

BEING IN COMMUNITIES
IN 20TH- AND 21ST- CENTURY
FRENCH, BRITISH, CANADIAN, AND FRANCOPHONE NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines formations of communities in novels by late 20th- and early 21st- century British, French, Canadian, and Francophone authors and argues that this approach is particularly relevant to an increasingly global literature. Tracing the formation of communities in postmodern novels may seem like a nostalgic attempt to return to a time of greater solidarity and social consciousness in a period of literature most known for its characters' loss of social cohesion, rampant alienation and loneliness. If a community is a group of people living together in one place, postmodern novels are particularly hostile environments for this kind of formation. Characters in postmodern literature are defined primarily by their heightened mobility, their loss of roots or connection to a place of origin or to a place of residence, their anonymity, detachment from their neighbors, and the absence of any sense of communal or collective solidarity. More than ever there is a personal and spatial crisis that makes finding or forming communities unlikely and problematic. And yet, we note a growing interest in academic scholarship in the formation of communities in literature, politics, urbanism, and inside the uses of social media and technology. Benedict Anderson's study on *Imagined Communities* (1991) describes community as that which exists in the minds of those who feel a sense of nationalism, whether it is truly represented in their countries or not. *Reinventing Community* (2005) by Jane Hiddleston argues that now more than ever there is a need for communities in Northern African literature. There are numerous studies on digital communities in which forms of global unity become possible for

the first time by way of the Internet. We speak of transnational communities, communities formed around sexual orientation (the “gay community,” for example), specific interests, political concerns, causes, etc. In recent decades, critical and philosophical reflection has focused on formations of a wide variety of communities at the same time as it has become clear that these communities are different from the kind of face-to-face social unity, close-knit neighborhoods, or solid family structure that we traditionally assign to the concept of community. In postmodern literature in the late 20th- and early 21st- centuries, the solid social structures of family, the transparent community, and a harmonious bond with one’s surroundings have long been gone from novels. This is the case, for example, in Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist* in which the protagonist, Lauren Hartke, must mourn the death of her husband alone, detached from her neighbors, in a rented house that is not her own, and in the occasional presence of a man best described as a stranger. Kathy Acker’s *Blood and Guts in High School*, or Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* in which characters live lonely lives spent filling meaningless corporate positions, consuming mass produced goods, and spend most of their time in places of transition such as airports, highways, and waiting rooms.

The quest for communities in contemporary fiction appears to be not only difficult but paradoxical when considered alongside former traditions of literature that lend themselves more willingly to representations of social bonding, the sharing of values and mores, and to the interdependency of social groups. Novels and essays written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and, later, by German Romantic

authors, offer more promising prospects for community formation.¹ The promise of a mythical community as a counterpoint to urban anonymity and the loss of connection with one's environment in literature during this period, justifies a search for communities. In order to resist the effects of industrialization and urbanization, novelists put emphasis on the family unit, on social classes and acquaintances, and on the return to simple, idyllic settings in which people live harmoniously among their neighbors. Goethe famously calls for a return to a pastoral setting in which community among people is possible: "The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks & feels with us, and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden." In his celebration of human connection he also promises the possibility of establishing roots and of living harmoniously in a home with those that form a community. On the contrary, Modernist and Postmodernist literatures see a shift away from the promise of a unified bond between people. There is a greater frequency of divorce, a multitude of broken families, immigration on a larger scale, and therefore a loss of roots, and more circulation around the world or around the city. In Postmodern fiction in particular, the nuclear family is dismantled and the father figure falls from his place of authority, no longer able to be a catalyst for order and identity. While Modernist literature witnessed the breakdown of organizing

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau hypothesized the creation of a harmonious community that would impose social order and give citizens power. In his mature work, he principally explores two routes to achieving and protecting freedom: firstly, he conceived of political institutions that would make it possible for citizens to co-exist in a free and equal manner inside community in which they themselves would be sovereign, and secondly to promote education for children so that they may become independent and safe from most destructive forms of self-destruction.

systems such as families, institutions, small rural settings, property, small government, etc. postmodern literature has forged its identity on the rubble and distorted vestiges of the lost order. Community, it seems, was much easier to conceive of in less densely populated and more traditional environments and those more commonly represented in 18th- and 19th- century European literature.

The question, then, remains: why look for community in the forlorn spaces and populations of postmodern fiction? The Italian philosopher, Roberto Esposito, warns against the shared tendency to inscribe community in a chronological context. He recognizes the historical shift that occurs in the beginning of Modernism: "There is no need to hypothesize any sort of former idyllic community, no primitive 'organic society' that exists only in the Romantic *imagerie* of the nineteenth century, to see how modernity is affirmed in its violent separation from an order [...]"² But he warns his readers against idealizing the past and seeing it as a time of greater social order and peaceful relationships among neighbors, all the while pointing to a crisis and dislocation in Modernism that is not favorable to the formation of community. While community is more difficult than ever to imagine, it is not a purely chronological formation and in fact its advent cannot adequately be determined according to a specific timeframe. The French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy participates in locating community formation inside the postmodern period in a short collaborative essay titled *La Comparution*³:

² *Communitas*. Translated by Timothy Campbell. California: Stanford University Press. 1998. 12.

³ Nancy, Jean-Luc and Baily, Jean-Christophe. *La Comparution*. Paris: Christian Bourgois Editeur. 1991.

Rien ne repère sans doute mieux le 'post-moderne' que la constellation polymorphe de toutes les 'fins du communisme.' Les fins de toute communauté-sujet, de tout organicisme, et de tout 'rousseauisme.' Mais dans le même temps, la condition commune se présente de toutes parts, plus manifeste que jamais, et plus dénudée.
(53)

Community is both impossible on account of the absence of communal feelings and more relevant than ever in a world that exposes its subjects and puts them in greater contact with one another. This is especially important when considering postmodern novels that combine a patchwork of literary traditions from the past. Many novels, including several of the ones under consideration here, are composite formations of satires or pastiches of more sentimental and nostalgic accounts of past social structures, traditions, values, etc. As a result, inside the novel itself, time is difficult to represent in a unilinear fashion, and community, whether it lies in the past or the present, cannot be excluded from the entire novel.

It is difficult to contain community inside a single timeframe because it does not apply to a single period in history, but also because the concept itself gets redefined with each new development. There are ongoing discussions in philosophy, sociology, anthropology, political science, etc. around the definition of community in each context. I have chosen to base my inquiries in this study on an understanding of community informed by the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy's, essays and articles and on the greater philosophical community to which he belongs. Community, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, is an ongoing process of formation of space or *spacing*, as he calls it, in which beings emerge through movement, encounters with others, and through the exposure of their limits to one another. It can be reduced neither to a collection of distinct individuals nor to an essentialized

communal whole, which would lead to forms of totalitarian regimes such as those that appeared during the first half of the 20th- century. It is also not a concept that can be used to organize society or to correct the problems that are present in it today. Community does not operate outside of the process of its own formation and the formation of the beings inside it. Ultimately, and for reasons that are justified again and again throughout his essays, Nancy's definition of community is difficult to grasp and is never presented in any exhaustive or complete manner. Community is always already lost and yet to come and in this way it escapes any definitive articulation. In his most influential essay on community, *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, Nancy provides myriad examples of the collapse of communities in history:

La communauté perdue, ou rompue, peut être exemplifiée de toutes sortes de manières, dans toutes sortes de paradigmes : famille naturelle, cité athénienne, république romaine, première communauté chrétienne, corporations, communes ou fraternités – toujours, il est question d'un âge perdu où la communauté se tissait de liens étroits, harmonieux et infrangibles, et se donnait surtout à elle-même, dans ses institutions, dans ses rites et dans ses symboles, la représentation, voire l'offrande vivante de sa propre unité, de son intimité et de son autonomie immanentes. (30)

He combines simple examples of contemporary social structures (nuclear family) with the collapse of some of the first traceable forms of human civilization. By placing these events alongside one another, without attempting to impose hierarchy or chronology on them, Nancy demonstrates that the longing for the lost community is universal and timeless. Each period in history mourns the loss of an idea of unity or totality that is gone and no longer possible in the present. The result is that the community, which is never fully achieved, is also only understood through this

sense of loss, not as one that motivates us to retrieve it, but as one that forces us to consider it outside of the possibility of its completion and full realization. The French philosopher provides only examples of the lost community and as a result community appears as always already interrupted and displaced and therefore without origin and without possible return to a state of completeness.⁴ In addition, Nancy's prolific presentations of community give the concept a plurality that prevents it from excluding any kinds of beings or manifestations during any time period. In the preface to the English translation, Nancy writes: "The community that becomes a *single* thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader...) necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being."⁵ In its refusal to be reduced to a single concept and to be applied to anything other than itself, the Nancian community best fits a literary period also defined by its resistance to definition, the erosion of its categories of identity, and the collapse of dichotomous notions of in/out, I/other, singular/collective, etc.

⁴ Nancy reaches this conclusion shortly after the passages quoted above: "Mais c'est ici qu'il faut soupçonner la conscience rétrospective de la perte de la communauté et de son identité (que cette conscience se conçoive comme effectivement rétrospective, ou que, insoucieuse des réalités du passé, elle en construise des images pour le compte d'un idéal ou d'une prospective). Il faut soupçonner cette conscience, d'abord parce qu'elle semble bien accompagner l'Occident depuis ses débuts : à chaque moment de son histoire, il s'est déjà livré à la nostalgie d'une communauté plus archaïque, et disparue, à la déploration d'une familialité, d'une fraternité, d'une convivialité perdues." (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*, 30)

⁵ *The Inoperative Community*. Trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Micheal Holland, and Simona Swahney. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1991. xxxix.

The argument proposed here focuses on narrative as a literary genre that offers a space in which characters, places, and languages can come into contact with one another and participate in the formation of one another. The novels under consideration here shift their focus from the single protagonist or hero onto interactions and relationships between multitudes of beings. In coming into contact with one another, beings in these novels engage in processes of co-determination and shape one another mutually. In an ever-expanding world with lines of delineation that constantly shift, it is difficult to establish the limits, the beginning and the end of each space. More significantly, it is impossible to rely on a single authoritative voice to articulate the shape of a given space and of the world itself. Therefore to 'read' the world as a community, as something in a constant state of formation, passing over its own limits, exposing itself to all that it encounters, is a way of holding off from using inadequate tools of measurement. In order to recognize the formations of communities in contemporary literature and to witness the beings and world that emerge from them, it is important to fully grasp the concept of community put forth by Jean-Luc Nancy and the ways in which it differs from other articulations of community. Nancy devotes two of his most important essays to developing the process of the community (*La Communauté Désœuvrée* and *Etre Singulier Pluriel*) and yet he is still not satisfied with the development he gives to it. He considers the reaction of other philosophers such as Derrida⁶ and Blanchot

⁶ Derrida refuses to use the terms "community" without also negating it by putting in quotation marks or directly quoting from Maurice Blanchot's texts on community. In *Politiques de l'Amitié* (1994), he prefers the term "fraternity" and "friendship" over "community." Nancy mentions Derrida in the interview for *Télérama* that

and to this day he continues to write and to reflect on the risks and errors inherent in a term such as community. His struggle with 'community' reveals one of its most critical aspects, its ungraspability on account of its fluid nature and, as we will see, its resistance to a foundational definition, which according to Nancy, can be totalitarian and contain risks of its own.

While Jean-Luc Nancy argues that the concept of community cannot be reduced to the breakdown of an old system or the promise of a brighter future, he does recognize a change in the politics of language and in the organization of social and political action that increases the relevancy of an understanding of community in the second half of the 20th-century. The political context of liberation during the 1960s in Europe and in the United States lends itself particularly well to this process by insisting on the "spontaneous" formations and expressions that are generated without plan or project. We may examine, in a general way, the political and historical context, as described by theorists, including Maurice Blanchot, writing about this phenomenon. Communism, as they knew it, no longer occupies the position it held immediately after the Second World War, and although Nancy insists on the importance of the communist exigency, collective action and communitarian living are free from any defining system. In his chapter on "Mai 68," Blanchot writes:

"Sans projet": c'était là le trait, à la fois angoissant et fortuné, d'une forme de société incomparable qui ne se laissait pas saisir, qui n'était pas appelée à subsister, à s'installer, fût-ce à travers les multiples « comités » par lesquels se simulait un ordre-désordonné, une spécialisation imprécise. Contrairement aux « révolutions traditionnelles », il ne s'agissait pas de seulement prendre le pouvoir pour le remplacer par un autre, ni de perdre la Bastille, le Palais

appears below, as one of the philosophers that he is has been responding to over the years in his articles about community and about being singular plural.

d'hiver, l'Elysée ou l'Assemblée nationale, objectifs sans importance, et pas même de renverser un ancien monde, mais de laisser se manifester, en dehors de tout intérêt utilitaire, une possibilité *d'être ensemble* qui rendrait à tous le droit à l'égalité dans la fraternité par la *liberté de parole* qui soulevait chacun. (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*. 52)

The period that drew students and factory workers together in France was different from other historical moments of upheaval and revolt in that its aim was not to negate the figures in place nor to seize power, but to engender a moment of “disordered order” from which anything could emerge without definition, articulation, and most importantly, without teleology. There is an increase in relationality, which Blanchot describes as an “anonymous and impersonal fraternal movement” in which none of the encounters that occurred were, according to the author, geared towards a specific goal, nor were they based on individual characteristics in a given person. The relations that were formed during this period are crucial to our understanding of the Nancian community in that they offer instances in which it is possible to focus purely on the moment of relation, on the “with” of “being-with the other” rather than on either side of the relationship. Nancy puts forward the space or spacing “in-between” the “I” and the “other” or “others” as the *locus* for relationality where community can happen without being defined by one side or the other. In order to speak about this “in-between” without polarizing, Nancy introduces the notion of ‘compearance,’ which situates the “I” and the “you” on the same temporal line and at equidistance from the “we” situated in the middle. Compearance is the appearance of the “we” or the “singular plural,” which is central to Nancy’s reflections on community and constitutes the main form of existence that

we will focus on here. To speak of *compearance* in this context lets us consider the singular plural being without introducing political hierarchy between the singular, the primary individual, and the plurality, or the encounter with the other. The singular plural being is always already in relation with the other and always already plural.

The difficulty inherent in the development of the notion of community, which is expressed in what Nancy later refers to as “le reproche de Blanchot,” can be seen specifically in the dissension between the two theorists. Blanchot’s *La Communauté Inavouable* was written in response to Nancy’s article titled “La Communauté Désœuvrée” and the main claim the author makes against Nancy is that the latter attempts to constitute a kind of negative truth or impossible subject of the community, and thus, in a way, he re-essentializes the subject and the community. Special attention must be given to the effort to avoid hypostasis, or the re-essentialization of something that exists insofar as it cannot be essentialized. Blanchot writes:

Je passe quelques phrases pourtant essentielles, et j’en viens à cette affirmation qui est, pour moi, la plus décisive: « Si la communauté est révélée par la mort d’autrui, c’est que la mort est elle-même la véritable communauté des êtres mortels: leur communion impossible. La communauté occupe donc cette place singulière: elle assume l’impossibilité de sa propre immanence, l’impossibilité d’un être communautaire comme sujet. La communauté assume et inscrit en quelque sorte l’impossibilité de la communauté... Une communauté est la présentation à ses « membres » de leur vérité mortelle (autant dire qu’il n’y a pas de communauté d’êtres immortels...). Elle est la présentation de la finitude et de l’excès sans retour qui fonde l’être-fini... (*La Communauté Inavouable*, 24)

Blanchot, quoting Nancy in this passage, insists particularly on the last sentence and more specifically, I believe, on the term, “fonde” (found) which assigns to the community, even in its negative presence and exposure of its own finitude and that of its “members,” the ability to found, or to essentialize the finite being. Blanchot also takes a stand against the role Nancy assigns to death as an experience of exposure that reveals the subject or opens it up to others, enabling it to become aware of its own finitude. The problem is that community would therefore become instrumental, as would death and the subject, or being. Nancy responds to this reproach in another work titled *Etre Singulier Pluriel*, in which he acknowledges Blanchot’s critique, and decides to place himself, not on the side of the lacking subject governed by the “principe d’insuffisance” that seeks to regain what it has lost, but purely in the relationality between beings alongside one another in an experience of finitude.

But Nancy’s struggle to let go of any aim or teleology in his concept of community continues even beyond the response he provides to Blanchot in *Etre Singulier Pluriel*. In an interview for *Télérama* with Juliette Cerf that took place on July 14, 2012, the philosopher explains again the problems surrounding the concept of community:

Le singulier pluriel, ça m’est venu à partir de la difficulté que j’avais eue à manier le mot de communauté, dès *La Communauté Désœuvrée*. Ce terme heurtait Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe et tous ceux qui, avant la lettre, percevaient dans la communauté le risque de communautarisme. Le singulier pluriel, c’était une façon d’éviter les pièges de la communauté. En latin, singulier ne se dit qu’au pluriel: *singulis* n’existe pas, c’est *singuli* qui signifie “un par un”. C’est la manière juste pour moi d’exprimer ce qui se joue dans l’être en commun.

The trap inherent in community, according to the philosophers that Nancy refers to, is communitarianism, or in other words, a social model that alters the rights of the individual by putting the group or State first. Mainly the problem lies in the term “community” since Nancy is not describing a change in the status of the individual but rather the process by which a being who does not exist outside of community, comes into existence by repeatedly coming into contact with the other. He had already pointed to some of these issues in a previous interview in which he insisted that the question of community is first and foremost an ontological one that does not propose a particular political program: “Mon propre déplacement d’abord pour me rendre compte de ce que j’ai dit sur la politique et aussi plusieurs fois pour insister qu’il s’agissait là d’ontologie et pas directement de politique, car quelle est la politique de la communauté désœuvrée?”⁷ “Inoperable” is the key term and Nancy insists in numerous instances that by not operating outside of itself, community is able to avoid playing a foundational role and thereby resist any kind of totalitarian effects on the beings that exist inside it. Maurice Blanchot also articulates this clearly: “A la différence d’une cellule sociale, elle [la communauté] s’interdit de faire œuvre, et n’a pour fin aucune valeur de production” (*La Communauté Inavouable*, 24). So that a community can never become a social unit capable of operating outside of itself, its formation, even in the articulation it receives, must be interrupted, imperfect, and incomplete. Maurice Blanchot argues that any articulation of the community or mention of it inside is itself foundational and so he

⁷ *Spirale* No. 207. March-April 2006.

speaks of the unavowable community as a process that takes place but that cannot be defined in any definitive manner.

Jean-Luc Nancy is receptive to Blanchot's responses to his work and his reaction calls attention to the fact that they themselves are engaged in the process of formation of a community of philosophical inquiry. In responding to Nancy's articulation of community in a way that often reveals qualms and disagreements, Blanchot especially is able to interrupt any attempt at a final definition outside of the theoretical essay itself. It becomes clear that if Nancy responds so persistently, from the publication of *La Communauté Désœuvrée* in 1986 to his most recent interview in 2012, it is because these repeated utterances, slight changes, and additions⁸ are integral parts of the ongoing process of bringing the concept of community into being. Nancy devotes an entire essay to this problem in which he demonstrates that the need to return to the question of community or to being-alongside-the-other is in fact an articulation of the community itself:

Car si le « commun » est l'« avec », l'« avec » désigne l'espace sans toute-puissance et sans toute-présence. Dans l'« avec », il ne peut y avoir que des forces qui s'affrontent en raison de leur jeu mutuel et

⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy calls refers to this as "écho, une résonance et une réplique, une réserve, voire à quelque égard un reproche." (*La Communauté Affrontée*. Paris: Galilée. 2001. 38). We recognize the term "resonance" from Gilles Deleuze's articulation of the happenings of thought and the representation of thought: "Thus philosophy, art, and science come into relations of mutual *resonance* and exchange, but always for internal reasons. The way they impinge on one another depends on their own evolution. So in this sense we really have to see philosophy, art, and science as sorts of separate melodic lines in constant interplay with one another." (Italics mine) (*Negotiations*. Gilles Deleuze. New York: Columbia University Press. 1997. 125). In this collection of essays, Deleuze demonstrates that the truth value of any given idea or perception cannot be given in a single articulation. It is a process of give and take, a matter of listening to harsh critics, revising, and reediting. Every repetition is a resonance with a center towards which one aspires to go, but at which one never arrives.

des présences qui s'écartent en raison de ce qu'elles ont toujours à devenir autre chose que des pures présences (objets donnés, sujets confortés dans leurs certitudes, monde de l'inertie et de l'entropie). (*La Communauté Affrontée*, 18)

The "common" or "being-with" takes place inside community insofar as the community is the space that is formed through the process of these forces confronting one another. The "common" never becomes a full presence or a full force because it is always interrupted and exposed by the others who hit up against it.

