The Chair of Tears," 20)

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[12] At this and some other points this essay touches upon questions addressed at slightly greater length in a companion piece, entitled "Gerald Vizenor: Negotiations of difference and value," forthcoming in the (selected) proceedings of the 1991 annual convention of the Netherlands Association for American Studies.

The text here concerns itself self-reflexively with central aspects of its own discursive practices, and above all with its avoidance of any established authorization of either one even of the basic relations between cultural systems: it avoids closure either in relation (balance) or severance (contraries). And in telling the reader so, it comments on its own dynamic nature.

The example privileges a nexus between postmodern and intercultural writing that makes its discussion to some degree predictable. But similar concerns are so deeply embedded in intercultural writing that the model has wider applicability, which is, furthermore, entirely compatible with at least one general view on literariness: what characterizes intercultural writing in its basic gesture(s) of communicating difference is a specification of what, according to this view, characterizes literature in general. For in coupling power and powerlessness, intercultural writing can be taken to duplicate and specify the coupling of cultural crisis and utopia, of the loss of meaning rendered somewhere "in" the text and a horizon of meaning that at the very least appears "behind" it, and of alienation and creativity that Charles Russell[13] discusses as one of the central gestures of avant-gardist writing in the 20th century. With its focus on powerlessness, it also picks up what I should like to regard as at least one of the characteristic utopias of these avantgardes, and it develops it further.

To criticize such paradoxical couplings with Russell as debilitating aporias, or even as historical errors, is of course possible, but it seems to me that such a view overlooks the dynamic and dynamizing qualities of the oppositions. It also overlooks the fact that loss and achievement, alienation and creativity are not normally symmetrically related, or at least they do not need to. As an antecedent of the creative act, the negative element may threaten the artist with paralysis, with the suppression of his creativity, but it also constitutes a first impulse towards creative action, which may lead to the "sublation" of the contradiction between paralysis and creativity on a higher level: that of the aesthetic object. Such achievement will in its turn more or less automatically be experienced as opposed to the loss that was the original problem, so that the process of dealing with and conquering contradiction will once again receive another dynamic impulse. In the last

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[13] Cf. especially the first and last chapters.

analysis, the process is obviously unclosable, but by the same token it is not in any simple sense circular, nor is it meaningless. The paradoxical coupling of negative and positive, of problems demanding a solution and solutions that confront the stubborn, ultimately unconquerable problem and thus lead into a re-opening of the problem is not only impediment, but also stimulus; or, to accept Russell's historical perspective: the paradox is a sign not only of a historical error and defeat, but also of a historical achievement. And the paradoxical coupling of power-as-problem and powerlessness-as-solution is among the historical achievements of certain types of intercultural writing.

3. Intercultural writing: the critique of the current situation specified.

In contemporary criticism, history, and theory, the recognition of the pervasiveness of power in language uses (as well as in other forms of social interaction) has generated a number of perspectives according to which, in different ways that depend on the specific subject matter under discussion, society again and again appears as a system of dominances or of relations of domination. (The notion of power, in other words, has come to be associated to the point of identification with *competition*.) The "non-domination" view suggested by intercultural literature provides a critical focus upon this overall trend, which may initially become somewhat clearer through a brief reference to the divergent ways in which modernist literary/anthropological(/culture-critical) interests have already attempted to domesticate and to humanize power.

There exists a pervasive tendency in modernist (predominantly high modernist) thought and writing to essentialize difference by ascribing different forms of (vital, etc.) power to cultural products, individuals, and groups. The modernist use of race terms is perhaps one of the more conspicuous instances — reminiscent, immediately, of the ambiguous and ambivalent connection between modernism and fascism. This is not in any simple sense to be construed as an indictment of modernism; undoubtedly every pattern of thought has its own specific potential for perversion. But it may account for the fact that historically the modernist attempt to humanize power via the gesture or figure of essentialization has proved abortive and that statements of the following type have become irredeemably obsolete:

> The whole genius of the Russian people is so different from our practical Anglo-Saxon one that . . .   (Wilson 323)
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> It has been always of the essence of the Jewish genius that it works through the spirit and the intellect.   (Wilson 480)
>
> Like [X], she was the green-eyed kind of Russian to whom, according to my theory, the pale-eyed kind is obliged to yield.   (Wilson 357)

In the first two quotations, where Wilson employs notions of race and blood, rather than of cultural systems, when he talks of the "genius," or cultural power, of a people, we encounter one of the two forms of the view: a "racialization," and hence a "biologization" of power; in the last quotation, where physiological differences among types of people are immediately viewed as power differentials (or where they are only perceived if they are associated with them), the biological is translated into power terms.