Nancy's community is therefore always polyphonic in that no single speaker has the authority or the ability to found the nature of community through articulation. The process is necessarily plural and the object itself sustains that plurality within it, insofar as it is possible to conceive of an inside and an outside of community. Plurality is the condition for the existence of community but plurality inside community resists being essentialized in that it is apparent only in the moment of exposure or encounter with the other. Therefore the differences that maintain separation between beings are not sustained categories of identity or a stable set of characteristics that make plurality possible, but rather contours and lines of separation that get traced at the same time as they disappear again. Fusion between beings would lead to the loss of relationality and the end of plurality, which would prevent any formation inside community. Another member of the discussion on community is the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who participates by giving shape to internal differences in community and providing an astute illustration of the possibility of both maintaining and overcoming differences.

Agamben begins his essay titled *The Coming Community* with this sentence: “The coming being is whatever being.” And he adds: “In the Scholastic enumeration of transcendentals (*quodlibet ense est unum, verum, bonum seu perfectum* – whatever entity is one, true, good, or perfect), the term that, remaining unthought in each, conditions the meaning of all the others is the adjective *quodlibet*.”⁹ He specifies that while this adjective is often translated as “whatever” it does not mean that the epithet (“true, good, or perfect”) does not matter but, rather, that it always matters. This is very clear in the second paragraph: “The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such as it is*.” In articulating this dilemma in this manner, Agamben is suggesting that the being inside the coming community is not one without characteristics that are specific to it, it does not have to shed these differences in order to be part of the community, but that being the way that it is does not essentialize it or remove it from the ongoing process of formation of which it is a part. Put more simply, Agamben argues that in order to be and even to be a part of something, it is not necessary to lose self-differentiation (that which is ineffable), but that that difference does not matter. On the next page he writes: “The singularity exposed as such is whatever you want, that is, lovable.” Although differences are revealed at each encounter with the other, they are not cause for exclusion or inclusion. In the last paragraph, Agamben states this more plainly: “The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is.” What becomes clear here is that the

⁹ *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1993 (Part 1 “Whatever,” no page numbers).

particular traits are not as important as the being's condition of belonging. The singularity of being is not defined by its predicates, rather it resides in its exposure to an unconditional belonging. The fact that the singularity is lovable no matter its differences indicates that the singularity always already belongs to the community.

By placing emphasis on the bond that exists between beings as the condition for their existence, Agamben manages to refrain from essentializing the community. Here, it does not matter what the community is made of or how it is articulated, what matters is the act of belonging to it. Focusing on the lovability of singularity in this case also removes the issue of teleology or operability in community. There is no aim beyond simply being in the moment of love, being connected to, and belonging to the community. To be both different and indifferent to that difference is to be singular plural in a Nancian sense, meaning that plurality or difference are only the condition for existence not the object of existence itself. This does not mean that community is empty but that it does not matter what it is made of as long as the process of mutual exposure occurs thanks to the plurality of the beings engaged in the process of forming community and themselves. Another Italian philosopher, Robert Esposito, also partakes in the discussion around the notion of community in his essay titled *Communitas*, written in 1998. He acknowledges his debt to Jean-Luc Nancy and sets up the dialectic between the individual and the community. Much like Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben, Esposito denounces the possibility of thinking of community as a property, meaning as a substance in and of itself that can be added to the subject or that subjects can add themselves to. After undertaking an etymological study of the word community, which explains why he opts for the term

communitas, he argues that beings are indeed dependent on the condition of their belonging to *communitas*, but that, contrary to Agamben, it is not by way of love or by virtue of a quality, but on account of a debt, a lack, an obligation that the being has to the community. Esposito draws his understanding of the relationality between beings from Heidegger, as does Nancy, and his insistence on the “with” as the condition for existence at first places him very close to Nancy’s own articulation of community:

Against this temptation for fusion and therefore for the sacrifice of the one or of the other (which paradoxically the philosophy of alterity arrives at), Heidegger refers to the originally singular and plural character of a shared existence, which is properly ecstatic: each opens to all, not despite of but inasmuch as single, the contrary of the individual. The other cannot be brought near, nor can it be absorbed or incorporated by the one, or vice versa, because the other is already with the one given, on account of the fact that there is no one without the other. In this case a ‘we’ cannot even be spoken of that isn’t always a ‘we-others.’ For Heidegger this means beginning not with ‘me’ or with ‘not-me,’ but with *cum*, with ‘with’: we are together with others not as elements that at a certain point come together, nor in the mode of a totality that is subdivided, but in that of always being-the-ones-with-the-others and the-ones-of-the-others. (94)

It is important to consider this entire passage because it demonstrates the degree to which Nancy and Esposito have a shared background for their philosophy of community and that they understand it in an identical way. This is particularly interesting when considered alongside the radical difference that exists between their subsequent developments of community. As we have seen, Nancy struggles with the risk of essentializing the subject and of, as Blanchot has claimed, rendering the community operable by making it so specifically inoperable. Esposito, on the other hand, unequivocally claims that community is nothing (not in the sense of no

thing or as with the French *rien* (nothing) derived from the Latin *res*, which means thing), rather it is a negative space, a lack, or an absence. He writes: "Community appears to be definable only on the basis of the lack that characterizes it. It is *nothing other* than what history has negated, the nonhistoric backdrop from which history originates in the form of necessary betrayal." (26) And he adds:

In the community, the subjects do not find a principle of identification nor an aseptic enclosure within which they can establish transparent communication or even a content to be communicated. They don't find anything else except that void, that distance, that extraneousness that constitutes them as being missing from themselves. [...] (7)

There are points of consensus here insofar as Esposito argues that the community is inoperable in that it cannot be anything other than what it is, and he avoids essentializing the community by demonstrating that it is not a graspable substance by way of which individuals come to recognize one another and to unite. However, instead of viewing the community as an ongoing process that generates at the same time as it disrupts beings and space, Esposito claims that community takes away from the beings that are a part of it, it subjects them to its power by making them beholden to it. Community, as understood by Esposito, is not the condition of being (Nancy and Agamben) but a state of obligation that the individual must overcome in order to once again be free:

Modern individuals truly become that, the perfectly individual, the 'absolute' individual, bordered in such a way that they are isolated and protected, but only if they are freed in advance from the 'debt' that binds them one to the other: if they are released from, exonerated, or relieved of that contact, which threatens their identity,

exposing them to possible conflict with their neighbor, exposing them to the contagion of the relation with others. (13)¹⁰

The actual possibility of being freed from debt is challenged again and again as Esposito presents historical cases in which the negative bond with community was inescapable and damning. There is nothing inside community but the devastation of meaning and the loss of any reference to the transcendental. However, Esposito does not paint an entirely negative picture of community in that he is able to recognize that thanks to the bond established by debt and the complete loss of meaning, beings and the world are free to be simply themselves, as long as these selves are thought of only as non-selves.¹¹

Without generalizing to too great an extent it is possible to conclude, based on perceptions of community this far, that Nancy, Blanchot, Agamben, and even Esposito do come together in their understanding of community as a process that is never absolute, nor substantial, and that interrupts itself at the same time as it

¹⁰ Here Esposito references the “fear of touching” in Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1960). This reference points to another opposition between Esposito and Nancy that becomes clear in a passage on touching: “It is the plural singularity of the Being of being. We reach it to the extent that we are in touch with ourselves and in touch with the rest of beings. We are in touch with ourselves insofar as we exist. Being in touch with ourselves is what makes us “us,” and there is no other secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the ‘with’ of coexistence.” in *Being Singular Plural*. California: Stanford California Press. Translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne. 2000. 13. Touching is at the heart of the process of exposure of beings to one another and therefore it is the gesture that marks the moment of mutual formation.

¹¹ Esposito writes in the appendix: “One might observe that from a certain point of view it is the absence of community (and even more the desert of community) that indicates the demand for lacking; as a void that never asks to be filled with new or ancient myths but rather is to be reinterpreted in the light of its own ‘non.’” (*Communitas*, 149).

forms itself. They agree that community has no established connection to transcendental meaning and does not rest on a solid foundation. It is a movement of constant returns, reiterations, repetitions, and echoes that, in the instance of their encounter with one another, come to expose themselves in order to come into existence, and then to disappear again. The disparity that emerges between these presentations lies mainly in the difficulty in speaking about a process so fleeting and resistant to definition. As we have seen, Nancy has spent over thirty years revising, altering, and rephrasing his presentation of community, Agamben, somewhat safely, focuses on the positive bonds that bring beings together and Esposito opts for the prefix “non” in order to discuss the contents of community without having to take them as contents. This is, of course, only a very schematic summary of the complex essays under consideration here, but it does reveal the danger inherent in the main task at hand: to find communities in literature and therefore to give them temporary definition and substance is to run the risk of essentializing them and of going against the values Nancy attributes to them. The one theorist whose work I have not mentioned in the summaries above is the one who shares his own attempts to read community alongside literature, Maurice Blanchot in *La Communauté Inavouable*. Blanchot devotes half of this essay to Marguerite Duras’ *La Maladie de la Mort* at the same time as he responds to Nancy’s article on the inoperability of community. In other words he uses community to read literature while denouncing Nancy’s tendency to render community operable. The way in which he understands community inside Duras’ novella is critical, however, in distinguishing between using community for something other than itself and simply becoming witness to its

formation and letting it come into existence as such. Blanchot opts strictly for the latter and in doing so he develops a new way of approaching literature that makes it possible to read without forcing literature to mean something other than itself, to organize itself according to external concepts, and to be at the service of a purpose outside of itself. At the very end of his essay, Blanchot quotes Wittgenstein, “Ce dont on ne peut parler, il *faut* le taire,”¹² but argues that even in order to say that nothing can be said it is necessary to speak. The reading he provides of *La Maladie de la Mort* is made up of a series of recognitions of instances of community formation and the subsequent interruption of these formations. He does not attempt to assign greater meaning to the novella other than the fact that it becomes a platform for immanence through community. Blanchot brings his essay to an end by giving others the responsibility of deciding what words can be said that will neither render the community operable or purely inoperable. Even after producing one hundred pages of words he claims that he cannot be the one to decide which words can be used and therefore he speaks in order to silence himself and writes only so that he can interrupt himself and end his essay.

Nancy echoes this approach to reading communities in literature in his chapter titled “Myth Interrompu” in *La Communauté Désœuvrée* in which he insists on the importance of relinquishing the attempt to understand the world through the authority of concepts and the need to become simple witnesses to the formations of community. In order to be able to speak and to let literature speak without letting

¹² *La Communauté Inavouable*. 92

either side arrive at a totalitarian definition of the matter at hand, everything must always be interrupted:

Certes, un tel courage existe – mais le courage de l'interruption consiste plutôt à oser se taire, ou bien, pour le dire de manière moins sommaire, il consiste à *laisser se dire* quelque chose que personne – aucun individu, aucun porte-parole – ne pourrait dire : une voix qui ne pourrait être la voix d'aucun sujet, une parole qui ne pourrait être la sentence d'aucune intelligence, et qui est seulement la voix et la pensée de la communauté dans l'interruption du mythe. A la fois, une voix interrompue, et l'interruption, sans voix, de toute voix générale ou particulière. (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*, 196)

This brings into question the role of the critic and literary scholar in that in producing commentary on a text, one is in fact speaking for it and claiming that it does or is something other than what it is. The phrase in italics that Nancy writes, “*laisser se dire*” proposes a different way of commenting on literature that turns the critic into a platform on which literature can say itself, produce itself, and, through community, become itself. To “let” something say itself means to relinquish the responsibility of speaking for the subject or matter at hand, which in turn means letting go of the terms and concepts that serve as tools or language for speaking for the other. The literary scholar recognizes in the novel the space in which community can be formed, witnesses the phases of its formation and the instances in which this formation is interrupted, always before becoming complete.

Since Nancy does not provide readings of literary texts in his development of community, it is necessary to determine the possibility of adopting community as a literary device and to provide a greater critical context in which it finds its place. Nancy refers to myth as the *panta, pléré théôn*, or “all things full of gods,” the complete, uninterrupted and perfect story of an undivided world. Myth is the

totality, the perfect and complete world, and literature is both that which interrupts it and that which is generated at the moment of interruption of the myth. He writes:

A cet égard, la littérature qui a correspondu à la grande interruption moderne des mythes a immédiatement engendré son propre mythe. Mais c'est ce mythe, désormais, qui s'interrompt à son tour. Et l'interruption révèle que c'est parce qu'il y a communauté qu'il y a de la littérature: la littérature inscrit l'être-en-commun, l'être pour autrui et par autrui. Elle nous inscrit exposés les uns aux autres, et à nos morts respectives par lesquelles nous nous atteignons – à la limite – mutuellement. S'atteindre – à la limite – n'est pas communier, qui est accéder à un autre corps, total, où tous se fondent. Mais s'atteindre, se toucher, c'est toucher la limite où l'être lui-même, l'être-en-commun, nous dérobe les uns aux autres, en nous retirant de l'autre devant l'autre, nous expose à lui. (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*, 165-166)

Literature produces its own myth and interrupts it before it becomes whole, total or "full of gods," it forms a space in which beings can come together, but it interrupts itself before they fuse together to form a single, greater whole. Literature and community generate one another but remain inoperable in that they interrupt themselves before acquiring autonomy. In this sense, Nancy's notion of literature reveals similarities with the role Georg Lukács gives the novel in his *Theory of the Novel*. There has been a split, a rupture, or an interruption and the world that was once an all-encompassing unit inhabited both by man and gods, was torn apart. Literature comes about at the time of that interruption and plays an active role. He famously writes: "The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel hero's psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality."¹³ The

¹³ *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 1971. 88.

novel is the space in which the broken parts of a shattered world that is no longer “inhabited by gods” can come into contact with one another and be mutually formed by one another.¹⁴ In this sense, Lukàcs and Nancy present similar views on the singular activity of the novel. Lukàcs speaks of the “transcendental homelessness” that pervades the modern novel and explains that characters are to become seekers searching for their lost home, the one that they knew to be everywhere when the world was one, and that is now nowhere to be found. He argues that most novels adopt, in full awareness or not, a biographical form that makes space for the subject’s quest to return to a form of totality that is lost. This is where Lukàcs and Nancy differ greatly in that although Nancy recognizes totality inside myth, he argues specifically that literature and community do not seek to retrieve lost totality in any way.¹⁵ Lukàcs, on the other hand, argues that it is possible to retrieve totality and it is the drive or operation of the novel: “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality”

¹⁴ Lukàcs writes: “But as the objective world breaks down, so the subject, too, becomes a fragment; only the ‘I’ continues to exist, but its existence is then lost in the insubstantiality of its self-created world of ruins. Such subjectivity wants to give form to everything, and precisely for this reason succeeds only in mirroring a segment of the world. (53) And later he describes this co-dependency: “The contingent world and the problematic individual are realities which mutually determine one another” (78).

¹⁵ In fact, as we have seen, they interrupt any formation that may arrive at a state of wholeness or totality, which would perhaps lead to forms of totalitarian regimes but would also, even more importantly, annihilate beings and their worlds that need to retain their plurality in order to exist.

(56). Not only is totality available in the novel,¹⁶ the novel can be justified only when it provides a glimpse of it: "The immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero's finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer, and that this glimpse is the only thing worth the commitment of an entire life, the only thing by which the struggle will have been justified."¹⁷ In Nancian terms, Lukàcs argues that the novel is operable and cannot simply be *as such*, it will not be successful in its attempt to reunite the world with the gods and have a single, unified, universe, but its function is to try to do so. The comparison between two philosophers that speak of the lost community and the rupture or separation that affected the world we live in, calls attention to the specificity of Nancy's claim that an actual return to totality would signify the end instead of the aim of literature. Lukàcs goes on further to call the individual in the novel a "mere instrument" used to "reveal a certain problematic of life." Nancy insists on interrupting any kind of project and Lukàcs insists on enlisting the novel and the subject in the all-important task of returning meaning to the world.¹⁸

¹⁶ Lukàcs conceives of the novel as the form that contains within it, in the movement and process it offers, a possible glimpse of lost totality, a brief return to it somewhere between its end and its beginning. He writes: "The novel comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of one who must create an entire world through his experience and who must maintain that world in equilibrium – heights which no epic individual, not even Dante's, could reach, because the epic individual owed his significance to the grace accorded him, not to his pure individuality." (83)

¹⁷ 80.

¹⁸ In *La Communauté Inavouable*, Maurice Blanchot insists further on the impossibility of reaching satisfaction, even in the event of fusion. He quotes Georges Bataille and comments on the issue of the principle of incompleteness: "A la base de chaque être, il existe un principe d'insuffisance...(principe d'incomplétude). C'est un

The distinction between Lukàcs and Nancy informs this approach to literature that focuses on works that are affected by changes in the world and in the subject due to globalization and a crisis in subjectivity. Concepts and distinctions such as subject/object, national/domestic, inside/outside, I/other, etc. have been challenged for over sixty years and can no longer be used without editorial assistance and contextualization. In an increasingly global world, the ability to track migratory paths, to identify a place of origin or to maintain separation between languages, is not only a colossal task but perhaps one that should not even be undertaken. Community calls attention to the inadequacy of the categories of identity used up until now. Literature's sole operation, according to Nancy, is to communicate and the only way it communicates is by exposing beings to one another and to their limits. Each literary work and act of writing creates a community, which becomes a space or spacing for the formation of beings and of the world in which and by which they exist. I base my approach to the novels under

principe, notons-le bien, cela qui commande et ordonne la possibilité d'un être. D'où il résulte que ce manque par principe ne va pas de pair avec une nécessité de complétude" (15). He also argues that it is necessary to remain in an ongoing state of deprivation:

C'est comme si se pressaient au portillon des pensées qui ne peuvent être pensées qu'ensemble, alors que leur multitude en empêche le passage. L'autre cherche, non pas à être reconnu, mais à être contesté : il va, pour exister, vers l'autre qui le conteste et parfois le nie, afin qu'il ne commence d'être que dans cette privation qui le rend conscient (c'est là l'origine de sa conscience) de l'impossibilité d'être lui-même, d'insister comme *ipse* ou, si l'on veut, comme individu séparé : ainsi peut-être ex-istera-t-il, s'éprouvant comme extériorité toujours préalable, ou comme existence de part en part éclatée, ne se composant que comme se décomposant constamment, violemment et silencieusement. (*La communauté inavouable*, 16)

consideration here on Nancy's perception of writing as that which brings space and beings to the limit, exposes them to one another, lets them come into existence, and then retreat, dissolve, and become something else. All that exists, exists only inside relationality, only alongside the other, and is therefore not organized according to concepts and categories of identity. In this study, I develop a new approach to reading world literature not as the comparison of literatures from "integrated civilizations"¹⁹ but as the witnessing of formations of communities of spaces and beings that expose themselves to the limits of one another. In this sense, borders, languages, places, and people shape one another mutually as they come into contact with one another. The novels I consider are inherently plural and contain multiple languages, countries, origins, and destinations and they lend themselves particularly well to repeated instances of relationality and mutual definitions of their parts. They resist attempts to assign meaning once and for all to the formations that take place in them and interrupt themselves before generating new and fully formed beings. These novels shift the attention away from traditional paradigms such as national borders, linguistic differences, and differences between species, and blur their lines of delineation.²⁰ The result is that limits gets formed only through mutual exposure,

¹⁹ Term used by Lukàcs.

²⁰ The call to move beyond the national border as an indicator of a field of study or even as the indicator of a limit is, of course, not new. In an article titled "World Literature and Global Theory: Comparative Literature for the New Millennium" (*Symploke* 9.1-2 (2001) 15-24), Vilashini Cooppan quotes from Erich Auerbach's article titled "Philology and *Weltliteratur*." Trans. Edward Said and Marie Said. *The Centennial Review* 13 (1969):1-17. As the author demonstrates, Auerbach calls for a new *Weltliteratur* "one animated by a different understanding of history and historical method and therefore able to articulate the fateful coalescence of cultures for those people who are in the midst of the terminal phase of fruitful multiplicity"

they are not where we expect them, and the task at hand is to recognize the moment of mutual formation and to witness that which is generated at that moment. Concretely, this means that prior to the encounter with the other, a being or space has no meaning; it is in 'hitting' up against the other that the contours of the self or of the space or language, can begin to form, for a moment, before they are interrupted again.