It bears repeating that such translations and associations are attempts to humanize power: one of the central concerns of modernism was obviously to deal with the perceived dehumanization of power, and to cater to a resulting need to re-humanize it — if only by irrationalizing and mythifying it.[14] Part of the function of the literary-anthropological alliance

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[14] Cf. Wilson, once again: "It seems as if the dancer [. . .] were really generating energy for the Zuñis [. . .] These people who sit here in silence [. . .] are sustained and invigorated by watching this. [. . .] The whole complicated society of Zuñi in some sense depends on this dance. Our ideas of energy and power have tended to become, in the modern world, identified with the natural forces — electricity, combustion, etc. — which we manipulate mechanically for our benefit, and it is startling to see human energy invoked and adored as a force that is at once conceived as a loan from the non-human natural forces and as a rival pitted against them; or rather, to put it in terms that are closer to the Zuñi point of view, to see all the life of the animal world and the power of the natural elements made continuous with human vitality and endowed with semi-human form." (38) The modernist problem of power — mechanized modern vs. organic or natural — is here presented in terms of the manipulative vs. the non-manipulative. Celebration and performance are the media in which an essential humanization of power takes place, within the framework of a postulated original unity of art and religion: "Here, too, one finds theater and worship before they have become dissociated." (Ib.)

within the overall movement of modernism was precisely to provide an account of such humanization of power. The strategy is visible in Wilson, but also in Deren, where the entire mythological system of Voodoo is regarded as an attempt to capture certain life powers in humanizing or anthropomorphizing formulation,[15] at the same time that the system is presented (passim) in terms of an economy of energy/power, of a series of trade-offs and transformations.[16] Deren thus begins to go beyond the essentialization perceivable in Wilson and attempts to develop distinctions that open up possibilities of rational choice among uses of power. It is especially her basic distinction between *solidarity* and *superbia*[17] that subjects power to moral criteria, in the process replicating the power motive[18] in so far as superbia is power *against* someone or something, whereas solidarity is power *with*: a use of power that does not attempt to dominate.

It is precisely the distinction between solidarity and superbia that seems to be lacking, or at least marginalized, in more recent accounts of power in society, culture, or literature. Though it may appear to be implicit in a notion, for example, like that of a *communicative community*, that term is quite characteristically (characteristically, that is, of the current intellectual climate) used primarily to talk about the imposition of opinion, the exclusion of divergent opinion, and the re-enforcing of convergent opinion; it is not characteristically used to talk about the communication of difference, either within or between communities. This implies an

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[15] Life, for Deren, is necessarily associated with the notion of power. (24ff.) The distinction that lurks in the background of her entire discussion is that between universal and timeless power (or energy in potentia and as a transpersonal [and in a sense therefore non-human] life force constantly at work), and power, control, or mastery over it, as a historical and human phenomenon, condition, or act. The relation between the historical (individual or collective, but always human) and the eternal force is the question.

[16] Cf. (an entirely arbitrary example) the use of the term *exchange*. (217)

[17] Religion is basically the use of access to power in a spirit of (collective) *solidarity*, magic a highly similar (though in some respects also different, stigmatized) use in a spirit of (individual) *superbia*. (75ff.)

[18] Such multiplication and replication on several levels of argument seems to be characteristic of the discussion of power.

interpretation of history. When Richard Rorty, for instance, reflects on history in what amounts to a programmatic attempt on his part to shape the opinions of a large literate and literary community — his three "Contingency" essays in the *London Review of Books* (1986) —, his account of variations of truth in time, or of truth's working itself (or its dominant phases) out in a temporal "arena," privileges the medium of time over any other "arenas" or "media" of interpretation, such as social, geographical, etc. ones, in which, too, interpretive communities have their existence in processes of dissociation and diversification. There is a correlation between the notion of a struggle for dominance and the foregrounding of the dimension of time: interpretive communities, in this view, stand primarily in relations of conflict and succession, but above all in the relation of a conflict over and for succession to one another. And it is the succession-in-dominance that in turn primarily identifies such communities.

Neither interactions of other than temporal kinds nor the temporal relation of simultaneity are "interesting" in this framework, which can be criticized with Johannes Fabian for its denial of "coevalness" to others. The other interpretive community is always an inimical and/or obsolete ("primitive") Other, and Rorty's view of what one might call the "ethnocentrism" of truth(s) and language use(s) amounts to a complacent manner of talking that implicitly but programmatically rejects any attempt to overcome such ethnocentrism.[19] And finally, it is a rejection of the universalist aspirations of all critical theory, and of the literary-anthropological alliance whose importance in our century has already been alluded to. This importance lies precisely in its attempt (whether successful or not — and Fabian would judge the results rather harshly) to break the ethnocentrism of literary and cultural studies.

In order to criticize the neo-pragmatist position, it is, of course, not necessary to reject its claim that any system (period style, world view,

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[19] Rorty's position obviously merits much closer analysis, which can, however, not be offered here for reasons of space and time. The worst deficit of the thumb-nail sketch given here may be that it cannot even attempt to indicate the extent to which the next sentence goes against certain basic assumptions of the new pragmatism concerning the relationship between (literary) theory and criticism.

Menschenbild — whatever) is only one of several possible ones, i. e., that it is not ontologically guaranteed. It is not necessary, in other words, to reject the instrumentalist and "localist" bias that it shares with intercultural writing. These are, after all, not claims unique to neo-pragmatism. The question is only whether one then needs to look upon literary history as a process in which different equally (in)valid accounts or stories of what (literarily) is the case "struggle" for "dominance," or whether one does not need to reject this "dog-eat-dog," or vulgar-Darwinist account of what is the case in history as being too simple. Does one not wish to talk differently, or to make up a different story, about the actual interactions of systems in the past, and about what interactions may be possible in the future, or in general?

The problem lies, then, in neo-pragmatism's taking persuasion for granted, refusing to thematize its mechanisms and its environment. It does not talk about personal or group interest or motivation (which is, after all, a central category in so "pragmatic" a critic as Kenneth Burke), and it does not really analyze power. Its view is a "blanket" one, like the one with which Bigsby begins (but only begins!) in the following quotation: "Language is power, the shaping of language into art is power, and the codification of literature in the form of literary history is also a source of power." (9) This view, *if it is not modified or made concrete in subsequent discussion and analysis*, which it is with Bigsby, lends itself to all manner of glibness; it essentializes power, thereby, in effect, automatically legitimizing it, or at least making any concern with it incidental to the critical act and to the writing of literary history, rather than intrinsic to it — which it should be. Or, in other words: power needs to be an object of analysis, rather than its tool. For the tool remains always (and necessarily) to some degree unquestioned, *unhinterfragt.*[20]

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[20] I do not at this point wish to address a different problem about the neo-pragmatist stance, or about the step from "theory" to "pragmatism" — that it is essentially the step, taken once again, that led from Nominalism to Empiricism, or from a "semiotic" pragmatism (James, Peirce, Morris), which talks about the tools of the mind, to Pragmatism (Dewey), which talks about what one can do or does with them. It is a step that should not be taken again; for it is primarily a reduction in the scope and the range of possibilities, of the universe of permissible discourse(s). It is a restriction of the concept of reality, or a restriction of the range of relevant statements, which results in a restricted notion of reality.

3.1. Some problems of "pragmatic" pragmatics.

All through the network of specialized and specified research interests and sub-disciplines that make up the various disciplines of Literature, one can perceive symptoms of this essentialization of power, which can be discussed, too, (at least in the case of English and American Studies) as the imposition of a specific type of pragmatism on the concern with and interest in the pragmatic dimension of language. Pragmatics has been "pragmatized" in a sense that emerges, too, from Kenneth Burke's brief criticism of Dewey in "The Philosophy of Literary Form." Dewey's "instrumentalism," says Burke, "equate[s] technology with 'good' (via the steps: [1] technology is intelligent; and [2] intelligence is a 'good')," and it thus "illustrates [a] kind of essentializing [of power]." (55) A few instances *that should not be taken to imply any systematic criticism of authors or movements, but serve as illustrations of what I take to be the prevailing intellectual climate exclusively,* will have to suffice to substantiate the point.[21]