Each novel is a process of mutual definition and although the traditional categories of identity still find representation, they are no longer capable of capturing the entirety of what there is, without acknowledging the plurality of other categories alongside themselves. This does not mean that we should do away with these categories of identity, rather that they cannot come into existence, nor acquire essence, without appearing alongside one another. Therefore, rather than to focus primarily on each category, I focus on the relationship between them, defining each one only as it appears alongside the other.²¹ Each chapter examines the fluid limits that exist as *loci* for exposure and as opportunities to come into existence. In novels that rely on encounters as the means for immanence, movement and circulation are everywhere. There is a great emphasis on international travel, departures and

(6-7). And "The more our earth grows closer together, the more must historicist synthesis balance the contraction by expanding its activity... our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation" (23).

²¹ Nancy states this clearly in *Being Singular Plural*: "Being is put into play as the 'with' that is absolutely indisputable. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this 'between'." And further: "The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others, which means, in every sense, understanding other through 'me' and understanding 'me' through other, the understanding of one another." (27)

arrivals, and on experiences with the new and unknown. These novels are overpopulated and subjects are forced to live among others or to attempt in vain to escape the city, the subway, the packed trains and cars. Thanks to these characteristics the novels are able to form spaces for the emergence of beings and their worlds. The first chapter of my dissertation, "Letting Go in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," argues that in responding to the absence of the individual authoritative Subject, novels become a space for the mutual determination of components such as characters and space. Ishiguro opts for characters that cannot rely on traditional means of identity. They do not have families, nor do they live in any particular geographic location, they have forgotten their past, and they are unable to determine a future for themselves. Ishiguro takes this further in *Never Let Me Go* in which he deprives his characters, clones of citizens of a town in England, of their own inherent genetic make-up. The possibility of identity therefore moves away from the subject and onto the relationships it has with representations of itself and with others. Here, writing must find ways to accommodate the fluidity of beings determined not by their own genetic make-up or origin, but by their position alongside others.

The second chapter, "Spatial Representation Through Interactions in Houellebecq's *La Carte et le Territoire*," addresses the limits of mapping and staking out private space in postmodern literature. Maps in this novel are considered independent works of art, deprived of their ability to represent the land that lies beyond them. The protagonist reproduces them in painting, photography, and collages before he recognizes the necessity to go to the places named in the maps.

The juxtapositioning of representation and object, or map and territory, always fails as each side refuses to contain or to be contained by the other. Each encounter results in a greater development of the map and the territory as incommensurable doubles that somehow continue to need one another. I argue that in depicting failed efforts of representation, Houellebecq's novels dismantle the authority of the concept over the object and render both equal. The map does not dictate the shape and limit of the territory; it only participates in the ongoing process of co-determination. The world becomes the *locus* of such mutual and infinite returns between the map and the territory.

The third chapter, "Conflict in Translation, Nancy Huston's Bilingual Text *Limes/Limbo*," considers various theories of translation by Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and Nancy Huston, and argues that mistranslation, disagreement, and confusion are necessary in order to produce meaning in literary texts. This chapter reads François Lyotard's *Le Différand* as the vexed space between original and translation alongside Huston's texts. There are growing pains inherent in the shaping of national languages in translation, and versions of the same text reject their translated counterparts. Despite the frustration in working in foreign languages, Huston is acutely aware of what she refers to as the "danger of reunification," the threat of annihilation inherent in the collapse of opposing languages. Writing happens at the edge of one language and the other and the conflict and separation between the two is crucial in order to maintain meaning.

The final chapter, "Globalization in the New Maghreb Novel," looks at a francophone novel that has done away with questions of immigration and

integration and entered the globalized world of capitalism and digital communication. Driss C. Jaydane's novel *Le Jour Venu* severs its connection with the ancestral land and imagination and becomes universal, not belonging to any culture or language. Positioning itself in a period after postcolonialism, Jaydane's novel does not consider notions of homeland, ancestry, and kinship, and yet it still searches for another world beyond its own. In doing so it comes into contact with Maghreb culture not as a familiar world left behind but as something new and unknown with which it can interact. This novel does not mourn its homelessness in a globalized era; rather it comes into existence through constant interaction with the only world beyond its own, which turns out to be a more traditional Moroccan culture. Globalization, in this novel, has to look in new places for diversity or for what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the 'immonde,' in order to maintain itself.

CHAPTER 1: LETTING GO IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

In order to trace the formation of communities in contemporary fiction, it is necessary to release the subject from traditional markers of identity such as place of origin, language, family and profession. The British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, originally from Japan, writes novels that do away with these markers by shifting attention away from them and onto the movement or processes that take place inside the narratives between characters and spaces. Ishiguro's novels, of course, still contain countries with names and characters with features that express their identity, but these specificities do not play a defining role and appear in fact, quite often, to be obstacles to other forms of being. Ishiguro provides details in his novels but accompanies them always with the possibility of their erasure or of their loss of meaning. Some novels, such as *The Unconsoled* (1995), take place in foreign countries but both the country and the languages (there are several foreign languages) are not clearly indicated. It is possible in some cases to infer what these languages may be and in which country the novel may be taking place, but the novels do not provide any definitive answers. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) contains characters that are clones and that are unaware of their origins and are therefore undetermined by their family and genetic background. They have no last name, are not permitted to have a profession, they cannot conceive, and eventually even the building in which they spent their youth disappears, leaving them with no markers of identity, other than the ones that come about in the ongoing processes of mutual formation. *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *When We Were Orphans*

(2000) leave out crucial historical and national details, even though they do provide more context than *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro's most famous novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is arguably a period novel, offering a glimpse of life in Britain during the years leading up to the Second World War. However, as we will see here, the author has shared his disbelief on several occasions over the fact that this novel was taken at face value and that the public did not recognize it as the satire he intended it to be. By stripping his novels of their specific historical contexts, their geographical reliefs, and of the names and origin of their characters, Ishiguro is able to change the means of representation. His novels move away from a series of pre-established categories of being, and onto a plane of immanence on which, through interactions, encounters, and mutual exposure, new beings and spaces emerge constantly. Because Ishiguro's novels demonstrate such disinterest in the organizing norms and boundaries that generally define space and being, an approach that looks beyond these limits and focuses on other means of formation is necessary. Tracing the formation of communities inside these novels makes it possible to witness mutual shaping of spaces and beings as they occur in the processes of relationality that govern the structure of these texts. Ishiguro constructs spaces for the formation of community, made possible by the fact that these characters are always in a process of formation, and are never fully determined by the categories of identity that would normally capture their being and establish it once and for all. By insisting on the undoing of traditional markers of identity and spatial delineation in Ishiguro's novels, this chapter will develop an approach to these novels based on the instances of self-formation in relationality. After demonstrating that Ishiguro's novels contain

way of generating meaning that does not rely on difference through names, concepts, dichotomies, and definitions, a close reading of Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* will provide the basis for an approach to literature based on community.

In an interview in 1991, Kazuo Ishiguro argued that "one of the most important jobs of the novelist [is] to actually tackle and rework myths."²² It is a "very valid task to figure out what the myth of the nation is and if [novelists] should actually rework or undermine that myth." Ishiguro is referring to the plethora of stories and figures that compose a nation's history and identity. To articulate the myth of a nation is to assign a place of origin, a distinct shape, and a function through language. This implies that language is capable of supporting such a task and that the nation is such that it may be possible to capture it in its entirety inside language. Myth serves as the foundation for the existence of an event and inscribes it in a larger explanatory system capable of governing all reasons and components of any form of being. Thus, to rework or to undermine the myth is to interrupt it before it arrives at its state of completion and before it can become foundational. The prefix re- offers the possibility of returning to the story of origin and adding another version alongside it, thus dismantling its authority as myth itself. Very much up for this task, Ishiguro opts always for multiplicity when attempting to represent beings and the world in which they evolve. No single version is sufficient and no single utterance can carry the weight of the narrative on its shoulders. In addition, the possibility of recounting the story of a single origin and function is not only abandoned but revealed as the flawed technique he believes sit to be. In his novels

²² *Conversation with Kazuo Ishiguro*. 2008. 74.

there is a multitude of characters with troubled genealogies that are difficult to trace and who live in and come from unnamed or unspecified spaces. If we consider the myth of a nation to be the narrative of that nation's origin, and more importantly, the identity-founding operation by which characters are defined, then to "rework" that myth is to unravel the ontological foundation of identity in representation and to locate existence, instead, alongside a plurality of manifestations of beings, all reworking one another.

Ishiguro's words may seem like the simple premise for a novelist to create new stories and narratives based on the issues at hand in his country. And yet, the terms he uses call attention to the theoretical and philosophical context in which he is writing. Ishiguro's novels have been largely studied and taught in academic settings around the world because of their transnational character (a Japanese author writing in English and living in England), but also because they contain and represent contemporary problems of memory, nationalism and the widespread crisis in subjectivity as well as the construction of personhood. Ishiguro transgresses national boundaries in his writing, taking his characters in and out of England and Japan. He makes each space appear generic, without singular traits and mistakable, always, for somewhere else. In depriving the spaces and beings of any boundaries and norms, Ishiguro both hinders their development as literary subjects and places the task of coming into existence onto their own shoulders. Identity and function are no longer dictated, they are formed through the process of mutual determination.

In his novels, Ishiguro interrupts identity forming narrative and shreds the threads holding the subjects to a specific place of origin or familial position. By refraining from anchoring his subjects in a linear self-history or a coherent genetic past, he lets his subjects and the world they exist in appear *as such*, without teleology and without causality, undetermined by time and space. He removes all links and connections to anything outside his texts and lets all that is in the novels simply be. These tendencies recall the formations of communities presented by the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, who is of particular interest in this inquiry into Ishiguro's will to "rework" and "undermine" a nation's myth. He reveals the myth as the presence of totality and insists, much like Ishiguro, on interrupting it and preventing it from becoming absolute. Myth, according to Jean-Luc Nancy's interpretation of Homer's *muthos*, is a "narrative of origins and an explanation of destinies,"²³ which aims to exhaust the unknown. Nancy states "literature's revelation, unlike myth's, does not reveal a completed reality, or the reality of a completion. It does not reveal in a general way *some thing*—it reveals rather the unrevealable: namely that it is itself, as a work that reveals and gives access to a vision and to the communion of a vision, essentially interrupted."²⁴ By interrupting itself over and over again, literature avoids producing a figure or achieving exemplarity for the subject and remains in a state of permanent process. This way of rendering the myth plural instead of absolute has an immediate effect on the postmodern subject. The Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo discusses these issues

²³ *The Inoperative Community*. Ibid. 48

²⁴ *Idem*. 63

in connection with the crisis in communication on account of the overwhelming presence of mass media and links them to the postmodern subject. In his chapter titled "Myth Rediscovered," after establishing that myth always undergoes demythologization, he states: "if the postmodern subject looks into itself in search of a primary certainty, in place of the security of the Cartesian *cogito*, it finds the intermittencies of the Proustian heart, stories from the media, mythologies evinced by psychoanalysis."²⁵ Thus, to rework the myth in literature is to lift the veil of certainty and to recognize that being lies only in the myriad expressions and manifestations of the self, without function and without cause.

Concretely, in terms of writing, interrupting the myth offers a kind of liberation of the subject and of the world in which it exists. In the novel *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro severs the space in which the narrative unfolds from any specific geographic site or rather, by providing, at times, an abundance of bootless names, all with Germanic resonance²⁶, with none of them able to offer any conclusive evidence regarding the specific location of the events of the narrative. *An Artist of the Floating World* is, similarly, unattached to a defined space and Ishiguro mentions in an interview that he had at first thought of choosing Nagasaki for its location because he knows it well, but that he would then have had to include real historic events, such as the dropping of the atom bomb, and that there was no place for that in the novel. He adds that in the absence of a specific location it is possible to

²⁵ *Transparent Society*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1989. 42.

²⁶ Ishiguro insists that the Germanic resonance of these names occurred to him as an after thought and they could just as well have been French or British sounding. This country is, however, clearly not Germany as its people often express resentment and envy towards Germany for everything that it has while they have to go without.

create any kind of effect and phenomenon freely, and avoid having to adapt narrative to the reality of the chosen location. The author contends that if he were to write a novel that takes place in a real city with real references he would run the risk of being misread: “ By setting [the novel] in an unspecified venue, I could suggest that I’m offering this as a novel about people and their lives, and this is not some piece of documentary writing about a real city.”²⁷ The distinction here between “people and their lives” and any kind of “documentary” work illustrates clearly the author’s move away from writing as an explanatory tool for something outside itself, namely for a specific city in Japan. He insists on generating instances, occurrences, manifestations of life, and not producing any kind of archival representation of an unchanging reality capable of being captured in writing.

Ishiguro’s narratives take place in a space that remains in a constant state of becoming as the author creates and imagines places and historic events and situates them in a time frame that sets itself up again and again to defy any chronological progression.²⁸ He also casts characters that, in many cases, are unattached and without specific history: clones, orphans, protagonists with acute amnesia, and servants who willingly shield their eyes and ears from the world around them. I will argue that by “reworking the myth of a nation,” Ishiguro is able to always be

²⁷ Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, Interview with Gregory Mason, 2008.

²⁸ In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida comments on the term “spacing” as a word that “speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space” (“Part 1: Writing Before the Letter,” 68). Although he is speaking of writing and of the spaces between words such “[a] pause, [a] blank, punctuation, [and] interval in general,” the relationship he establishes between time and space is inherent in the gerund “spacing” used by Jean-Luc Nancy to describe the novel.

engaged in a process, never arrested, never crystallized, and never easy to talk about in definite terms. More specifically, Ishiguro engages with the problems common to writers of the contemporary epoch who face the trial of hypostatic narrative and writing produced within an ontological frame. Kazuo Ishiguro is not reworking a myth in order to create a new one, one for our time, or the myth of an existence within the era of fallen boundaries and globalized spaces, rather, he is interrupting any myth put in place and exposing the only possibility for myth to be: in a state of constant dissolution.²⁹

Although many of these characteristics belong to postmodern narrative, Ishiguro's place in postmodern literature is problematic and the author has, on more than one occasion, been fitted into a category "in-between" modernism and postmodernism, which one critic calls "neomodernism." Brian Richardson argues that there is a renaissance of neomodernism, and he places Ishiguro alongside such authors as Graham Swift and Anita Brookner. He defends this decision by insisting on the absence of any operations carried out by these authors that disrupt the foundational boundaries between "fiction and nonfiction, history and fabrication,

²⁹ For purposes that will become clear in the rest of this chapter, I am considering the "myth" under Jean-Luc Nancy's definition as "une parole pleine, originelle, tantôt révélatrice et tantôt fondatrice de l'être intime d'une communauté. [...] un récit des origines et d'une explication des destins (peu importe, dans cette détermination posthomérique, puis moderne, du 'mythe,' qu'on y croie ou non, qu'on le considère avec méfiance ou non). Cette parole n'est pas un discours qui répondrait à la curiosité d'une intelligence: c'est la réponse à une attente, plus qu'à une question, et à une attente du monde lui-même. Dans le mythe, le monde se fait connaître, et il se fait connaître par une déclaration ou par une révélation complète." (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*, 122)

homage and parody, subject and object, self and other, text and world.”³⁰ Postmodern writers, according to Richardson, move further beyond these challenges and blur the lines of demarcation in narration between the “narrator and character, dialogue and monologue, the ‘he’ and the ‘I.’” It is, however, my contention that Kazuo Ishiguro escapes this kind of categorization altogether. He is indeed neither a postmodern writer nor a modern writer in that he exceeds the characteristics put forward by Richardson. The novel that is most often designated as evidence of Ishiguro’s preservation, in his writing, of national constructions of identity is his period novel *The Remains of The Day*, and the author claims that it has been misunderstood:

With *The Remains of the Day* it’s like a pastiche where I’ve tried to create a mythical England. Sometimes it looks like or has the tone of a very English book, but actually I’m using that as a kind of shock tactic of this relatively young person with a Japanese face who produces this extra-English novel or, perhaps I should say, a super-English novel. It’s more English than English. Yet I think there’s a big difference from the tones of the world in *The Remains of the Day* and the worlds created by those writers you mentioned because in my case there is an ironic distance. (“Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro,” 139)

By overstating a pronouncement generally used to determine and define identity such as “English” and by creating an “ironic distance” between himself and these systems, the author seems to have discovered a way to continue to posit ideas without letting these ideas and the words that designate them become foundational. As discussed earlier, the “mythical England” he creates in this novel is most likely part of his project to “undermine” and “rework” the myth and in this way it does not provide evidence for the Ishiguro’s conservatism.

³⁰Richardson, Brian. “The Genealogies of *Ulysses*.” 1039

Ishiguro plays willingly with the larger categories of definition and portrays in many of his novels, the tools most commonly used to describe and contain beings and the space they exist in such as the nation,³¹ a parameter for statistics,³² a collective mission³³ or a medical pursuit.³⁴ But the “ironic distance” from these entities and methods is always maintained and the author willingly weakens their effectiveness and illustrates their limits by letting them become entangled and mixed, and by watching them merge with one another and with other kinds of identity formations and national expressions until their limits becomes apparent. The process of mixing and blurring categories does not only affect categories of national and collective denotation, contrary to Richardson’s claims, it also blurs the boundaries between the “I” and the “you,” the original and the copy and the singular and the plural. This is a key point from which to demonstrate both the severance, on the author’s part, from writing foundational and mythic discourse, as well as the emergence, alongside these processes, of a new kind of subject that is not inscribed in traditional categories of identity, but rather exists only in the moments of its

³¹ In *The Unconsoled*, the people of the unnamed country where Mr. Ryder arrives are in search of a new figure, a new musician that they can place at their helm. His own destiny gets mixed up in their search since he corresponds perfectly well with the type they are looking for.

³² *Never Let Me Go* is often read as an allegory in which the process of childhood is represented in the cold light of a bureaucratic system, which inscribes its characters in a merely statistical existence.

³³ All of his novels portray collective efforts to change what seem to be ailing groups of people. In *Never Let Me Go*, the students try to figure out how to aid their collective situation. In *Artist of a Floating World*, the protagonist attempts to help his country by producing propaganda art. In turn the society as a whole feels it has a mission of its own: to judge the artist and attempt to determine whether he is guilty in the present for his past actions.

³⁴ *Never Let Me Go*

appearance alongside the *other*. We will attempt to recognize the moments of appearance of beings that exist only “with” the other in Ishiguro’s novels with the help of Jean-Luc Nancy articulations of the “singular plural being.” In examining this problem under the scope of the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, we will witness its development in the moments of formation and deformation of community, a term that is central to his work, and that refers to the space or spacing in which it is possible to consider beings alongside one another without any solid individuality. Ishiguro’s desire to rework the myth and to prevent it from developing into foundational discourse participates in the creation of a space in which community is possible.

In the novel *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro takes on the role of writing in the name of a country. This is a role that Ishiguro both accepts, since he continues to write, and rejects by countering any possibility of recognizing in his writing, the literary *voice* of a nation. First of all, Ishiguro writes in order to be translated. In her article titled “Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature,”³⁵ Rebecca Walkowitz points out that Ishiguro’s novels are not only translated they are “*written for translation*” (emphasis by author). She goes on to add: “As objects, they are written, printed, translated, circulated, and read in several places: as narratives, they organize local anecdotes into global networks and then consider the ethical consequences of that process.”³⁶ Walkowitz insists on the process of starting out local, starting out singular, and pushing the national

³⁵ *Novel*. Summer, 2007. 40(3): 216-239. 217.

³⁶ *Ibid*. 219

boundaries in a movement towards a space without boundaries. She also links this to the reproducibility of the text that will go from being one to being multiple: multiple versions, multiple translations, and multiple places in which the book is sold. Peter Burke argues that this is part of a larger phenomenon in film and literature around the world. He quotes from an article by Emily Apter³⁷ and argues: "Thanks to the growth of a global market, some writers, like some directors of films 'consciously or unconsciously build translatability into their art forms'"³⁸ By constructing a text in view of the possibility of translating it into another language, the author removes any untranslatable elements, in other words, anything that is so intrinsic to one nation that it cannot be imported into another. Ishiguro does this in his novels and as a result they do not contain narratives specific to the nation in which they originate. On the contrary, they ignore national boundaries and place themselves in the world, above cultural and linguistic differences. Burke bases his arguments on the differences between Milan Kundera's novels when there were written purely for a Czech population and those written after Kundera acquired international fame and began to write for a world audience. He argues that Kundera's writing suffers a great loss when it renounced diversity and it became more generic. By erasing the differences imposed by identity and spatial markers, the novels lost their ability to portray narratives as rich and compelling as before. By providing a reading of several of Ishiguro's novels that show a disregard for these modes of representation, this chapter articulates a new approach to a world

³⁷ "On Translation in a Global Market," *Public Culture* 13 (2001), 1-12.

³⁸ *Cultural Hybridity*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press. 2009. 105

literature or a literature written for the world that goes beyond these distinctions and finds plurality in the formation of a greater community, and difference inside the process of formation of this community. Far from losing diversity, this process frees the narrative from absolute and totalizing representational grids and lets it generate its own particularity throughout its own manifestation of itself.

To write for translation is to write for the encounter of a text with other texts in the world. However, to contain translatability inside the text itself is to interrupt even the flow of a singular voice in the narrative itself. As we will see, Ishiguro invites other voices into each narrative and in this way he never lets a single voice dominate the others or acquire authority. Each narrative interrupts another, again and again, which is the process by which new forms of difference are generated. Therefore, in articulating the task of “re-working” the myth, Ishiguro is also insisting on the importance of self-interruption. This also provides the grounds for reading Jean-Luc Nancy’s essays on community alongside Ishiguro’s novels in that the French philosopher locates literature in the interruption of myth: “On a donné un nom à cette voix de l’interruption: la littérature.”³⁹ In this sense, and Ishiguro suggests this as well, the myth although no longer exhaustive nor relevant in terms of an explanatory system, is maintained in literature. Myth is always necessary as its function is to gesture towards transcendence and to set itself up to reach across all existence, to be written or recalled, so that there is something to interrupt and to suspend. According to Nancy, these actions must happen simultaneously and they must be directed toward the elimination of the other, but both will residually

³⁹ *La Communauté Désœuvrée*. 157.

remain in the other, thus positing and interrupting at the same time. Literature can then be an “offering,” an instance of being or a moment of being-together without attempting to found our common essence.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this idea is key in a literary practice such as Ishiguro’s that no longer believes that a higher “We” or a communion of shared essence can be achieved through the collective efforts of groups of people all working toward the same goal. His novels do not abide by a cohesive structure leading to a specific development or dénouement. Instead, their narratives are often circular (*The Unconsoled*), retrospective and nostalgic (*Never Let Me Go*), historical (*The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*), and therefore unwilling to be organized according to a particular aim. By refusing to be organized in this manner they continue to make room for a plurality of narratives, each leading down a different path. Jean-Luc Nancy insists on the plurality inside literature, which he argues is the only way that subjects and their worlds can be represented. He writes: “la littérature, dès le moment du moins où nous comprenons par ce mot l’interruption du mythe, a pour être (pour essence, si on veut dire, ou encore, pour constitution transcendante) l’exposition commune des êtres singuliers, leur comparution.”⁴¹ The relationship between interrupted myth and literature as well as the instances of beings as being-with are essential here and

⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy insists on this point in his short text entitled *Corpus* where he describes the body not as *the* body but as instances of it offered up by way of the many parts they are made of: “C’est comment les corps sont offerts entre eux, c’est la mise au monde, la mise au bord, la mise en gloire de la limite et de l’éclat. Un corps est une image offerte à d’autres corps, tout un corpus d’images tendues de corps en corps, couleurs, ombres locales, fragments, grains, aréoles, lunules, ongles, poils, tendons, crânes, côtes, pelvis, ventres, méats, écumes, larmes, dents, baves, fentes, blocs, langues, sueurs, liqueurs, veines, peines et joies, et moi, et toi.” 104-105

⁴¹ *La Communauté Désœuvrée* 165.

will serve as the premise for an examination of Ishiguro's writing in the context of this phenomenon.⁴² It is important to note that Nancy is not attempting to discover a new definition for literature, or for the subject, but rather he is looking for ways to understand the plural manifestations of community. In other words he is trying here and elsewhere to view beings without making them into founding or originary figures for one another.

Although Jean-Luc Nancy does locate literature in the instance of interruption of myth and although he argues that writing is that which generates community, he does not undertake any close reading of literature in any of his essays. In fact, Nancy refrains, for the most part, from assigning substance, faces, shapes, etc. to community. As a result, in articulating an approach to literature organized around the formation of community, the main difficulty lies in the process of recognizing this process of formation inside the novel. For the purposes of this study, and in keeping with Nancy's development of this process, community appears in moments of relationality and in the interruption of these moments. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *When We Were Orphans* lends itself to such an approach by putting forth characters severed from their families and by presenting a world that is devastated by the effects of war. The protagonist, Christopher Banks, witnesses the abduction of his parents at a young age in the International Settlement in Shanghai and is forced to grow up without them in London in the care of an aunt. Mr. Banks becomes a detective and after making a name for himself in London, he goes back to

⁴² Nancy develops this idea alongside other philosophers at a conference. The proceedings from this conference were published under the title: *Who Comes After the Subject?* Edited by Eduardo Cadava and Peter Connor. New York: Routledge. 1991.

the International Settlement to solve the greatest mystery of his career: his parents' disappearance. His own personal mission is conflated early on with the Battle of Shanghai in 1937, when Japan attacked Shanghai, putting the International Settlement in danger, and the result is that the narrative blurs the distinction between personal crisis and national cause. When Banks arrives in Shanghai he is regarded as the potential savior and greatest hope of the settlement, and people who speak to him seem to believe, without exception, that by solving one case he will solve the other. Mr. Banks undertakes the task of retracing his past in order to reconstruct the narrative of his parents' disappearance. However, as he attempts to return to the places he knew as a young boy, he finds that most threads leading to his past have become unraveled. When Mr. Banks returns to his childhood home in the International Settlement, the place where he lived when his parents were still with him, he finds a Chinese family living there and the father of the family tells him about his adopted sister:

'We Chinese are well used to such arrangements,' he said, 'Blood is important. But so is household. My father took in an orphan girl and she grew up with us as though she were my sister. I regarded her as such, though I knew always of her origins. When she died, in the cholera epidemic when I was still a young man, I felt as much grief as when my blood sisters passed away.' (208)

Instead of his parents he finds strangers in his former house. The Chinese man tries to convince Mr. Banks that the individual elements of the past do not matter, what matters is the relationship that one has with them. There is interruption both in the linear connection to his past and interruption in the family presented here, and the result is a broadening of the possibilities of what the past may be and of what the

family unit that Mr. Banks is attempting to reconstruct may look like. In this encounter, it seems that families can be replaced by other families and that it is not defined by its genetic bond but by its relationality. Mr. Banks' trajectory in the rest of the novel becomes more circular after this moment as his goal is no longer singular.

Christopher Banks goes on to meet other orphans in his quest to find his parents whom he believes are being kept, even twenty years after their abduction, in a house outside the International Settlement, in the war zone. As he makes his way through the rubble in the occupied zone, outside the settlement, he finds a Chinese girl standing in a shambled house accompanied by a dying dog, and surrounded by the corpses of her parents and grandparents. When the detective sees the bodies his only reaction is one of relief for, noticing that they are Chinese, he is able to conclude that they are not his own parents. When earlier on, Mr. Banks adopted a young girl named Jennifer who was also an orphan, the narrative pays little attention to his relationship with her, and they are happy to simply refer to one another as "uncle" and "niece." These marginal events indicate that it is not primarily empathy that draws Banks to other orphans. He may recognize himself in them and want to help them, but there is so little actual dedication to this cause that it cannot be read as the main motivation. Rather, Mr. Banks seems preoccupied by a feeling of incompleteness and fragmentation. He views the orphan, but also the bereaved parents, as partial beings lacking in something that they must search for. The orphan is the figure without lineage and without blood relations to others and yet the very notion of the orphan contains in it the idea of the lost other, the

deceased parents. Mr. Banks forges his identity on his quest to reunite with his parents and to become “one,” but he surrounds himself throughout the narrative with plural beings who, by definition, cannot achieve completeness. This is central to the protagonist and he thinks obsessively, throughout the narrative, of regaining unity, and of holding all the little pieces together. His childhood friend, Akira, is the first to call his attention to the unifying role played by children within their families, as well as within the world:

We children, he said, were like the twine that kept the slats held together. A Japanese monk had once told him this. We often failed to realise it, but it was we children who bound not only a family, but the whole world together. If we did not do our part, the slats would fall and scatter over the floor. (77)

Mr. Banks brings up the image of the twine binding the blind together again when talking to his uncle Philip. He longs for the return of unity that he knew when he was younger and at the same time he realizes that this formation is one that requires ongoing effort. In mourning the loss of this former unity, Mr. Banks realizes that it is perhaps something that exists only retrospectively and that was never actually present. The linear progression of the narrative is halted and the protagonist is deprived of the system that ensured his existence by giving him a unifying function. Now that unifying power is gone and all that is left is a collection of random encounters with orphans, abandoned houses, zones of the city that are destroyed by war, and fragments of a memory of his childhood. However it is the interruption of this unity that propels the protagonist forward and that generates the narrative of his existence. When Christopher Banks ceases to search for his parents, he is freed from the singular function he was assigned to and he can become aware of the

myriad determinants of his identity. The categories of representation in which he formerly believed his identity to reside have been torn apart, no longer held together by twine, and yet, instead of disappearing or disintegrating, the main character multiplies the instances in which he comes into being.

As a child, he idolizes his uncle and believes him to be what he calls “a figure to study closely and emulate,”⁴³ and it is with this in mind that he asks his uncle how he might go about becoming more “English” so that he can enforce the unity between himself and his family. When Christopher’s uncle, whose nickname for Christopher is “Puffin,” thinks about this question, he decides that it may not be necessary for beings to fuse together into one:

[...] it’s true, out here, you’re growing up with a lot of different sorts around you. Chinese, French, Germans, Americans, what have you. It’d be no wonder if you grew up a bit of a mongrel.’ He gave a short laugh. Then he went on: “But that’s no bad thing. You know what I think, Puffin? I think it would be no bad thing if boys like you all grew up with a bit of everything. We might all treat each other a good deal better then. Be less of these wars for one thing. Oh yes. Perhaps one day, all these conflicts will end, and it won’t be because of great statesmen or churches or organisations like this one. It’ll be because people have changed. They’ll be like you, Puffin. More a mixture. So why not become a mongrel? It’s healthy. (80-81)

Christopher’s uncle is describing groups that are not structured according to a hierarchy or any organizing principle (no “statesmen or churches or organisations”). These are eclectic groups that bring together a great number of nationalities and “a bit of everything,” which indicates that the differences presented here are acknowledged but they are not essentialized. Within this group, difference is sustained and beings do not collapse into one another in order to become a single

⁴³ *When We Were Orphans*, 54

unit. This stands in direct opposition to the one category of being “English” to which the protagonist wished to belong. Christopher’s uncle, Philip, is describing a space of sustained plurality in which the formation of community can take place. Without hierarchy, organization, or an attempt to fuse beings together, the boys presented here are free to determine one another mutually as they come into contact. This formation closely resembles the Nancian community in the fact that it brings together boys that both maintain their differences and exist as a plural group. However, as the uncle attempts to assign utility to the community and to use it as the means for avoiding war in the future, the rest of the narrative clearly proves this to be impossible. By situating this memory in a moment during which there is a war, despite the formation of the eclectic community, the narrative is able to interrupt the formation of community and to undo any purpose or operation the uncle attempted to assign to it. Community is presented here both as the possibility of a bright future and as a nostalgic glimpse at the past. The protagonist remembers it fondly as if it were a possibility, and assigns meaning to it that may provide a better future, even though neither of these possibilities actually take place. Christopher Banks, however, fears the annihilation he thinks will come about if everyone is not tightly bound together into a single unit and he believes he must try to become “more English” in order to belong more closely to the group. His uncle concedes that if everyone does not do their part, “this civilisation of ours, perhaps it’ll just collapse.”⁴⁴ The threat that lies beyond unity and conformity is the total collapse of a nation. Ishiguro seems to let this point find a certain foundation at this moment in

⁴⁴ *When We Were Orphans*. 80

the narrative. And yet, as the greater part of Banks' experiences unfolds, and he does not find his parents where he expects them to be and does not manage to save the International Settlement, save his relationship with a woman, and when his adopted daughter leaves his house to go live elsewhere, the limitations of such a belief start to become clear.

In realizing the limits inherent in maintaining a close bind and belonging to the same category of representation, the novel shifts the attention away from the protagonist's quest for unity and onto the multitude of means of identity. When Christopher's uncle turns out to be a corrupt and malicious figure who orchestrated his parents' abduction, there is no one left for Christopher to emulate and he must accept to simply exist, outside of any mission or organizing element and outside of any model. He seems to do just this at the end of the novel when he finds mild satisfaction in his daily life: "drifting through my days here in London, I believe I can indeed own up to a certain contentment."⁴⁵ The detective story genre is effective here in that it tries to separate evil from good and guilt from innocence, and then shows great contrast when it owns up to the impossibility of maintaining such a distinct line of separation between these opposites. This struggle reveals how radical it is to simply *be* alongside one another without purpose, and without producing any kind of figure, or finality. Although Banks fails to solve his biggest case, he does manage to let the sun behind the unraveled blinds shine in and expose his own limitations or finitude as well as that of others. By the end, Christopher has undergone several losses: his parents, his British uncle and his international

⁴⁵ *When We Were Orphans*. 336

reputation. Although this constitutes the primary narrative of the novel, it is also important to note the parallel narrative that focuses on the ongoing eradication and interruption of all categories of being, all hierarchy, and all models or figures governing existence. Banks undergoes losses but only to reveal the finite nature of these governing categories.

This process determines the formation of community in this novel. In order to understand the significance of this in terms of Jean-Luc Nancy's articulation of community we turn to Gregory Bird's comments: "In the exposure, i.e., being placed-out-of-position, the former subject is dispossessed and disposed away from fusional modes of understanding. In this new mode it is no longer understood as a "subject" but as a "singular plural being."⁴⁶ He goes on to say that "the explosiveness of this event shatters the subject to such an extent that it is left without the means to objectify it; plus it is never complete, without a singular origin and perpetually originates in, while simultaneously limiting, singularities, 'each time.'"⁴⁷ Thus, *When We Were Orphans* becomes a literary space in which the becoming of the singular plural being takes place as the subject is severed from genetic lineage as well as from all missions and goals that would otherwise bind it to others. The use of the first person plural "We" in the title, instead of a singular indication of the protagonist, points already to the plurality of our singular main character. In addition, the logical impossibility expressed by way of the use of the past tense "were" referring to the state of being an orphan (disconnected from the family unit)

⁴⁶ "Community Beyond Hypostasis," 6

⁴⁷ 6

simultaneously posits the reunion and connection with others and the state of bereavement itself. The title expresses loss and recovery, singularity and plurality, as well as the refusal to adopt a linear chronology. Thus, *When We Were Orphans* is the spacing for the formation of community as well as its perpetual interruption. The figure of the orphan lends itself well to this problem and we will see with similar figures in subsequent novels by Ishiguro.

A similar problem occurs in *The Unconsoled* around the protagonist Mr. Ryder, who describes himself as “an outsider,” and asserts a certain distance between himself and the others. Mr. Ryder, a renowned musician, arrives as a stranger in an undetermined, but decidedly European, city. Immediately upon his arrival he meets several residents with whom he interacts. He does not know any of these people before his arrival, but because of his fame and reputation, each new person Mr. Ryder meets seems to know him in some way already. As he spends time with these people, the boundary between them gets blurred and a relationship of familiarity sets in:

[Sophie] began to give me more details about the house. I remained silent, but only partly because of my uncertainty as to how I should respond. For the fact was, as we had been sitting together, Sophie’s face had come to seem steadily more familiar to me, until now though I could even remember vaguely some earlier discussions about buying such a house in the woods. (34)

As it turns out, the woman Mr. Ryder is speaking to is in fact his companion with whom he had a child named Boris. This kind of unacknowledged familiarity exists throughout the novel. Mr. Ryder wakes briefly from a nap and reflects on his hotel room: “But it was unmistakably the same ceiling I had so often stared up at from my

narrow creaking bed of those days [his childhood].”⁴⁸ The distinction between what the character actually knows or remembers and what comes about as he experiences it, either in the form of memory or of a spontaneous awareness of something new and yet already familiar, gets blurred over and over again. He suddenly remembers things without ever explaining how he could know the things he does. Upon hearing his newly remembered son Boris sing a song he remembers it: “From the first, Boris’s mentions of ‘Number Nine’ had rung some distant bell for me.”⁴⁹ The literary critic Natalie Reitano describes this problem as an “amnesia [Mr. Ryder] barely acknowledges”⁵⁰ and goes on to point out how “implausible” it is that he would still know the “life stories and problems of citizens he has only just met.”⁵¹ However, as the narrative progresses and as the relationship of familiarity starts to work both ways, in that others begin to count on Mr. Ryder and need him in ways that make it impossible to believe that his presence is purely fortuitous, the explanation of amnesia becomes rather insufficient. Indeed, most of the characters that Mr. Ryder meets have a favor to ask of him and when he describes this problem to Sophie, he says: “Some of these places I visit, the people don’t know a thing. They don’t understand the first thing about modern music and if you leave them to themselves, it’s obvious, they’ll just get deeper and deeper into trouble. I’m needed, why can’t you see that? I’m needed out here!”(37). Mr. Ryder becomes more and

⁴⁸ *The Unconsoled*. 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41

⁵⁰ “The Good Wound: Memory and Community in *The Unconsoled*.” 361

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

more committed to the people that surround him at the same time as he remembers previous commitments he made and had forgotten about. As the web of relationships thickens the issue at hand is less likely to be a faulty memory, but rather the realization that Mr. Ryder is always already intimately connected to everyone and everyone is connected with the others as well. This realization, along with the entanglement brought about by the many favors rendered throughout the narrative, reveals the inseparability of beings, the fact that it is impossible to conceive of the subject, in this narrative, as an absolute individual.

As Mr. Ryder reaches further and further back into his memory he realizes that he knows things about the people he encounters because he was always there, even at the origin. At first, when asked to speak to Sophie, before he meets her for the first time, as far as he knows at least, Mr. Ryder claims that he does not want to engage in any discussion of family matters because everything is “connected”: “An outsider such as myself may after some frank discussion get to the bottom of one thing, only to find it connected to another problem” (29). In this way, there can never be and or a beginning in any kind of problem. Much like the narrative itself that is purely circular and does not lead to any kind of deliverance from the character’s bewilderment, the relationships and issues are all strung together. Mr. Ryder accepts this conditions more readily than Mr. Banks in *When We Were Orphans*. Although he is confused by the simultaneity of familiarity and strangeness, he binds together with the people he meets here, regardless of the structural elements that traditionally indicate whether there can be a relationship: familiarity, shared interests, family bonds, communal past, etc. As the name of the protagonist

clearly indicates, Mr. Ryder comes into being not because of the objective features that define him, but because he is in constant movement and because he participates in an ongoing series of encounters with others.

Ishiguro's latest novel, *Never Let Me Go* presents characters that do not know their origin. The author constructs characters devoid of intrinsic qualities, except those assigned to them intentionally, characters removed from family attachments and deprived of uniqueness or individuality *a priori*. The characters are teenage clones living in a boarding school somewhere in England and they know little to nothing about their place of origin and their function. The choice of the clone sheds light on the core elements that go into composing the subject when it cannot be thought of as a given or a result of nature. In a general sense, the clone offers the rare opportunity for the novelist to consider beings without family ties and without familial history. The literary clone is a copy of a 'natural' literary subject in the way the literary subject is a clone of people living outside of the novel, in the 'real' world. In this sense, the clone is the creative construction of the novel, the character created by characters. This novel is a rare opportunity to discover what it is that the literary world searches for in a character and what kinds of characteristics it chooses to breed. In this unusual example of reproduction, the novel tells us what kind of creature can come out the literary lab and what needs it might meet. The novel tells the story of the lives of a group of adolescent clones, from the point of view of the nostalgic thirty-one year old narrator, Kathy, who is also a clone. Kathy recalls her childhood at Hailsham, the boarding school she attended with her friends, Ruth and Tommy, followed by their graduation, the move to a house in the

country with other clones from other schools, and then finally the moment at which they became carers and donors, before “completing,” which is the technical term for dying.