Wherever (socio)linguistic pragmatics focuses on the innate power aspect of language and language use, regarding, for instance, (oral) communication as "face-work",[22] or language acquisition and socialization as struggles among norms and patterns for realization, for some sort of "place" in a repertoire,[23] there prevails a perspective of competitive individualism. Such perspectives, especially where they make their way into standard introductions to the discipline such as Hudson's, have helped to shape an intellectual climate in which the entire field of society will appear as the site of a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and in which reflexes of social Darwinism are detectable.[24] According to this type of account, the other is almost automatically viewed as either inferior, which is the primary

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[21] This is my justification, too, for criticizing points of view as they occur in generally accessible or even popular statements, rather than in their original, mandarin forms.

[22] Cf. on Goffman's notion of face-work (Hudson 115); cf. also 129.

[23] Cf. the prevailing questions of standardization and power, of prestige and central authority. (Hudson 32ff.)

[24] Thus, the entire argument in Hudson 16ff. is based on the view that language behavior, like any behavior, is intensely affected by power relations. Cf. the quote there from Hockett.

tendency, or else as superior — a secondary tendency that only comes into play when the first one is not viable, and usually with some sort of modification. Speakers of different "dialects" will supposedly regard their own forms of discourse as the norm — they are, after all, part of the norms one has employed and accepted in identity formation, and they imply acts of self-definition. If this "normalization" of one's own discourse is not possible, it is at least viewed as an inferior form of language *that has redeeming qualities.*[25]

A similar centralization and essentialization of notions of power can be observed in a text-book view of pidginization that can once again be documented through reference to Hudson. Pidgins are, of course, languages that originate in situations characterized by a power differential, as an adaptive move by a "minority" and in ways that mirror the power relations between the groups. The vocabulary, e.g., will therefore come from the "dominant" language (61ff.), and "it is clear who has to do the bulk of the learning, though the dominant group may sometimes use the forms which they know the subordinate group use, in order to make things easier for them." (70)[26] But does the *creole continuum* (ib. 68) that develops in a later (and presumably more complex) socio-cultural situation have to be grounded in a central power motive in such a way that "only a single chain [or *hierarchy*] of varieties connects basilect and acrolect [low and high prestige variants], allowing speakers only a single linguistic dimension on which to locate themselves with reference to the rest of society" (68)? Do monolinear scales of this type proceed from detailed empirical observation in different spheres of language use (in the bank, the government office, the lecture hall, the chapel, the newspaper, the poem . . .), or from an anterior essentialization of the notion of power? Similarly — does the attempt to measure power along a simple scale that one finds in conversation analysis like that in Trömel-Plötz, and which quantifies it radically, apparently assuming that the *best* form of participation in a

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[25] It may, for example, be "intimate," "close," "involved," where the standard form of the language is "rational," "cold" and "distant."

[26] But cf. the case of European traders adopting a native lingua franca, for example in North America. Cf. Hochbruck 27f., where several cases are cited. Do they imply inferior status of Europeans in certain trade situations, or a need to rethink the pragmatics of the contact situation?

discussion that is defined as agonal is equal time, not rely too much on axioms that are informed with a competitive individualism?

In the last instance, alliances, particularly across gender lines, are not given the same degree of reality as the urge of the isolated individual to air his/her position (299), and an argument or a position that might be shared cooperatively by several speakers, as well as the shared theme and topic of the discussion (which might be seen as in some rudimentary way uniting the participants in a group), become immaterial, filtered out of the analysis via its extreme quantification and formalization. Similarly, one might at least entertain (for good reasons, and on the basis of observations) the thought that the hierarchical origins are not inscribed in pidgins for all eternity; literary uses of pidgins, for example, may very well reverse or subvert hierarchies which may still prevail in the culture at large, and they may do so with the intention, at least, in the long run to change the general usage, and the culture itself. The power of an utterance does not only depend on the locus or status (within a single hierarchy) of the discourse employed, but also on the situation and context in which it is employed, and literary usage will not be the only instance of a subversion of power relations that may prevail elsewhere as well. Patently, discourses bearing the stigma of powerlessness can, in some situations, acquire a certain kind of power, which may actually, in a paradoxical way, arise out of the very fact of general powerlessness.