The teenage clones of Hailsham attempt, much like Mr. Banks and Mr. Ryder, to retrieve details of their past in an effort to reconstruct the series of events that have taken place and gain information on themselves and on their future. At all stages of the novel, Kazuo Ishiguro resists genre fiction and remains radically uninterested in the scientific dimension of cloning. He gives almost no indications regarding the clones’ origin, explaining only that they are copied from an original, or “possible,” which is a human being living from somewhere in England. The “possible” often serves as a source of explanation for certain events and characteristics that define the clones. During her stay at the Cottages, Kathy begins to experience sudden sexual urges and because she does not understand them she searches for their origin in the characteristics or traits of her “possible.” Kathy explains: “Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant at least in theory, you’d be able to find the person you were modeled from.” She says that although not all students agreed, it was generally believed “that when you saw the person you were copied from, you’d get some insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you’d see something of what your life held in store.” In a quest for her identity, therefore, Kathy, believing herself to be burdened with abnormal sexual desire, looks for her “possible” in the stack of pornographic magazines left behind by former lodgers in the Cottages. She is interrupted when

her friend Tommy enters the room and asks her what she is doing and she never ends up finding her possible. At about the same time, Kathy's friend Ruth, upon stumbling across a discarded flyer advertising office furniture and lying open to the photograph of a fully furnished office, announces her desire to become an office worker. Later, two of the veterans from the Cottages claim to have spotted Ruth's "possible" and some of the students decide to take a road trip to Norfolk where the woman was last seen. The possible is a woman who works in an office and resembles Ruth and when the students finally find her again, her description also fits the advertisement that originally gave Ruth the idea to work in an office: "There it was sure enough. It wasn't exactly like the magazine advert we'd found on the ground that day, but then it wasn't so far off either. There was a big glass front at street-level, so anyone going by could see right into it."⁵² Ishiguro never gives a definite answer as to whether or not the fifty year-old woman seen working in this office is Ruth's "possible," the students follow her into an art gallery and eventually lose interest. What these two quests for the original demonstrate is that the copy and the original, although radically opposed to one another, seem to contain bits and pieces of one another. The sexual urges and the desire to work in an office are already nascent in the clones themselves and the search or actual discovery of the original merely brings these characteristics out, thus undoing any strict direction of influence between them. If the "possible" could be found then the characters could securely anchor their identity in a single figure. However, each attempt is interrupted and later abandoned and as the characters come to accept that they will

⁵² *Never Let Me Go*. 159

not find a foundation to their being and that they must simply continue to exist without definition, they are freed to determine themselves through their interactions with others.

However, their freedom is limited again on account of the fact that they are not human beings and that they have been created in the sole purpose of cultivating their organs in order to have the humans that live in the rest of the country. Critics have argued that characters in *Never Let Me Go* differ from human beings in that they do not rebel against a system that leads them to a premature death caused by repeated organ donation. One reader from a discussion forum on the novel remarked that “by having the characters accept their lot and not consider running away, Ishiguro was trying to show that they AREN’T fully realized people [human beings].”⁵³ Jerng quotes Leon Kass who denounces the monstrosities of cloning, stating that a “cloned life can never fulfill the expectations of individuation because it will never be seen as separate but only ‘in relation to...the older copy.’”⁵⁴ Kass disagrees with the argument that cloning could be utilized as a way of replacing the deceased child or parent whose loss, in a family, is unbearable. The clone, Kass contends, can never fully be human insofar as it is never singular, and always defined in relation to the original. According to him, therefore, a real human being is a singular being capable of individuation and independence. This is where humans and clones diverge from one another. The notion of existing outside of the formed groups is indeed never once brought up as a possibility in the novel and even though

⁵³ Jerng, Mark. “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human.” *Partial Answers*. (2008): 382.

⁵⁴ 375

the carers often experience moments of loneliness, they remain always inscribed within the nexus of relationality between donors and other carers. Here again, the means of self-formation are interrupted because of the lack of agency and the impossibility of carrying this process to a completion other than premature death.

Rather than enforcing the separation between clones and originals the searches for them serve to expose the shared qualities and characteristics that are brought to light. The opposition of beings does not result in a dialectical process insofar as nothing new is created in the instance of encounter; all that is revealed was always already there, contained in a kind of fluid form in each being. Nancy conceptualizes this problem in *Being Singular Plural*, stating :

We would not be 'humans' if there were not 'dogs' and 'stones.' A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality. But I would no longer be a 'human' if I did not have the exteriority 'in me,' in the form of the quasi-minerality of bone: I would no longer be a human if I *were* not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of 'me' in 'me.' (18)

A simultaneous containment of self and of the other is the condition for the existence of beings as well as the platform for any meaning they may retain. It is not that the copy and the model merge as they recognize similar traits in one another, but rather that they were never separate, and, more importantly, that one never preceded the other. The clone carries in him- or herself the organs necessary for the survival of the original as well as the original's genes, and the original carries the genes that generate the clone. The mutual and co-containing of all is what brings these beings into existence and is in fact what makes it possible for the only kind of being to be. Compearance as existence does not, however, result in similarity or

fusion. It requires that we acknowledge the manifestation of similarity in difference that will lead neither to sameness nor to absolute alterity but rather to a mutuality of being-in-common at a distance. The truth of being is situated at the limit that makes itself clear at the moment of the co-presentation of the finite limits of beings alongside one another. The communal “we” comes into existence when, without collapsing into a unity, the spacing of mutual sharing between beings reveals the true essence not as beings in relation to one another but as singular plural relation *as such*, since this plural being is not determined by the category of selfhood. Our students at Hailsham are thereby not reduced by their subservience to the other, they are revealed as singular beings intertwined in a web of singular plurality without which they cannot be. Being-in-common with one’s possible undoes the singular relationship to ontology.

And yet even as the novel disrupts the portrait of singular existence, pushing it to the limit of exposure with the other, it still opts for one image over the other and freezes each portrait, ultimately locking each being into one single shape. Several critics accuse *Never Let Me Go* of doing just that. Shameem Black notes, “the world of *Never Let Me Go* deeply resonates with twentieth-century legacies of modern totalitarian repression.”⁵⁵ The novel portrays a camp organized under heightened utilitarianism and it becomes apparent that the clone can be posited as the perfect teleological being created in view of a clearly defined goal. The hierarchy inside the boarding school and the security around it reinforce this perception and demonstrate the ways in which its very existence is articulated by means of the final

⁵⁵ “Ishiguro’s Inhuman Aesthetics.” 789

objective of donation. Black also points out that all activities inside the school participate in the commodification of the clones: the students' artwork is collected and either redistributed among them or taken away by Madame to be put in a gallery that they will never see. Everything from their biogenetic makeup to the expression of their souls through artistic creation is done according to the needs of the external authoritative figure that is this scientific institution in this novel. In her article, "Unimaginable Largeness," Emily Apter advocates for the abandonment of the "need for fidelity to the original in Ishiguro's world" arguing that it "would free the students from their imperative to serve the biomedical needs of their originals, thus liberating the students from their subservience to the category of 'human,' while it would also allow them to celebrate openly their own identity as copy, as inhuman."⁵⁶ To move away from the original is to detach oneself from the notion of a singular essence or ontology and at first glance it does seem as though this would free our subject from the organizing figure that dominates and contains him or her.

However, at the same time that she argues for a kind of insurrection against the domination of the original or in this case the human, Apter still remains within the realm of categorization as a means for organizing existence inside Ishiguro's world; clones would be free but only free to remain inside their own category. Indeed, to assume that clones are what humans are not and vice versa is to lock both beings into a fixed definition with conspicuous delineations on both sides. The traditional definitions of being are not only challenged by indistinction, they are rendered obsolete. No single form and no single space can be maintained and the

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terms for understanding existence must be multiplied and varied incessantly. The passage to plurality as a condition for existence in this novel points to the deeper problem of ontology itself and the role played by literature inside the incessant reconfiguration of existence. Jean-Luc Nancy argues that what interests us or “touches” us in literature is that literature serves as an “access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin.”⁵⁷ *Never Let Me Go* denounces the fallacy of a singular systematization or categorization of beings at the same time as it ventures into the plural telling of whole existence. Throughout Ishiguro’s work we recognize countless instances of encounter between separate units, which upon exposing the finitude of their being to each other, come into existence and participate in the retelling of a plural essence.

The passage into plurality affects the reception and understanding of the song that gives its name to the title. The relationship between the receiver of information and the information itself is made plural or at least it can no longer be reduced to a single interpretation. In the last few pages of *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy visits the woman who co-created Hailsham, called Madame, and together they reminisce about an afternoon when Madame happened upon Kathy who was listening to her favorite song “Never Let Me Go.” Kathy was caught rocking back and forth, holding a pillow in her arms and crying. Madame tells Kathy that she “saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never

⁵⁷ *Being Singular Plural*, 14

to let her go.”⁵⁸ The nostalgic tone of this recounting and the overly sentimental account of Kathy’s behavior suggests that this “old kind world” is already gone and that much like the portrait of British life in the 1930s in *Remains of the Day*, it probably never existed. The child holds onto a world already lost and remembers it fondly as an ideal past at the same time as she already sees herself in the next world. As readers, we know that Madame interprets the scene wrongly and fails to see that Kathy is actually imagining that she is holding a baby that she does not want to part with. Indeed, as a young student at Hailsham, Kathy used to sneak away at certain times of the day and hide in her room where she would listen to a song called “Never Let Me Go.” She would imagine, without taking heed of the lyrics, that the song was about a woman who was told she could not have children, but who had miraculously managed to have one anyway and was now fearful of losing it, thus the recurring refrain “never let me go.” At the moment of remembering this scene, Kathy, having now had the chance to listen to the words, admits to knowing that in fact the song is about a woman asking her lover not to leave her. The three interpretations of this event generate an excess of meaning at the same time as we realize that this scene is in fact about loss. The paradoxical gestures of giving meaning, even when it is not there, and the fear of losing that which contributes to creating it, forces us to release our grip on any singular perception and to view these actions in the state of permanent interruption in which they exist.

By holding onto what she knows is already lost, Kathy situates herself in neither of the two worlds imagined by Madame, but rather on the threshold

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between two spaces and times, allowing for the notion of the singular world to be split into a plurality of planes. Rocking back and forth as she listens to her favorite song, the narrator is in fact attempting to protect herself from imminent abandonment by a lover, a baby, or by the “old kind world,” and this sense of abandonment is in fact what connects her to all three forms taken by the pillow in her arms. By wrapping her arms around what is lost Kathy creates a zone of indistinction between inside and outside, exclusion and inclusion in which ultimately she remains exposed. She closes her eyes tightly and attempts to secure the space inside her and by wrapping her arms around a pillow she draws a tentative line of demarcation around herself. The physicality of her body creates a finite line and yet the substance contained in this internal space is being concurrently divested and invested at the very moment of these actions. We can see how in fact all that is present in this scene is visible only in the instance of its passage into something else. The “old kind world” receives its qualification as such and thus in a sense its name only because it touches the limit of its existence and pushes up against the new world that is already taking over. The woman in Kathy’s childish understanding of the song holds her baby and calls out to it in a song only because it was almost not there, and should in fact not have been there. The lover that the song addresses in reality is present only through his absence as his existence, at the moment of the scene had not even been inferred from the content of the song. Our three figures are therefore given space only because they are always already gone and in fact never yet present. The pillow that Kathy holds, because it is really just a pillow, is none of the three beings that are projected onto it

and ultimately it loses any claim to anything other than the object that it is when the song comes to an end. Much like the pillow, Kathy herself will eventually be emptied of the content she so adamantly holds inside her, when, at the close-by ending of the novel she will donate her own organs and eventually “complete” like the others. Kathy’s attempt to resist the loss that already takes place in this passage and to become the figures in the different interpretations of this scene inscribes her in a space that gets defined by inclusion and exclusion and the constant interruption of these.

Another way to understand the prominent role played by this song, and its recall or copy in the title, is that it serves as a call for help. In 2010, Mark Romanek directed the movie adaptation of the novel and the lukewarm reviews⁵⁹ that it received voiced a shared complaint. The website for movie reviews, Rottentomatoes.com, introduced the problem by providing this comment: “With *Never Let Me Go*, Mark Romanek has delivered a graceful adaptation that captures the spirit of the Ishiguro novel- which will be precisely the problem for some viewers.” So, what is this disappointing spirit? Another reviewer reveals more: “The big emotional moment at the end of the film- the reveal, if you will—is so unrevealing, so uninvolved, that you’re bowled over mostly by the anticlimax of

⁵⁹ Manohla Dargis writes for *The New York Times* on September 14th, 2010: “Alas, what’s missing is the spark of life, the jolt of the unexpected- something beyond tears- to puncture the falseness of a film world, which, by its insistence on its own beauty, obscures the tragedy that the three characters, by their nature, cannot express.”

it.”⁶⁰ And so the movie fails to reveal what the viewer expects it to reveal, which is seen as a major flaw in the film by Marshall Fine and yet we find the same problem in the novel. Two things happen in the novel by the end, all the characters have “completed,” and in keeping with its role as literary text, the novel reveals the unrevealable. We have argued against the possibility of presenting a complete subject, one that has overcome fragmentation, much like what Mr. Banks attempts to do in *The Unconsoled*, and the author illustrates the veracity of this position by inferring the death of his characters with the term “completion.” Characters “complete” when they die. Death becomes the moment of completion for the subject. Death as the ultimate event and the possibility of exposing and of exiting the self to see the *other*, occurs at the end of this novel. Death opens up the subject to an excess that leaves him or her exposed in relation to others and breaks down the boundaries of beings, enabling them to truly partake in the existence of the other. And yet, and this is the reproach Blanchot makes to Nancy, death cannot serve a purpose in the development of the subject, it merely exposes the subject to the other. Brian Richardson connects the process of exposure to the formation of community in his article, “Community Beyond Hypostasis”:

In the exposure, i.e., being-placed-out-of-position, the former subject is dispossessed and disposed away from the fusional modes of understanding. In this new mode it is no longer understood as a “subject” but as a “singular being.” [...] He claims that this space cannot be understood as either “society” or “community” in the traditional senses.

⁶⁰ Fine, Marshall, The Huffington Post, Huff Post Review: Never Let Me Go, September 13th, 2010

This is the only form of completion that we can speak of in the context of our postmodern novels. Characters in *Never Let Me Go* die almost willingly, without becoming “agitated” and their death serves no purpose.⁶¹ Completion does not bring about anything new and this is perhaps the motif for complaint from the readers mentioned previously, and perhaps even the reasons for the dissatisfied viewers of the recent film adaptation. It is difficult to resist attempting to insert the death of characters, especially when a narrator addresses the readers directly and in a familiar tone, into a larger and perhaps greater system, or process, towards improvement or self-elevation. Ishiguro resists this temptation and in doing so he manages to write occurrences of the singular plural being.

It is the interruption of myth that generates community among the finite beings that are present in its space. Community does not exist as a result of literature, rather it places the subject on the limit. By means of constant interruption, literature exposes beings to one another and as a result they are born into community. Jean-Luc Nancy insists on the role played by literature in the coming into being of community in his chapter entitled “Myth Interrupted,” and writes: “literature, at least from the moment we understand this word as the interruption of myth, has as being (as essence, if you will, or again, as transcendental constitution) the common exposure of singular beings, their compearance. [...] It is a

⁶¹ Of course, the death of the characters in this novel is purely instrumental in that they die by giving their organs to those in need. However, the instances of actual donation, with reception, are never recounted in the novel. Although organ donation is the main reason for their life and death, this reason remains vague and plays almost no part in the lives of the characters. Organ donation is superseded by the inevitability of completion as an event in and of itself, without little regard to the reasons for this occurrence.

birth: we never stop being born into community.”⁶² Here, the meaning of interruption becomes clear when Nancy reminds states that literature must never produce a founding speech, but must suspend its speech, interrupt it, and say that it is interrupting it. At the end of *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy assesses what is left of her past and recounts all that is lost: “I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy [...] I suppose I lost Hailsham too. You still hear stories about some ex-Hailsham students trying to find it, or rather the place where it should be. And the odd rumor will go around sometimes about what Hailsham’s become these days—a hotel, a school, a ruin.” Loss of the physical people, buildings, and spaces of her past certainly causes a rupture in Kathy’s story, but she does not seem to be particularly concerned by these changes, as she says, her memory of them will live on. Further on, in the last paragraph of the novel, Kathy decides to return to Norfolk, the place where she and Tommy found a cassette tape containing the song “Never Let Me Go” after she lost her own before leaving Hailsham. She drives aimlessly across several “featureless fields,” and then finally stops the car and steps outside. As Kathy stares off into the few standing trees she says to herself:

I half imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave, maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn’t let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.

⁶² *The Inoperative Community*, 66

The storyteller thus interrupts herself, as we can see with the caesurae created by the dashes “- I didn’t let it-,” at the same time as she tells us she is interrupting herself, and this interruption coincides with yet another interruption- that of the novel itself. These breaks, just like those seen previously, force beings to share, to touch, to be exposed to one another and to be born into community.

In these novels, and in *Never Let Me Go*, in particular, the traditional trajectory of character development and progression of the plot is never completed. Each novel prevents itself from making any of its characters complete and from depicting a world that can exist outside of interaction. Instead of viewing these instances as evidence of a crisis in narrative, they can be seen as a way of remaining inside the process of formation, and therefore of entering and interacting inside community. In this way, community exists and can be recognized not for what it achieves but both for what it prevents and for what gets generated at that moment of prevention. By always containing the potential for translation inside them, by lifting essential differences off of the characters and environment depicted, these novels offer themselves up as a blue print for a new kind of world literature that no longer relies on essentializing differences between countries, languages, beings, and cultures, but that looks exclusively at the moments of encounter between a plurality of trends, at the ways in which these trends remain in the space for encounter (interruption), and on the temporary formations of this space (community). Ishiguro’s latest work is a collection of short stories titled *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (2010) that take place while visiting Venice, often in the presence of tourists. To read such a work is to relinquish the need to connect

characters back to their place of origin and to re-establish the boundaries between Venice, its inhabitants, and those visiting it. Instead, the stories focus on love affairs among people who have known each other for a long time or people meeting for the first time. The focus is on encounters, regardless of the objective differences that previously defined the characters involved. This collection of short stories in a plurality of voices, speaking alongside one another, each telling narratives that become intertwined and as they do they bring into existence their worlds and beings. This study will continue to develop the intricacies of an approach to world literature by examining contemporary works of literature from other parts of the world. Tracing communities inside contemporary literature is a way of seeing beyond what has been undone by globalization and certain philosophical trends and finding what is particular to this literature.

The next chapter will focus on the French novelist, Michel Houellebecq and on his attempts, through his novels, to solve the problem of spatial delineation. In all of his novels he is met with challenges and in his final novel, *La Carte et le Territoire*, he seems to accept the impossibility of juxtaposing the map onto the territory. Each novel launches a new process of determination of space and frustration and feelings of homelessness are common. However, as the narrators of his novels come to terms with their tendency to be overwhelmed and lost, they experience a kind of liberation both of themselves and of the space they fill. Michel Houellebecq experiments with the limits of space with his focus on borders, fences, and boundaries and also on the limits of being. In very similar terms, Michel Houellebecq is interested in the kinds of characters that cannot trace their lives back to a single origin. For the same reasons

as Ishiguro, he opts for characters with difficult relationships with their families, especially with their parents, and, more importantly here, he also writes extensively about human cloning both in his novels and outside. In the novel, *La Possibilité d'une Ile*, he portrays clones put on an island in order to try to live forever. The experiment pushes these beings, all named Daniel, to the limit of their identity and physical existence. The possibility of undertaking such experiments is dear to the author himself as he explained in the magazine *L'Humanité* in 1996 when he declared that he was leaving France to go live in Ireland because France had banned cloning. This issue comes up again in *Les Particules Élémentaires* when one of his protagonists, Michel Djerzinsky moves to Ireland, himself, in order to pursue his genetic testing. Whether this unites Kazuo Ishiguro with Michel Houellebecq is debatable, but it does demonstrate a tendency to redefine the composition of the subject and to sever it from its natural place of origin.

CHAPTER 2: SPATIAL REPRESENTATION THROUGH INTERACTIONS IN MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ'S *LA CARTE ET LE TERRITOIRE*

Maps, blue prints, photographs and paintings of maps, signposts, walls, street signs, and records of land ownership punctuate the contemporary French writer, Michel Houellebecq's, five novels. These novels put a strong emphasis on its exposure to other countries with its multinational firms spread out across the world, corporate executives offering catalogues for luxury hotels for Westerners in Asian countries, signs on highways pointing to old villages and Roman ruins for tourists. All these instances have in common the appearance of a sign or image that stands slightly askew in relation to what it seeks to represent. Michel Houellebecq opts for a plurality of worlds, in his novels, which are increasingly global, and he presents them together regardless of their relationship, status, or geographic location. The space he represents is in constant expansion and pushes up against other spaces, defying borders, customs, languages, and signs in ways that challenge the possibility of difference between spaces. Traditional means of separation between spaces fail to enforce the limit, edge, or delineation between spaces. However, rather than to remove these signs, Houellebecq preserves them and multiplies them, planting them in abundance in any space available, and by doing so he invites inquiry into the residual meaning or perhaps new meaning of the signs and maps that continue to appear on every street corner and at every border.