Similarly, in the question of the relative status of dialects, the linkage between mechanisms of identity-formation and the view of the other does of course have some merit: norms and traits that are at odds with those that have been internalized in identity-formation can only with difficulty be perceived as both really different and really equal. But wherever it is possible to defuse the difference — for example, through some appeal to universals that establishes a substratum of sameness —, there obviously is no problem.

Also, the pervasiveness of power in conversation can be viewed in a somewhat different light. It is true that an agonal aspect carries over from language acquisition into conversation, if only in so far as it constitutes an ongoing series of readjustments of the verbal continuum of participants. Conversation is in part always meta-communication; it is in part about the validity (or lack of it) of terms and notions employed in it: will they be accepted, used, and thereby validated, or will they be rejected? Conversation, in other words, negotiates the validity of the discourses it

employs. But if this observation can on the one hand be used to argue that the power/domination aspect of language goes well beyond the "face-work," or the concern with "face-saving," that people find in or behind language use, as a built-in, but in some sense ulterior motive, and that power is a motive in the very acting-out of conversation, implicit in the flow of it, and coterminous with it, it can at the same time be used to point out that such a view is incomplete if it is not coupled with its paradoxical or dialectical opposite: a motive of *solidarity*[27] *and co-operation* that emerges, one might say, in acts of "face-giving," or in that willingness to accept inadequate terms and notions provisionally which makes it possible for the flow of communication (the interaction) to go on. In every act of convincing, every act of communication, there is not only a competitive power play going on, but a game of cooperation.

3.2. Powerlessness/non-domination in current criticism and intercultural writing.

The dubious nature of many of the modernist discourses of humanization and humanistic appropriation of power (see above) may be one reason why — whether with Bakhtin or Barthes, or with any one of a number of other theorist-critics — the axiom of the guilt of prevailing or dominant discourses has gained a degree of axiomatic evidence, together with its corollary, according to which the positive power of dominant discourses needs to be overturned and overthrown in multiplicity, obliqueness, indeterminacy, and negativity. Behind such views stands, too, the paradoxical opposition between the recurrent historical experience that the very act of communication degenerates altogether too easily into an exercise of power, and the equally recurrent humanistic and enlightened postulate that communicative interaction should be relatively free from the exercise of power. In view of the currently widespread more or less complacent acceptance of power that has just been sketched out, this perspective needs to be recuperated, and intercultural writing forces one to do so — or to recuperate the dialectic of power and powerlessness as a central analytical and critical concern.

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[27] This use of the term is not at all intended to be related to the notion Brown has introduced into sociolinguistics (cf. Brown/Ford and Brown/Gilman) — in some ways it is its opposite.

This can be seen as forcing one to go beyond the deconstructive enterprise. Deconstruction has complicated the relationships between generally sociocultural power and the power we ascribe to utterances and texts, highlighting the fact that powerlessness can generate its own very peculiar forms of power of utterance. It has, in a sense, worked against simple notions of *empowerment* that can be associated with conservative and authoritarian views of culture, by turning its attention to the manifold and often paradoxical interplay between power and powerlessness in texts that in part, in large part, or predominantly question the desirability of at least certain forms of power, in "real" or "material" *and* in verbal interaction. But while deconstruction has provided us with ample theories of victimization and discursive practices that work through it (and that work it through and out, that symbolize it in a Burkean sense, always preserving the problem), it has in a curious (and quite un-Burkean) sense been just as complacently accepting the pervasiveness and presence, and the pervasive presence, of power as has (for completely different reasons) neo-pragmatism. If (according to a brief informal remark of Richard Rorty's [in Geneva, mid-1980s]) neo-pragmatism was arguably designed to ignore the question of the legitimacy of power, poststructuralism and deconstruction seem to have been designed to agonize over the illegitimacy of power; but the focus, the theme, the concern has been remarkably similar in its essentialization of power through the acceptance of the view that social interaction and communication are in some manner essentially power-full.