The preoccupation with space in Houellebecq's novels is visible in the titles themselves, such as is the case with Houellebecq's latest novel that won the much

coveted Prix Goncourt in 2010: *La Carte et le Territoire*. But this is true too of a number of other novels as well such as *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* (1994), which refers to a delimited space (domain) that is being extended. *Plateforme* (2001) is a surface or structure on which something is built or presented. His latest collection of poetry is titled *Configuration du Dernier Rivage* (2013) and although it will not receive direct consideration in this chapter, it does participate in this discussion. *La Possibilité d'une île* (2005) and *Les Particules Élémentaires* (1998) do not contain direct allusions to space in their title but play throughout their narratives with enclosures and limitations related to space. The contemporary French author's interest in space raises questions concerning its possibilities of representation given that a single articulation of the contours of a given location is never enough and a multitude of attempts must always take place in order for space to be defined, even for a moment. Space in the contemporary French writer's five novels is elevated above the boundaries and limitations traditionally imposed by spatial markers, borders, signs, lines, streets, etc. and represented by maps, blue prints, and land evidence records. Their ability to determine difference between inside and outside, public and private, right and left, for example, has been nullified. However, the abiding presence of signs and maps in Houellebecq's novels, despite their loss of meaning, indicates that there is perhaps another use for these common tools of representation. Setting up signage, delineations, and demarcations participates in the formation of space in Houellebecq's novels, but this space also surpasses these tools and becomes an active process of enactment of itself, having to enforce its own limits through action and repetition. This means that rather than to

rely on the representation of space by way of maps and other forms of representation, visual or verbal, spatial formation happens through processes of iteration and repeated encounters with other spaces that are different from it for whatever reason and by whichever means. It is not enough to have one's name on the deed of a clearly marked piece of land, one must constantly insist on the separation between said space and that which it is not and repeat the means by which these spaces are separate. As the power of boundaries and signs of demarcation is weakened, a growing fear of the invasion of the unknown starts to affect Houellebecq's characters and they begin to enforce boundaries more frantically. All of Houellebecq's novels and especially his latest, *La Carte et le Territoire*, contain a new kind of spatial representation that relies not on blue prints or maps but on desperate acts of enforcement and reinforcement of spatial delineation by any means possible. Houellebecq's characters build walls and install video surveillance cameras in order to monitor their private space; they inhabit isolated pieces of land and shut out the external world as best they can.

Because space is never simply posited in these novels, it appears not to exist outside of the efforts of repeated articulation, enforcement and fortifications of its contours, undertaken by characters in all five novels. This means that countries and private property for example do not come into existence simply because they are named or because ownership is established, rather, the characters must experience these contours and delineations first hand. The difference between countries in the world does not naturally become apparent when a national boundary is crossed and characters are often surprised that there is a difference between spaces. At the end

of *La Carte et le Territoire*, the central character, Jed Martin, inherits his grandparents' house that is located in a small village outside of Paris and he decides to leave the city and move to the slow-paced village. Jed's return to the country evokes a different reading of the title as *La Carte et le Terroire*, as if, in the end, it were possible to return to a traditional life that is not yet separate from nature and not yet tainted by the urban art world from which Jed Martin emerges. Houellebecq acknowledges in this novel that the return to nature is not new and writes: "Il avait péniblement conscience, ce faisant, de suivre le chemin emprunté par Houellebecq [a character in the novel] quelques années auparavant. Il se *répétait*, pour s'en persuader, qu'il y avait d'importantes *differences*." (399, Italics mine). However, upon arriving, Jed is filled with the awareness that he is foreign, a *parisien*, and that the villagers will despise him. His fear of others turns into a hatred of them and he becomes concerned with the separation between his land and the village surrounding it. He builds high walls and fences and installs surveillance cameras in order to exact the limits (as far as he can remember where they are supposed to be) between private and public property. Each time he reinforces the boundaries of his space, however, he begins to doubt the efficiency of his methods and to suspect that the line of demarcation is porous. He also finds that he needs to be able to go to the supermarket in the nearby town and because he is now reluctant to leave his land he attempts to build a secure passageway from his house to the supermarket. In the end these efforts, costly as they are, deplete him of his fortune and when he finally decides to leave his land and venture into the village he realizes that it has undergone its own transformation, adapting to different economic conditions (it has

benefited immensely from ecotourism), and a new kind of immigration that is no longer domestic. Jed is no longer a foreigner in the village as the very notion of being foreign has been eroded by the great variety of people presently inhabiting the village. In the end, efforts towards maintaining the difference between Jed Martin's private space and the space that surrounds him were both necessary and futile. They were necessary insofar as without them the difference between spaces would not have existed at all. But they were futile in that his space and the outside were not absolute opposites and were capable of changing and evolving in ways that nullified the separation and produced something else. The absolute otherness of the space that is not Jed's dissolved by developing into something new and as a result Jed's relationship with it changed and the separation between the two disappeared. With nothing to oppose it to, the village lost its specific identity and melted into the rest of the world and Jed, similarly, lost his status as an outsider and has become part of the rest of the world as well.

The failure to maintain separation and difference between spaces by way of markers points to the possibility of reversing the mode of representation of space. Indeed, Jed Martin assumes that the space is already divided thanks to the layout of the land and the historic ownership of land in the village, and that it is his job to enforce this separation. But it is possible, at the outcome of his efforts, to posit that the space was only divided and thus different when he was actively tracing the lines of spatial delineation and that these lines do not exist outside his efforts. Jean Baudrillard writes in *Simulacre et Simulation* about the illusions of representations

that are mere simulations, revealing nothing, and being simply all there is to be. He writes:

Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être référentiel, d'une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine et sans réalité : hyperréel. Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit. C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire – précession des simulacres -, c'est elle qui engendre le territoire dont les lambeaux pourrissent lentement sur l'étendue de la carte. C'est le réel et non la carte dont les vestiges subsistent çà et là, dans les déserts qui ne sont plus ceux de l'Empire, mais le nôtre. *Le désert du réel lui-même*. (10)

Space or the real are generated by models of representation without reference and, in other words, without anything to represent. Baudrillard calls the new reality created out of models of a reality that does not preexist it, hyperreal. Houellebecq takes this problem further and threatens to blur the line between the real and the hyperreal by making the real, generated by the map (the hyperreal), coincide at times with the real that is outside of the map. At the end of *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte*, Michel, the central character looks at his map as he stands in the location represented by the map. He sees that there are springs nearby on the map and he takes a few steps forward to go and look for them. The real and the hyperreal are in close proximity at this point. But the superimposition of hyperreal onto real fails to happen at the last minute when the springs are forgotten about in favor of the forest itself, the map is dropped, and Michel declares that everything looks like everything else and that he can no longer follow the map or even navigate through the forest on his own: "Tout à présent se ressemble" (156). The close encounter between the hyperreal and the real is important insofar as it demonstrates a departure in

Houellebecq's writing from what Baudrillard describes as "reality without origin" in that something exists outside of the model of representation. Although this "something else" is unclear it is still solid enough to be confronted with the reality represented in the map and sought after by Michel. The forest in which the central character stands after dropping the map is a real beyond hyperreal and the fact that it comes about only when compared to a domain that differs from it, the domain of representation or of imagined reality, indicates that it requires interaction or opposition in order to be seen.

Jean-Luc Nancy writes about the conditions for the existence of space in his 2002 work titled *La Création du Monde*: "[La mondialité] jamais déposable dans une représentation, et pourtant toujours en travail et en circulation dans les formes qui se cherchent.⁶³" Space cannot simply be declared or represented, it must look for itself alongside others and search for its shape by filling shapes alongside other shapes. Sustained plural contact and interaction are necessary for the existence of space. This differs from Baudrillard's description of space in that space does not emerge out of nothing, rather it is always plural and can always come into existence by positioning itself alongside the other. In this sense it is the disposition or arrangement of any given thing, including space itself, that ensures existence and not the designation of origin or the proof of origin: "Selon cette archispatialité de la disposition, qui est aussi la spaciosité de l'ouverture, ce qui est en jeu n'est pas une provenance d'être (ni un être de provenance ou d'origine), mais un espacement de

⁶³ *La Création du Monde*, 59

présences.⁶⁴ The space or spacing (espacement) is what generates existence in that it provides a platform on which a plurality of spaces can be arranged in proximity to others and thereby come into existence through contact with one another. This co-exposure of all those contained in a given space is the community of which Nancy speaks, and literature is the place where it is made possible. Essence is not situated in the origin of a being and there is no immanence; rather, the limit between different spaces, the line space hits up against when in the presence of another is the *locus* of identity. It is this limit or finitude that needs to be sustained by way of interaction and it is in this sense that representation without interaction is impossible. This chapter will address the necessary plurality of spaces hitting up against one another in a state of co-exposure in Houellebecq's novels and determine the extent to which these novels contribute to the articulation of plural essence.

Before investigating the particularities of spatial formation, this chapter will examine the presence of groups of individuals in the novel and the ways in which they form themselves through interaction and form the worlds in which they exist. In order for there to be a plurality of encounters, there cannot be a single figure that has power over the others or that can impose structure and organization over them. Michel Houellebecq takes care never to let one character dominate the others inside a narrative. Once a character starts to acquire too much importance and to foreshadow the others he or she is killed off or put on a plane and sent to some faraway office for a promotion. In an interview for the *Paris Review* with Susannah Hunnewell, Houellebecq expresses regret at having let the heroine of his 2001 novel

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 99

Plateforme, Valérie, become too important. He says: "And one character, Valérie, dominates the book too much." and goes on to explain that therefore the book was a failure. When asked about his second novel, *Les Particules Élémentaires*, Houellebecq insists that he kept both characters, Michel and Bruno, equally present in the narrative. He writes both of their life stories and keeps them both alive until the end. This does not mean there cannot be what he calls "central" characters, characters whose lives and experiences form the thread of the main narrative, but they do not dominate the other characters and are central only insofar as they find themselves positioned in the center of the novel. In *Les Particules Élémentaires*, Bruno and Michel, two half brothers, are presented as opposites of one another, Michel is an introverted molecular biologist whose upbringing was slightly more stable than Bruno's. Bruno is a sex-craved loner in a loveless marriage who ends up on disability leave from his position as a high school teacher in an insane asylum, mourning his failed attempt to seduce one of his students. The half brothers meet and form a relationship as young adults and then separate and see each other only rarely. Still, every event and defining moment in the subsequent narratives of the rest of the life of one brother is always compared to whatever event takes place in the life of the other half brother. The comparison is not always qualitative and often only serves to contextualize such and such event. When Bruno goes to a Liberal New Age camp, Houellebecq compares this experience as something Michel would never do and because Bruno's acts and decisions are so different from Michel's, it becomes clear that Bruno's choice is unusual, desperate, and specific to him. Both characters are miserable and alone and although they do not see each other often and did not

grow up together, their interconnectedness is governed by what the author calls the EPR paradox: “when particles interact, their destinies become linked. When you act on one, the effect spreads instantly to the other, even if they are great distances apart.”⁶⁵ Sustained interaction, regardless of spatial separation or lack of encounter is of crucial importance to the terms in which the brothers come into existence and continue to be portrayed throughout the narrative. No single particle dominates the other, each one is affected similarly by what surrounds it and it simply comes into contact with the other, without subordination or domination over one another or over the rest of the world.

Having a “central” character is different from having a main character in that the central character never stands alone—even when he or she is alone. Each character is brought into the narrative in relation to those that surround it, whether they are physically present, or merely remembered. If the EPR paradox affects Houellebecq’s characters as he suggests, then no single character is placed in a higher or more protected place than the others since all that happens to one happens to the other. To know these characters is to know the characters that surround them, which means, in turn, that to know a central character is to be aware of his or her place among other characters, to be aware of the centrality and of their spatial configuration. In the beginning of *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* (1994), curiously translated into English as *Whatever*,⁶⁶ Houellebecq gives one of his

⁶⁵ “Michel Houellebecq, The Art of Fiction.” Interview for *The Paris Review*

⁶⁶ This recalls the adjective “whatever” used by Giorgio Agamben to describe the condition of belonging to community. To be whatever is both to be different and to be above difference.

early chapters the title “Au Milieu des Marcells,” which suggests at first that the main character, Michel, is surrounded by other characters names Marcel. In this chapter the central character leaves a colleague’s birthday party in a part of Paris with which he is quite familiar and cannot find his car. He searches for a short amount of time and then returns two days later to continue to search:

Le surlendemain était un dimanche. Je suis retourné dans le quartier, mais ma voiture est restée introuvable. En fait, je ne me souvenais plus où je l’avais garée; toutes les rues me paraissaient convenir, aussi bien. La rue Marcel-Sembat, Marcel-Dassault...beaucoup de Marcel. Des immeubles rectangulaires, où vivent les gens. Violente impression d’identité. Mais où était ma voiture? (12)

In the middle of the Marcells, Michel cannot find his way. Each street seems to be the right one and within this chapter he takes them all without managing to locate his car. The rest of the environment through which he attempts to navigate does not help either. His description of the architecture as “rectangular buildings in which people live⁶⁷” does nothing to distinguish this urban setting from any other in Paris. Houellebecq describes Michel’s defeat as he attempts to divide the space by way of street names and elements lining the streets, finding only that they provide nothing that he can use, their similarity being too great. He reads them out loud and they appear in the text of the novel even though their ability to signify and to serve their communicatory purpose is null. The car remains unfound. And yet in this moment, when the central character, Michel, is in the middle of Marcells, he experiences a “violente impression d’identité.” The most noteworthy characteristic of this early passage in the novel is that once Michel has finished naming all the Marcells that

⁶⁷ My own translation

surround him, he suddenly experiences his own identity. The scenery is at its most banal: all streets have the same name and buildings are rectangular places where people live and it is at this moment that he becomes aware of his own being. Just as the author, Houellebecq, is careful not to let one single character stand out and impose him- or herself on the other characters, it seems he is also careful never to let the environment in which a character finds him- or herself impose meaning either. The interaction with a generic space that is referred to only by the repetitions of the name Marcel provokes a moment of revelation of the self for the central character. To be in the middle of the Marcells is to be purely in a moment of relationality without hierarchy and without essentializing characteristics capable of excluding spaces or characters. This instance lends itself to a moment of formation of the community that hosts interactions among beings and exposes their limits to one another, making it possible for them to come into being.

It seems it is necessary to shed differences in order for community to take place and yet it is also essential to retain plurality. In her article, "And yet Some Free Time Remains," Carole Sweeney comments on the gradual dissolution of difference in Houellebecq's novels: "As the need for differentiation and distinction is thrust more and more urgently on each post-Fordist subject, the sense of pervasive indistinctness of all things becomes more insistent in the novel."⁶⁸ She extends this observation to all of Houellebecq's novels and suggests that there must be a reason for such a paradoxical gesture on the part of the contemporary author. Indeed, Houellebecq's characters and the worlds they evolve in are known for their

⁶⁸ 51

heightened individuality. In her chapter on Houellebecq's novels titled "The Domain of Sexual Struggle," Fatima Naqvi refers to the fact that Houellebecq's characters, which she describes as "middle-aged anti-heroes," are repetitive and are referred to as types. She writes: "[...] differences among people today are negligible, at least from an 'enlightened' contemporary perspective. People repeat a general behavioral pattern and diverge from it only slightly."⁶⁹ She also suggests, that although the differences are slight, they do manage to maintain a separation between the characters. Although family and relationships are not their strong point, the Caucasian all-male central characters do find themselves devoting most of their time to the cultivation of their own taste and pleasures, grooming themselves, and giving into their every whim. Without exception Houellebecq's characters spend their evenings and weekends, when they are not working, to choosing the products, in supermarkets or catalogues, that best reflect who they are and that best enable them to be who they are. Hours are spent reading the descriptions of frozen dinners and hair gels, commentaries in catalogues on the kind of person who would need such and such kitchen appliances or living-room rug, etc. And yet, the paradox lies in the unquestionable fact that Houellebecq's characters seem happiest, most accomplished, and more aware of themselves when they accidentally stumble into an indistinct environment and can no longer rely on signs, descriptions, and commentaries to determine the utility of the space nor the behavior they should adopt while in it. Indistinctness and the erasure of difference is what finally brings about a sense of self and although Houellebecq's novels fail at or refrain from fitting

⁶⁹ Naqvi, Fatima. *Literary and Cultural Rhetoric of Victimhood: Western Europe, 1970-2005*. Virginia: Palgrave Macmillan. 2007.

these moments into the articulation of a higher sense of self, these characteristics can be read as moments of temporary contentment accompanied by a heightened sense of self.

Michel Houellebecq gives his first name to most central characters in most of his novels and although each Michel varies slightly from the others, the Houellebecquian reader, much like the Michel in *Whatever*, finds him- or herself in the middle of Michels, searching in vain for difference. The “insistent” nature of the lack of difference, as described by Carole Sweeney and Fatima Naqvi, indicates that this is not simply the gradual erasure of individuality in the consumerist environments Houellebecq chooses for his novels, but that this sameness has agency and operates in some way on the unfolding narratives of his novels. In the previous example, the spacing of the streets, the centrality of the character, and the rectangular buildings all lead to a sudden awareness of being for Michel. The short segment containing this impression has no verbs and is positioned much like a block in the paragraph and nothing in the rest of the character’s search for his car changes after this, he simply continues to make his way through the streets. It is a violent surge that disappears as he continues to make his way through the city. The moment of relationality that leads to this sensation of identity is bereft of any indication of commonhood beyond the mere location of the character in the space in which he finds himself. Although we may infer that the streets and buildings provoked the sudden self-awareness in Michel, there is no indication of what might have caused it. Since nothing new happens and nothing changes afterward, the central location and the spacing of the character seem to be the only indicators of

what may have caused the impression identity. Michel is lost and yet he has somehow managed to find himself.

It is this configuration of space, whether it is organized according to a principle or concept, or whether it is filled with unreadable and unusable signs, that makes it possible to witness the coming into being of Houellebecq's characters. Overall there is a growing lack of markers capable of delineating space and turning space into a readable environment. With the abundance of indicators that saturate modern spaces such as supermarkets, gas stations, highways, and organized tours, that appear in Houellebecq's novels, the most indicative instances paradoxically remain those that cannot be described and that appear blurry and without precise features. The most enjoyable moment for Michel in *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* happens when he leaves Paris by train and enters into the country on a foggy day:

En sortant de la ville nous traversons des nappes de brouillard successives, puis, le dernier croisement franchi, nous plongeons dans un lac de brume opaque, absolu. La route et le paysage sont complètement noyés. On ne distingue rien, sinon de temps à autre un arbre ou une vache qui émergent de manière temporaire, indécise. C'est très beau. (121)

Although Michel recognizes that the scenery is beautiful, he cannot actually see what is beautiful about it. Everything is submerged in fog and his use of words such as "absolu" and "complètement" leave no hope of anything eventually transpiring. His inability to capture the elements that make up the beauty of the scene and his feeling of contentment in simply being in proximity with it both indicate that the meaning of this scene is impossible to articulate and to do so would be to reduce its beauty. The most meaningful experience the central character can have in such an

environment is one of relationality brought about simply by pressing his face against the window of the train. The English title of this novel, *Whatever*, points, despite its tenuous relationship with the French title, to the moments when Michel Houellebecq occasionally steps outside of articulation and lets something more abstract and indistinct happen in his novels.

In the first example, Michel seems to believe that the world can be captured in indubitable conceptual categories, i.e. street names, and that their interpretation will lead to a successful navigation through space and the retrieval of his car. However, as we have seen, something unplanned and practically unarticulated happens. In the passage with the train, Michel has relinquished his need to organize space into concepts and has simply positioned himself as the other to the space at which he gazes, separated by the window as well as by his gaze. This attempt to organize space according to categories of representation and the realization that it escapes those categories is a call for another kind of approach that both highlights differences but only insofar as they are transient. Jean-Luc Nancy addresses the limits and potentially destructive nature of articulation of space in discourse in his 2002 text entitled *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*. Space, he argues, exists in a state of becoming, it takes on form because it is met with an attempt at borders and delineations of different kinds. Space gets filled out in the active relationship between infinity and delineation. It matters that infinity is capped at some point, not because that line of delineation will come to define what a given space is but because that limit will enable space to be in relation with something

other than itself, and this ongoing process of relationality will consistently bring space into being.

As the world grows gradually homogenous, the possibility of capturing any one part of separating and designating one part of it becomes difficult. Nancy goes on to write: "L'Occident est venu à recouvrir le monde, et dans ce mouvement il disparaît en tant qu'il était censé orienter le monde" (16). The possibility of a single empire dominating other parts of the world was weakened as the Occident began to cover the whole world. This statement seems at first to contradict itself, one thing is becoming progressively impossible at the same time as it is happening, but Nancy explains that if a given space is covered completely by a dominating force, both the space and the dominating force will disappear due to a lack of distinction. With nothing left to differ from, it will not matter that one space has been taken over, its lack of delineation or border with something other than itself will erase it and it will sink into indistinction. Nancy interprets this passage as the beginning of "mondialisation," meaning that everything is the same, covered by the same characteristics of whatever formerly dominated it. He notes that because the world is gradually becoming homogenous, the presence of opposing or differing elements inside the world is threatened. The West is no longer actually opposed to the East because it has managed to spread beyond its own boundaries and encapsulate land that was previously foreign to it.⁷⁰ The absence of difference between spaces makes a relationship between them impossible. Again according to Nancy, the absence of

⁷⁰ This issue will receive a more extensive development in chapter 4 in terms of globalization inside the Maghreb novel and the effects on divisions between the East and the West.

this relationship would lead to the absence of being, since being itself is predicated on continuous and repeated encounters and relationships with the other. These relationships are necessary since without them the other cannot become the other and the self cannot become the self. This relationship is sustained here, despite the dwindling presence of difference but it has to be created again and again through encounters with space, efforts towards representation, and attempts to uncover something other than the world with which to confront the world itself.

In most of Houellebecq's novels, there is a lack of uniqueness and specificity in the setting as well as in the beings that inhabit the settings. In many of his novels, especially *Plateforme*, and his latest, *La Carte et le Territoire* (2010), the narrators travel extensively, calling attention to the expectation of difference in new and unknown territory, and yet this difference fails to appear. By implementing an infrastructure for mass tourism in the developing world, the Michel in *Plateforme*, comes to view the world exclusively through the scope of global consumerism. The "Club Eldorado," developed by his girlfriend Valérie who works as an executive for the company Aurore⁷¹ that develops organized tours and owns hotel chains all over the world, and her boss, Jean-Yves, spreads across national borders from countries in Africa to most countries in South East Asia. The only variation worth noting from country to country and from club to club is the quality and willingness of the local women to enter into the forms of prostitution that quickly become part of what they are calling "tourisme de charme," a form of prostitution born out of the concept of

⁷¹ Houellebecq has slightly changed the name Accor, which is an actual French multinational corporation that manages hotels in more than 90 countries all over the world.

massage salons. Most characters, including many of the patrons at the hotels, have traveled to many of these locations and their descriptions of them displaces the possibility of difference between countries away from the sovereignty of national, cultural, and linguistic identity founded on political borders and geographic separations of space generally used to define a given country, and onto the slight variations of a given product that is available in the countries where the hotels are located. One patron sitting in a brothel in Thailand describes his experience in other foreign countries:

Je n'en ai rien à foutre ! ajouta-t-il en reposant son verre sur la table avec violence. Je suis un Occidental, mais je veux vivre où je veux, et pour l'instant, c'est encore moi qui ai le fric. Je suis allée au Sénégal, au Kenya, en Tanzanie, en Côte d'Ivoire. Les filles sont moins expertes que les Thaïes, c'est vrai, elles sont moins douces, mais elles sont bien cambrées, et elles ont une chatte odorante. (122)

The desire to consume the best possible product pushes Robert, a technician for the Gas Company in France, to pass over the existence of intrinsic distinctions in the countries he casually cites: "J'en ai rien à foutre!" Although he does name his own origin, "Je suis Occidental," he weakens it by saying that he wants to live wherever he wants and, more importantly, he refers to his nationality with a term that designates the West in its entirety and not his own country specifically. The fact that the speaker can give so little importance to national features between countries points to the preeminence of capitalistic pursuits over politics, culture, and language, as well as to the fact that difference, if there is any, resides in marketing studies and product comparison rather than in history, origin, and race determined by the national borders of any given country. The kind of difference that figures

here is of little importance: one product is presented slightly differently in the places where it is offered. What really emerges from this passage is the fact that the service Robert speaks of is offered in so many diverse countries and in a way that can be so casually compared.

This relates directly to the problems addressed by Jean-Luc Nancy concerning the spreading of commerce by the Western world, gradually erasing differences between countries and consequently rendering representation impossible. Representation becomes impossible because without difference and delineation there is nothing to determine the point at which one thing stops and another begins. The Occident, in this case and according to Nancy as well, with its money, power, and tendency toward domination, has taken over the rest of the world and imposed a general sameness on everything. In order to be able to represent the world something from outside of this sameness needs to interfere and to create delineation or otherness so that it can cap the infinity that otherwise occurs. Gradual globalization of space happens throughout Houellebecq's novels and there are many different reasons for it. Emily Apter comments on Houellebecq's choice to describe a "European-Unionized" in Houellebecq's *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* that he calls France, but that, according to Apter, "could be anywhere in Europe."⁷² Although the author provides a plethora of details pertaining to different spaces, these spaces retain nothing that distinguishes them from other spaces.

La Carte et le Territoire contains a similar blurring of spatial delineation brought on by the artistic projects of the narrator, Jed Martin, who photographs

⁷² "Mobile Citizens. Media States."

Michelin maps and frames the photographs as works of art. By taking photographs of the maps and often, then, photographs of these photographs, Jed Martin deprives them of their ability to represent the national and regional spaces they are based on. Jed Martin shares his first exhibition with his colleagues and chooses to present his photographs of maps. The maps he chooses are always meaningful and yet the meaning they contain that pertains to the territory, always get obliterated through multiple photographs, alterations of the images, and the many effects introduced by the artist in his final prints:

Pour l'exposition il avait choisi une partie de la carte Michelin de la Creuse, dans laquelle figurait le village de sa grand-mère. Il avait utilisé un axe de prise de vues très incliné, à trente degrés de l'horizontal, tout en réglant la bascule au maximum afin d'obtenir une très grande profondeur de champ. C'est ensuite qu'il avait introduit le flou de distance et l'effet bleuté à l'horizon, en utilisant des calques Photoshop. Au premier plan étaient l'étang du Breuil et le village de Châtelus-le-Marcheix. Plus loin, les routes qui sinuaient dans la forêt entre les villages de Saint-Goussaud, Laurière et Jabreilles-les-Bordes apparaissaient comme un territoire de rêve, féérique et inviolable. Au fond et à gauche de l'image, comme émergeant d'une nappe de brume, on distinguait encore nettement le ruban blanc et rouge de l'autoroute A20. (65)

Jed Martin looks at his photograph after Olga, the woman he meets at this exhibition and who will come to be his partner for a short time, tells him it is beautiful. He looks at it with her and agrees that it is indeed beautiful but fails to single out the specific features that make it beautiful. In describing it, Jed Martin begins with the fact that it is a map of the part of France where his grandmother, to whom we already know he was quite attached, lived and died. Very quickly after that he relates the differences he introduced in his own photograph of the map, the different angles he adopted and also the effects with the help of Photoshop that he

brought into his own photographs. The same blurriness or “flou” can be found here as well as the “nappe de brume” present in the above mentioned passage from *Extension du Domain de la Lutte* in which the narrator gazes out of his train window into the rural setting, immersed in fog, and comments on its beauty. The photograph makes the small villages seem fairytale-like and unreal. Later, when the shared exhibition attracts attention and Jed is invited to have his own show, he decides to call it “LA CARTE EST PLUS INTERESSANTE QUE LE TERRITOIRE.”⁷³ The basis for his decision is provided in the paragraph preceding the title, in which Jed Martin compares the territory to the map: “Le contraste était frappant: alors que la photo satellite ne laissait apparaitre qu’une soupe de verts plus ou moins uniformes parsemés de vagues tâches bleues, la carte développait un fascinant lacs de départementales, de routes pittoresques, de *points de vue*, de forêts, de lacs et de cols.”⁷⁴ In this description, the map is indeed more interesting than the territory, which contains shapeless pools of color that blend into one another. Nothing distinct can be named because nothing has any strict delineation. The map, on the contrary, is full of small distinct signs that refer specifically to what they stand for. Here the map and the territory get to stand next to each other in their photographic form and be compared by the viewers that surround them. Jed Martin is satisfied with his work and for a moment he believes it retains meaning. When a reviewer for *Le*

⁷³ *La Carte et le Territoire*. 82

⁷⁴ *La Carte et le Territoire*. 82

*Monde*⁷⁵ laudably writes: “Non sans une crâne audace, il [Jed Martin] adopte le point de vue d’un Dieu coparticipant, aux côtés de l’homme, à la (re)construction du monde” (84), Jed agrees: “Ce n’est pas bête ce qu’il dit...”. The kind of God that Patrick Kéchichian,⁷⁶ the reviewer for *Le Monde*, calls Jed Martin is significant here. He is God because he can adopt the point of view of a higher being capturing something from above. The satellite photograph and the photograph of the map are both taken from a dominant position. However, Kéchichian insists that this is the kind of God that co-participates with man and does not stand alone in his higher position. This designation brings ample weight to the fact that both the picture of the actual territory and the picture of the map are presented alongside one another and are described in the same paragraph. The satellite picture contains only watery impressions of the actual arrangement of elements of the world below. Nothing in its representation indicates that it is an image of the part of the world that figures in the photograph of the map and in this way its otherworldliness, put alongside the photograph of the clear rendition of a specific part of the world in which all is recognizable, provides the otherness that Nancy calls for as the sole possibility of actual representation of an otherwise homogeneous and therefore unrepresentable space. The fairytale-like qualities of the blurry photograph taken of the world from so far away, even though it is a photograph of the actual thing, of the world itself,

⁷⁵ In a previous conversation during the exposition, Jed Martin meets the critic from *Le Monde* and almost asks him what *Le Monde* is, before remembering on his own. There is no doubt that Houellebecq is using this instance to bring ridicule to the importance given to magazine and newspaper reviews of art, especially to the ones in France’s most important national newspaper.

⁷⁶ Patrick Kéchichian is an actual literary critic for *Le monde*.

and not a photograph of a reproduction such as of the map, caps the infinity of one space and creates a delineation between itself, the blurry unknown, and the representable world in the map. In this way Jed Martin is indeed a kind of God, as the *Le Monde* reviewer says, but only in that he understands enough to know that representation can never be the singular rendition of one thing. In each one of his attempts to render the map Jed Martin knows to not forget the territory. He is perhaps God but only insofar as he is a co-participant God.

Although Houellebecq maintains Patrick Kéchichian's words and other reviews at a distance, he does let this review contain a crucial element pertaining to Jed Martin and his maps as well as territories throughout the narrative. In the passage referred to above, the map wins, but as time goes by, examining a map becomes only a small and somewhat insignificant step towards accessing the territory. Towards the end of the novel it seems Jed Martin examines maps for no reason at all, even though he continues to do it with much concentration: "Il étudia quelques temps la carte du room services avant de se rendre compte qu'il n'avait pas faim; qu'il se sentait même incapable d'ingérer quoi que ce soit" (369). And later: "Après avoir étudié quelque temps son plan – c'était complexe, l'association se trouvait elle aussi dans une banlieue de Zurich, mais une banlieue différente – il laissa tomber, et décida de prendre un taxi" (369). Both attempts to privilege the map over the territory or over the actual manifestation of the thing itself turn out to be useless and Jed Martin gives up on them, opting instead for an encounter with the territory itself. Jed Martin cannot control the effects of his work any more than he can understand why it is successful or assign an appropriate value to it. He is not

God but his prolific approach to representing the world by way of photographs of objects, maps, and the land itself, all followed by photographs of those photographs, insures the constant iteration of the existence of the world. Indeed, by way of the multiplicity of attempts to capture what cannot be made to coincide with its representation, Jed Martin is giving expression to the world each time, and by confronting each representation with others of different forms. Without essence or origin, the world and all that is in it can rely only on iterations of itself in association with all that surrounds it, as instances of existence.

This phenomenon is set up earlier on in the novel when Jed Martin is asked to examine photographs of the murder scene of the author, Michel Houellebecq, who appears in the novel and is described as a well-loved author. Jed Martin is in the police station when he looks down at the photographic evidence that one inspector shares with him:

La surface de sa table de travail était presque entièrement recouverte des photos de la scène de crime, qu'il avait, pour la cinquantième fois peut-être, examiné en vain une grande partie de la matinée. Jed s'approcha avec curiosité, prit une des photos pour la regarder. [...] Jed examina plusieurs des agrandissements, qui pour Jasselin se ressemblaient à peu près tous : des couleurs, des lacérations, un puzzle informe. « C'est curieux... » dit-il finalement. « On dirait un Pollock ; mais un Pollock qui aurait travaillé presque en monochrome. Ca lui est arrivé d'ailleurs, mais pas souvent. (350)

The erasure of difference happens here as the photographs mix together and especially as the inspector views them for the “fiftieth time.” Arranged as they are on the inspector’s desk, they lose their ability to represent the space that they originally captured, the floor of the house of the murdered author, Michel Houellebecq. In the eyes of the narrator they become a work of art and detach

themselves, if only temporarily, from their ability to represent the crime scene. Jed Martin says they resemble a Jackson Pollack painting and rather than to discard this comment, the rest of the narrative proves it to be essential by making it become the clue that solves the mystery of the author's death. Michel Houellebecq, the author in the novel, was murdered by a painting thief who managed to steal the portrait Jed Martin made for him and is caught while attempting to sell it several months later. Detachment between representation and referent produces meaning that is central to the plot. The space between the actual floor and the arrangement of the photographs on the Police officer's desk is what reveals the key to the mystery and it is worth insisting on the nature of this gap as well as on the necessity to consider both the representation and the referent alongside one another.

In many of Houellebecq's novels, maps fall into the hands of central characters, whether they are bought, found or donated, and scenes occur in which the central characters believe they can use the map to access the space or territory they wish to go to. When the juxtaposition of map and territory, much like the juxtaposition of signs and streets happens, it fails to render the space legible, and instead simply creates a moment of relationality between the indomitable space and its representation, concept, or figure. This relationship is an active one and it is an ongoing process with very little to indicate that it could be resolved or solved. In *La Création du Monde*, Nancy argues that it is by way of the destruction of representation that representation is possible: "Le monde est désormais sorti de la représentation, de sa représentation et d'un monde de représentations, et c'est ainsi sans doute, qu'on atteint à la représentation du monde" (38). Thus, Houellebecq

redefines the kind of articulation he would need in order to capture indifference in the modern world. This indifference not only applies to the manner in which beings inhabiting the world feel or behave toward one another, it also applies to the lack or absence of difference between elements inside the world. A fading difference after globalization, which is a term that essentially covers up internal differences, is also affecting the mode of representation of all things and of the world in general and bringing representation to work with the world in a way that is always changing. It seems that, barring the integration of science fiction⁷⁷ or fantasy elements in Houellebecq's novels, the moments in which the characters pause to admire indistinct landscapes blurred by fog or by too much distance, are moments in which representation is destroyed, moments in which representation goes outside of representation. It is therefore no accident that characters need to be lost in order to be found or that the map needs its blurry counterpart: every instance of being that gets represented needs to be framed by its own undoing, capped by its own disintegration.

In speaking of the problematic relationship between the world and representation, Nancy claims that there is a form of excess that is secreted in the instant of imperfect coincidence between both entities. He writes:

Si un monde est essentiellement, non pas la représentation d'un univers (cosmos) ni celle d'un ici-bas (monde abaissé, voire

⁷⁷ Science fiction is very often present in Houellebecq's novels. *Les Particules Élémentaires* ends with Michel, realizing the failure of modern families to provide the appropriate amount of love and support and the agony of modern man to find a mate and to create a family, discovers a way for man to reproduce asexually by way of cloning. Cloning also gets picked up in *La Possibilité d'une Ile* (2005), which contains characters that have been cloned for generations, the same ones returning again and again, each one receiving its own number.

condamné du christianisme), mais *excès*, par delà tout représentation d'un ethos ou d'un habitus d'une tenue par laquelle il se tient de lui-même, se rapporte à soi sans se rapporter à aucun principe donné ni à aucune fin fixée, alors il faut aller droit au principe d'une telle absence de principe. Cela doit se nommer le 'sans raison' du monde, ou son absence de fondement. (Italics mine, 47)

This excess resides in the paradoxical efforts on the side of the object and its representation to coincide and to match, and therefore emerges from the gap between the two. Excess plays a particularly important part in the relation between these two elements in that it is both what goes beyond them and what makes it possible for them to exist.

With Houellebecq's interest in this relationship, excess must not be far and it is compelling here to examine some of the passages that portray the efforts to combine representation and object. In his novel *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte*, Michel, without knowing why, purchases a map and then attempts to go to the place on the map:

Vers midi je suis ressorti. Dans la librairie du parvis j'ai acheté la carte Michelin numéro 80 (Rodez-Albi-Nîmes). Rentré dans mon bureau, je l'ai examiné avec soin. Vers dix-sept heures une conclusion m'est apparue : je devais me rendre à Saint-Cirgues-en-Montagne. Le nom s'étalait dans un isolement splendide, au milieu des forêts et des points triangles figurant les sommets ; il n'y avait pas la moindre agglomération à trente kilomètres à la ronde. (50)

As Michel studies the Michelin⁷⁸ map he lets the representation of space that is given here in the form of a map bedim the territory that lies beyond it in Saint-Cirgues-en-Montagne, and behaves as if he were staring at the place itself. In the

⁷⁸ The connection is now three prong between the main character, the name of the author and the name of the maps. Although the author changed his name from Thomas to Houellebecq he did keep his first name Michel.

second sentence, objects and their symbols are no longer distinguished from one another, Michel successfully identifies forests but when it comes to mountains he mentions the red triangles first before revealing what they stand for. More importantly, Michel looks at the name of the town, “le nom s’étalait” [the name was spread out] and sees that it stands alone, “dans un isolement splendide” [in splendid isolation] and determines from this that it must be a desirable destination. The letters from the name seem to form the buildings and streets of the small town in question in Michel’s mind and with the adjective “splendide” it is as if the narrator sees the letters as the angular walls of the houses of the town and the sinewy streets that wind through it, they are vast and spread out and so the town must be so as well. Although he realizes that in order to enjoy the place itself he needs to physically go there, studying the map seems, for a moment, to appease his need⁷⁹.

Michel still fully intends to go to Saint-Cirgues-en-Montagne and gets a ride to the train station to buy a ticket and catch the train. There is a strike however and he decides to spend the night in the train station and wait. He experiences nightlife in the train station with the many vagabonds and dim, closed shops. For this Houellebecq reverts to a Zolean tone in his description and plunges his character in the utter misery of nocturnal Paris:

Le bâtiment la nuit est envahi par une bande de zonards et de semi-clochards. Des créatures crasseuses et méchantes, brutales, parfaitement stupides, qui vivent dans le sang, la haine et leurs propres

⁷⁹ The artist, John Baldessari experiments with the juxtaposition of landscape and map in his work entitled *California Map Project* (1969) in which he writes the letters of the word California on the territory of the state at approximately the same place as they are on the map. He then takes pictures of these letters and documents their location. To form the letters he uses materials found locally and goes to great lengths to alter the landscape in the slightest way possible.

excréments. Ils s'agglutinent là, dans la nuit, comme de grosses mouches à merde, autour des vitrines de luxe désertes. Ils vont par bandes, la solitude dans ce milieu étant quasiment fatale. (152)

This differs greatly from the forests and red triangles the narrator previously described and by 6am he gives up on his plans and leaves the train station. In the evening Michel decides to see a psychologist and he tells him the story of the failed trip to Ardèche. The psychologist manages to get Michel to reveal that his parents are from Ardèche and that it was not an indifferent decision on the part of his patient to wish to go there. The fact that the trip was aborted is also significant. His conclusion is that Michel is on a "quête de repère d'identité" (154) and that he is using space as a way to achieve this. In this sense, Michel's attempt to make the map coincide with the territory and to go to the space represented on the map was a means for uncovering his own identity. Indeed, the doctor is reading the space and determining the goal put forward in experiencing such a space. He includes in this all of Michel's business trips and although Michel is skeptical of such a diagnosis he thinks to himself: "Une théorie, c'est bien. C'est toujours mieux d'avoir une théorie au bout du compte" (154). The psychologist has assigned an identifying role to the spaces in which Michel finds himself and has established that to navigate through them, for Michel, is to attempt to determine who he is. The teleological approach to space put forward by the psychologist seems to establish that there is truth or the possibility of truth behind space and more specifically that the stories told by Michel, his purchase of the map of Ardèche, and finally his attempt to go there are all ways of getting to the truth of Michel himself, to his true identity.