I have argued so far that, held up for inspection next to certain literary texts, this focus, theme, and concern appears debilitatingly one-eyed; it does not provide a model for the adequate discussion of discourses (such as intercultural ones) that, though patently and explicitly written from a position of (relative) powerlessness and of antagonism to (relative) power(fulness) sidestep the antagonism at the very moment that they create it. I have tried to point out that such discourses become antagonistic in not even accepting the opposition between power and powerlessness, in not accepting the terms of the power game that seems to be going on (and to keep which going is in the interest of the more powerful side), in not looking for forms of authorization that are in the same place or of the same general (or generic) kind as those they are antagonistic to.

But in which way is powerlessness communicatively achievable — in which way can it become the informing principle of an act of

communication that at least invites a perspective that views it as power-full? It is almost impossible to imagine a flow of communication in which neither side has at any time the upper hand — for example, through choice of terminology, theme, implication, and the like; what precisely can be the meaning, then, of an ideal of powerlessness in criticism and literary history? This aspect is clearly central to discussions (e.g.) like Roland Barthes' in *Writing Degree Zero*;[28] that this writer, in his search for a glimpse of a power-free discourse, focuses on patterns that can (I believe) *only locally* (*perhaps*) be used in power-free ways, is relevant to the present discussion. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari, standing firmly in the Barthian tradition, encounter a similar problem. In presenting their programmatic notion of an avoidance of power in a *minor literature*[29] in terms of a working-through of disabilities, they cannot even raise the problem of the canonical power of Kafka's oeuvre. It becomes obvious, here, that freedom from power may only exist *dynamically*, as an *act* of liberation, rather than be "possessed" by and through any discourse. Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, as presented in the "Introduction" to *Rabelais and His World*, may have to be viewed in this spirit, and his notion of dialogicity does clearly not refer to an act that once and for all neutralizes power, but to an acting-out of antagonistic powers.[30] The overthrow of established authority that takes place there through anarchic power is then conducted in a struggle that makes the pervasiveness of power relations in cultural interaction visible, but denies legitimacy to any single, specific power.[31]

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[28] The text is, however, "obsolete" in its view that orality is "neutral" and non-authoritarian, literacy (at least modern literacy) authoritarian. This view — basically an anti-modernist one, in the middle of the century, already! — may be acceptable as a historical statement valid within the history of the dominant culture(s) of the West; beyond that double set of limits (time: modern; "space": dominant Western) it is not acceptable. Orality is not per se non-authoritarian or less authoritarian than . . .; minority cultures and literatures may actually find that literacy is a way out of authoritarian sets of relations that are manifested in and consolidated by orality.

[29] Cf. Renza, whose discussion is based on Deleuze/Guattari.

[30] The phrasing here is meant to indicate that I think both readings can be construed.

[31] Does one perhaps need to think in terms of a zero sum game — a balance

In intercultural literature, authority and authorization have then to be sought for in certain ways in order for the utterance to be communicatively effective, at the same time that they have to be rejected in so far as they replicate the posture of the antagonist; there will then be a dialectical interplay between moves of authorization and moves of de-authorization — a process in which a horizon of powerlessness (non-domination) is established towards which the text can work, but which (since this is in the very nature of such horizons) it can never achieve as a posture. In our critical vocabulary, a *positive* notion of powerlessness or non-domination is necessary to talk about this horizon of texts, but it has so far been conspicuously absent, both from the discussion of intercultural and of other writing. Insistence on its importance comes out of a reading of intercultural literature, and out of a perceived deficit in current theory and in the current sociology of the academy.

4. The (ir)relevance of the present discussion.

The transmission of signals of power as well as the coding of such signals themselves is governed by local and historically variable rules; they take different shapes and have different implications, depending on where, when, and under which circumstances they occur.[32] Just as our culture's comparatively clear tendency to correlate power with social distance, and powerlessness or avoidance of power display with intimacy or social

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established over time, in the balancing out of imbalances? Or is even this view too "optimistic" or "idealistic"? Is it only possible to aim at a relative degree of freedom from interference, in the flow of communication, by power relations that are simultaneously always acted out?

[32] This sort of evidence makes one feel very uncomfortable with generalizing tendencies like those apparent in the following Yale UP advertisement, which sums up the thesis of David I. Kertzer's book *Ritual, Politics, and Power* thus: "The most comprehensive study of political ritual yet written. Weaving together examples from around the world [!] and throughout history [!] — from Aztec cannibal rites to the inauguration of American presidents — Kertzer shows that the success of all political forces, whether conservative or revolutionary, is linked to their successful use of ritual." (*London Review of Books*, 5 May, 1988:7)

closeness,[33] should not be generalized into a universal[34] for systematic reasons — to go below the threshold of acceptable "solidarity" and intimacy constitutes an act of aggression[35] —, the very relationship of the terms themselves, the association between power and distance, needs to be questioned. Also, the current tendency, in Western cultures, to go by the criterion of social closeness, rather than of power, in the choice of forms of address (*tu/Du* rather than *vous/Sie*; first names) indicates that power today occupies a different "place" and takes a different shape in the making of the general "climate" of interaction than in former times; apparently there occurs a rejection of speech patterns of power distinction at the same time that notions of power have become central to the self-reflexion of the civilization and to discussions of the very notion of civilization. The tension would seem to indicate the real existence of a historic problem.

A semiotics of power and powerlessness is then needed that will make it possible to address general questions of consensus formation in a culture-specific and historicist way. It will not do to cling too tenaciously to universalist views of the relation between power and culture, and of the status of power in cultural processes. Thus, for example, the open question of the relation between power and idea can in different places be answered both by dissociating the two almost completely and (*vide* the new pragmatism) by associating them to the point of identification.

In the spirit of the former view, one might say that power needs idea, but that idea does not need power — that "naked" power is trivial, that it is not interesting, and that it is even "unreal" in the sense that — whatever its destructive potential — it unmasks itself, and its basic instability, and the basic instability of what it tries to "do," to institute, to effect, by more or less automatically creating its own antagonist(s). (Real power, by way of contrast, would be power that does not need to be exerted *ad infinitum* in order to guarantee the continuity of its effects, but "vanishes" behind an idea that it "serves," and behind consent to them.) And it is sometimes surprising how little assent to an idea that seems to have lost its viability

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[33] A fact that has, once again, made its way into (socio)linguistic textbooks; cf. Hudson (125), where the relation is regarded as a universal.

[34] Cf. Hudson (135) on cultural variations of acceptable distance.

[35] This aspect may become important in Roman lower-class youths preferring *Lei* to *tu* (Hudson 124f.).

can be produced by the display of power. But even within the comparatively small range of variation offered by the so-called Western civilizations, there seem to be instances of a tendency to ratify or endorse an idea through an appeal to power, if power is not in actual point of fact regarded as an idea. What in the spirit of the former view would seem to be a moment of trivialization — the appearance of power in the "place" of idea — may then be read as a moment of endorsement.[36]

American civilization may be a case in point. The relative prominence, in it, of certain figures and arguments seems to indicate as much. There is, above all, the cultural importance of the macho figure characterized, on the one hand, by a high degree of wanton destructiveness that frequently seems to result from paranoia and therefore tends to go with considerable self-pity, and on the other hand by a zero degree of responsibility toward others. (This figure is exemplified by characters in the works of authors such as Hemingway and Mailer, and in some measure also by the ways in which these and other authors have played their versions of the role of "the author.") The current prominence, in the United States, of opinions that associate *literary* history with a more or less meaningless power game among literary discourses, and that associate the history of *critical* views themselves with a more or less meaningless power game among critical discourses, also argues for this view. The case may be even stronger with regard to opinions that see the history of critical paradigms as a meaningless power struggle among critics, rather than discourses; this is where the macho turns critic, without much benefit to either the one role or the other. This is also where the sociological problems of the academy recur as the ideological problems of attitudes advocated and methods employed in it — and vice versa.

If this is true — and to the (perhaps limited) degree that it may be true —, the criticism of essentializing notions of power in our discipline that has gone through this essay may appear as irrelevant *in* an American context; but its perspective, which aims at being European or (preferably) international(ist), may not be irrelevant *to* that context in so far as it attempts to point out a difference of opinion and intellectual climate that may, if it is not at least talked about, create divisions that will go far beyond the literary.

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[36] Cf. Burke's criticism of Dewey quoted above.

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