The connection between space and identity is not new. Houellebecq brings all of these elements together in the beginning of *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* when he addresses his readers directly:

Les pages qui vont suivre constituent un roman; j'entends, une succession d'anecdotes dont je suis le héros. Ce choix autobiographique n'en est pas réellement un: de toute façon, je n'ai pas d'autre issue. Si je n'écris pas ce que j'ai vu je souffrirai autant – et peut-être plus. Un peu seulement, j'y insiste. L'écriture ne soulage guère. Elle retrace, elle délimite. [...] On patauge toujours dans un brouillard sanglant, mais il y a quelques repères. Le chaos n'est plus qu'à quelques mètres. (19)

Houellebecq compares writing to the navigation through space. Writing itself delineates and traces spaces and in a way it serves to create a meaningful path through the domain we are given to live in. But, Houellebecq is quick to say the aim is not to clarify everything, to explain space and to assign meaning, but to insert itself into a spatial configuration, to place itself on the map. Writing is intimately linked to space not in order to corral it, but in order to draw from the possibility of proximity and configurations that it affords. Chaos remains only a few meters away and writing can blissfully remain lost in fog, tracing lines and delineating, only to find that its achievement is to stay in touch with all that is around it and not to organize all that it sees. There are more markers, as Houellebecq writes, but they can never quite clear away the fog and provide a perfect representation of space. Houellebecq clearly establishes that he is writing a novel but the contents are left unspecified, as is the goal of the novel. He says that to write does not appease suffering; it simply provides some guidelines in an otherwise murky environment. The environment is not clearly defined here, nor is the goal of Houellebecq's writing,

but what is clear is that he is in it, he is stomping around in the “bloody fog,” fully present in the persistent telling and retelling of a story, and in this case of Michel’s story.

Jean-Luc Nancy also discusses what should go in a novel in his 2008 text entitled *Vérité de la Démocratie*, and writes: “S’il y a ‘crise’, comme on dit, du roman, c’est parce que nous avons à inventer un nouveau récit de notre histoire désormais privée d’Histoire.” (51). He adds even that “ Et s’il y a du body art - et jusqu’au sang, jusqu’à la souffrance -, c’est parce que nos corps désirent se comprendre autrement.” (51). What is the “Histoire” with a capital H to which Nancy refers and what is the other way of understanding bodies that body art and other kinds of body alterations are calling for? The answers appear earlier in the chapter titled “Espace formé pour l’infini” in which Nancy denounces the role of politics on space. Politics, according to Nancy, impose a meaning and a utility on a given space depriving it of its otherwise infinite facets and agencies. It inscribes one single meaning on a place, delineating it specifically, and incorporating it into a larger subset of usages, ultimately prescribing the function it will have in society and in the world. Nancy argues that politics should be limited to the role of rendering space available, of bringing it into the arena of expression but that the arts, literature, dreams, love, sciences, thoughts, etc. are what can bring it into existence by continuously writing the stories of what it is. As we have seen, he accuses the role of History as one single story that is the story of mankind of attempting to impose itself on space and dominate all other instances of expression of space. Nancy argues in favor of the multiplicity of moments of iteration in all forms. Politics should not carry the

meaning or the value of the space, rather “[l]a politique démocratique ouvre l’espace pour des identités multiples et pour leur partage, mais elle n’a pas elle-même à se figurer.” (49). Dethroning the single dominating figure that attempts to impose meaning or value on any given space is crucial in this chapter and Nancy goes on to argue:

Le renoncement à l’identification majeure – qu’elle ait été portée par l’image d’un roi, d’un père, d’un Dieu, d’une Nation, d’une République, d’un Peuple, d’un Homme ou d’une Humanité, voire d’une Démocratie – ne contredit pas, au contraire, l’exigence de l’identification pour tous et chacun de s’identifier (on aime dire, aujourd’hui, de “se subjectiver”) comme ayant place, rôle et valeur – inestimable – dans l’être-ensemble. Ce qui fait la politique, ce qui fait le “bien-vivre” par lequel Aristote la détermine, c’est un “bien” qui précisément ne se détermine en aucune façon, par aucune figure ni sous aucun concept. (49-50)

There can be no single figure or concept to define or articulate a given thing, each instance of being needs to be identified by all that surrounds it in the moment of being. Nancy mentions also that in order for something to be in needs to take place “comme ayant place” but also “avoir lieu,” which brings the problems of being and of space together in a relationship of mutual determination. Something must have a place in order to come into being but the place must be the scene for an infinite amount of experiences, stories, arrangements, articulations, commentaries etc. without a single one of them taking over the others⁸⁰. Houellebecq’s reluctance to determine the contents of his novel, as well as his insistence that the only thing that can happen is his own stomping around in thick fog, is in direct compliance with

⁸⁰ In this same vein, to pronounce a “non-lieu” in French, a “non-place” is legal jargon for a mistrial, one in which there is not enough reliable evidence for the trial to *take place*. The conditions for the existence of something are greatly dependent on the pace that surrounds them and on the possibility of borrowing for a moment.

Nancy's notions of expression. As an author, he refuses to say what his novel is about and although it has biographical elements, he says, it is *the story* of one main person. This, in turn, relates back to the author's efforts in his narratives to prevent one single character from dominating the others. The "central" characters are determined only in that they are given a spatial configuration in which to "take place." The relationship between being and space is one that comes into being only when it is iterated or exercised. In *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte*, as indicated by the title, there is an ongoing effort to claim space in order for events to happen.

By using spatial vocabulary, Houellebecq calls attention to the kinds of places he chooses to include in his novel and to the part they play. It may be useful to examine the kinds of spaces that appear in Houellebecq's novels, especially in consideration of the importance they receive in contemporary analyses of his works. Houellebecq chooses places such as supermarkets, nightclubs, airports, high, skyscrapers without names, highways, and ostentatious social venues in Paris. Emer O'Beine writes that these spaces "emphasize the protagonist's estrangement from the contemporary world by having them repeatedly encounter urban and inter-urban environments designed to be passed through rather than appropriated or domesticated, environments on which those negotiating them leave little trace and which thus impose transience on their users."⁸¹ Carole Sweeney agrees and adds: "Urban spaces in the novel are blasted geo-psychic landscapes of social and spatial desolation. Paris is represented as a dreary, bloodless city 'gaudy and repellent' full

⁸¹ "Navigating Non-Lieux in Contemporary Fiction," 393

of 'leprous façades' drained of any mythic or historical particularity."⁸² These comments address the relentless impersonality of the locations in which most events take place in Houellebecq's novels. Even novels that start out in a personal space such as Jed Martin's apartment in the beginning of *La Carte et le Territoire*, shift suddenly to a chain hotel, when the boiler in his apartment breaks down and Jed is forced to seek refuge in a Marriot Hotel. Deterritorialized, misplaced, and lost, the protagonists of Houellebecq's novels do not invest spaces with sentiments and memories, they move through them, consume them, and, if they are lucky, get lost in them. As Emer O'Beine refers to them, these places are not places they are non-places or *non-lieux*, which is a term used by the French anthropologist Marc Augé.

There is an uncanny and thus far undocumented relationship between Marc Augé's theorization of 'non-lieux' and the choices of spaces Houellebecq makes in his novels. In defining the "non-lieu," Marc Augé distinguishes it from a space that informs its occupants on their identity: "Si un lieu peut se définir comme identitaire, relationnel, historique, un espace qui ne peut se définir ni comme identitaire, ni comme relationnel, ni comme historique définira un non-lieu" (*Non-lieux, Introduction à une anthropologie de la Surmodernité*, 101). Marc Augé goes on to quote Michel de Certeau who argues that to exercise a space, meaning to attempt to navigate through it or to inhabit it fully, is to repeat the jubilatory and silent experience of childhood: "de la naissance comme expérience primordiale de la différenciation, de la reconnaissance de soi comme soi et comme autre" (105). To experience space according to Michel de Certeau is to apprehend difference

⁸² "And Yet Some Free Time Remains..." 52

between oneself and the environment and, as a result of this difference, to recognize something outside oneself that is a reflection or a marker contributing to forming identity. A place is therefore a residual memory, no matter of what origin, that is kept and that one can experience simply by occupying it. Michel in *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* is at first prevented from going to the place where his parents come from and for which he has a map, but when, at the end of the novel, he finally manages to go, his experience is unlike the psychologist and Michel de Certeau's theories:

Je m'avance encore un peu plus loin dans la forêt. Au delà de cette colline, annonce la carte, il y a les sources de l'Ardèche. Cela ne m'intéresse plus ; je continue quand même. Et je ne sais même plus où sont les sources ; *tout à présent se ressemble*. Je suis au centre du gouffre. Je ressens ma peau comme une frontière, et le monde extérieur comme un écrasement. L'impression de séparation est totale ; je suis désormais prisonnier en moi-même. Elle n'aura pas lieu, la fusion sublime ; le but de la vie est manqué. Il est deux heures de l'après-midi. (Italics mine, 181)

Michel experiences true separation between himself and the space he is in, which is the premise established by Michel de Certeau. His skin is like a border, the outside world presses against him and he feels imprisoned inside himself. However, contrary to Michel de Certeau's theory, Michel does not undergo an experience of himself and self and as other. This difference between himself and the world is not one that carries meaning, the world is all the same and the only difference is an oppressing one that prevents relationality. Michel seems to believe that the experience with space that could save him would be a total collapse of difference brought on by fusion. Everything that surrounds him is the same and he thinks he should join it and form one infinite space without difference. This is the end of the novel and the

narrator, who was apparently searching for something similar to what the psychologist told him to find, admits failure, “Elle n’aura pas lieu la fusion totale.” Michel starts out with a map and is able to locate the springs, which he wishes to see and he enters into the forest with a clear notion of where he wishes to go. Just as he is about to make the map coincide with the actual space and to come to stand in front of the springs that are represented on the map, he loses interest and loses track of where the springs are located. Not only does he lose that but also his ability to communicate with the environment in which he is standing as he feels more and more enclosed in his own body and he subtracts himself from this space. This experience does not lead to the goal Michel set for himself and as he establishes the times of day he points already to an external reality, “Il est deux heures de l’après-midi,” which applies to the rest of the afternoon anywhere else in France.

The effort to use space as a “quête d’identité” has proven unsuccessful and Ardèche, which was supposed to bring Michel back to his childhood, has revealed nothing. The end of the novel should perhaps have come several paragraphs earlier when Michel experiences a different kind of relationship to this environment, one that does not include a map:

Et soudain tout disparaît. Une grande claque mentale me ramène au plus profond de moi-même. Et je m’examine, et j’ironise, mais en même temps je me respecte. Combine je me sens capable jusqu’au bout de représentations mentales! Comme elle est nette, encore, l’image que je me fais du monde! La richesse de ce qui va mourir en moi est absolument prodigieuse; je n’ai pas à rougir de moi-même; j’aurais essayé. (180)

Michel is aware of his own representation of the world and as “everything disappears” he prepares to let go of it. This is what he does in the next paragraph:

“Depuis des années je marche aux côtés d’un fantôme qui me ressemble, et qui vit dans un paradis théorique, en relation étroite avec le monde. J’ai longtemps cru qu’il m’appartenait de le rejoindre” (180). Michel stops believing that he needs to fuse with his double, or the phantom and the theoretical paradise, and this realization provokes a new sensation: “En même temps je ressens, avec une impressionnante violence, la possibilité de la joie.” In renouncing all efforts to represent the world, and to merge with his theoretical other, Michel catches a glimpse of happiness and, much like the instance of identity he experiences in the middle of the Marcells, it is a violent impression that does not lead to greater development or growth and does nothing to prevent the narrator from believing that his life was a failure, as we see in the following paragraph when Michel picks up the map again.

It seems the psychologist, who attempted to assign meaning to the experience of space, was wrong and it is not always best to have a theory as Michel once thought. In renouncing a theoretic approach to space and in simply being present in it Michel finally comes closer to happiness. This understanding brings about a different reading of the last sentence of the novel, “Il est deux heures de l’après-midi.” While undoing any delineation of Michel’s space, given that it is two O’clock in the rest of France, this statement also captures the banal aftermath of the narrator’s failure to achieve a higher understanding of the world, two O’clock is neither the beginning of the day nor the end, nor even perfectly the middle. But given Michel’s short-lived realization in the second to last paragraph, that it is not necessary for him to fuse with the world or to adopt a theoretical understanding of what surrounds him in order for him to access happiness, the last sentence of the

novel seems also to evoke the French expression “Il ne faut pas chercher midi à quatorze heures,” commonly used in colloquial French to suggest that something is much simpler than it may seem at first. To search for noon in the slot reserved for 2pm is to overcomplicate something that is in fact very simple, but it is also to fail to see that each thing has its place and that one cannot be found in the place of another. Here Michel stands in the two O’clock slot looking for something with the help of a map and the words of a psychologist, when in fact he seems to have found it several paragraphs earlier when he renounces all efforts, puts down the map, lets everything disappear, and finally catches a glimpse of the possibility of happiness. *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* is the narrative of Michel’s search for something that will help him to make sense of his solitary and overall miserable life. For most of the narrative, he believes there is a place where this will happen for him, one that he needs to uncover and in which he will attempt to find happiness. The English title *Whatever*, reveals the outcome of this struggle and suggests that it is not a place or the ability to theoretically pin down a space and understand it that will provide happiness, rather it is the moment when the narrator stops consulting different experts and puts down his tools and does whatever.

This occurrence is not unusual in Houellebecq’s novels and a comparison between similar passages serves to illustrate that for the most part it is better to be lost and without markers or indicators of a navigational path through a given space. Much like the domination of a figure in a group of beings, Nancy denounces the negative side effects of a dominating principle of representation or cognition of the world: “Une représentation du monde, vision du monde, signifie l’assignation d’un

principe et d'une fin du monde. Autant dire qu'une vision du monde est en effet la fin du monde vu, aspiré, absorbé et dissous dans cette vision" (*La Création du Monde*, 38). The object must always extend beyond the arrested concept that attempts to define it or to represent it. Excess is the infinite act by which the object defies representation and in which something else, something abstract and unrepresentable, can take place. This realization that some thing escapes the categories of representation that exist will be revisited in chapter 4 in a study of the Franco-Moroccan author's novel, *Le Jour Venu* (2010). The novel sets itself up as an attempt to represent the city of Casablanca in Morocco, for "those who have not forgotten" the way the city was before colonialism. The chapter demonstrates that in fact, despite the means of representation and the effort in the narrative to be exhaustive, certain creatures and certain areas of the city resist being encapsulated and instead become part of an excess. This chapter bemoans the spreading effects of globalization in a novel that seeks to depict a specific cultural space and to protect it from Western influence. Although the appearances of somewhat monstrous beings who escape representation can be unsettling, it is reassuring to see that no matter what categories or concepts are developed, something still remains free and undefined. This presents a similar potentiality and generative quality as the excess that remains in *La Carte et le Territoire*, when the map does not fully capture the territory and some free and bewildering elements are left behind to ensure plurality and the survival of difference. This excess is generated in other literary texts and we will see an example of it in the next chapter, which is a study of Nancy Huston's bilingual text *Limbes/Limbo* in which each language on each side of the binding of

the book spills over to the other side. Any attempt to contain each on each page fails and the text becomes a series of dialogues, conflicts, and tense encounters between the French and English version of a very unusual text.

CHAPTER 3: CONFLICT IN TRANSLATION, NANCY HUSTON'S BILINGUAL TEXT *LIMES/LIMBO* AND OTHER TEXTS

Misunderstanding, disagreement, confusion, conflict, and misconception can all be caused by the failure to adequately communicate an idea in another idiom or in a foreign language. The translation of a literary text from one language to another makes communication across languages possible but it also comes with a set of problems. Theories of translation oppose one another over whether translations should be faithful renditions of the original or whether they should free themselves from the original and take on a life of their own. Literal translations can bring about the loss of context or meaning while context based translations can fail to capture specific words and terminology; cultural references, historical sensitivity, and basic social mores can be distorted or misrepresented when translated from one language to another. Should a translation be literal regardless of the varying emotional connotations of the words chosen in one language and imposed on another? Or should the translation take into account the environment in which it is created and offer itself up as a translated interpretation of the original, adapted, in turn, to a new context? A closer examination of the relationship between languages in translation and between the translation and the original reveals fundamental aspects of the ways in which languages organize themselves to create meaning in literary expression. Certain aspects of a literary text get lost in translation because they are untranslatable and these losses expose the role they originally played: the subtle cultural references, alliterations, the order of words, the age of each word, as well as

the relationship between words in a sentence. This chapter will focus on conflicts and disagreements in translation in the Canadian author Nancy Huston's bilingual text *Limbes/Limbo* as well as several of her novels, including *Infrarouge*, *Cantique des Plaines*, and *Lignes de Faille*. Characters in her novels and the subject *I/je* in her bilingual text grapple with the frustrations that come from passing from one language to the other as well as with the power to form and to create new life in translations. In *Lignes de Faille*, the six-year-old protagonist Solomon leaves the United States for the first time on a trip to Munich with his family and is dismayed to find that everyone speaks German and that he cannot understand:

Moi non plus je n'aime pas que les panneaux soient en Allemand, c'est comme autant de portes qui me claquent à la figure les unes après les autres et je refuse de demander à mamie Sadie ce qu'ils veulent dire, je ne veux pas admettre que j'ignore quelque chose. D'ici ma majorité, il faudra que tous les habitants de la Terre se mettent à parler anglais et s'ils ne le font pas c'est une des premières lois que je passerai quand je serai au pouvoir. (110)

The character's frustration over the fact that the street signs are in German gets expressed in the image of doors being slammed and in the fact that the world in which he exists is being reduced in size. The only solution is to force everyone to speak English.

Nancy Huston, whose mother tongue is English chooses to write in French and therefore to write from outside of the familiarity of her own language. She discusses this in her correspondence with the French Algerian author Léïla Sebbar, in a collection of letters titled *Lettres Parisiennes*. The author longs for a world outside of the plurality of languages and yet she thrives in producing literary texts that depend on the distance from the familiar. She writes: "N'est-ce pas cette

distanciation même qui constitue la littérature? En d'autres termes, j'avais besoin de rendre mes pensées deux fois étrangères, pour être sûre de ne jamais retomber dans l'immédiateté, dans l'expérience brute sur laquelle je n'avais aucune prise." (*Lettres Parisiennes*, 197). Informed by Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," this inquiry into the relationality between foreign languages inside the act of translation will expose the impossibility of any given language to sever its connections with other languages and its dependency on others. Paul de Man's comments, given during a talk at Cornell University on the mistranslation of Benjamin's text on translation, will also reveal how prevalent this problem is and how damaging it can be. Nancy Huston plays, in self-translations of her texts, with the issues at stake in translation and opts often willingly for conflict, disagreement, mistranslation, and for what Jean-François Lyotard calls *différend*, the vexed space between source and target sentences, by choosing sound over meaning, form over content, and by making each version of her bilingual text painfully aware of its foreign counterpart, on the opposing page. The Canadian author locates literature on the limit between opposing and contradictory sides of the self and the world and argues that the strangeness but also the deficiency, the lack, and the division are necessary conditions for her own writing. In Nancy Huston's experience this twice-strange space of in-betweenness is what constitutes exile. Exile and the conflicted relationship with one's own origin and mother tongue are fundamental aspects of her writing and she points to the real threat, which is not conflict and misunderstanding but the "danger of reunification":

En somme, nous avons besoin d'un pays et de l'autre; de la différence entre les deux; le mélange ne nous intéresse pas, il nous

effraie. Danger de réunification, comme tu disais il y a déjà longtemps... Sans doute l'avais-tu compris avant moi: l'exil n'est que le fantasme qui nous permet de fonctionner, et notamment d'écrire. (193)

The formation of the space in between languages is one that contains both the experience of loss of meaning, and the sense of belongingness to the homeland and to the mother tongue, as well as the fecund possibility of generating something new and of shedding a new light on the old or the original after translation. Huston positions the protagonists of her novels as well as the subject "I/je" in her bilingual text in the space in between languages and exposes them to the feeling of loss or lack that comes from the insufficiency inherent in each side taken alone and to the experiences of exposure brought about by crossing over into other countries and other languages. In examining the relationship between languages, this chapter will look closely at the effects of these problems on the formation of the literary subject in Nancy Huston's text. Just as languages cannot be considered outside of their relationship with other languages, neither can they be considered outside of their relationship with those who speak them, who are born into them, learn new languages, or who long for a world beyond languages. The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy considers the possibility of a plurality of worlds beyond that which is familiar and argues that this possibility both saves the world from the threat of total homogenization, and therefore annihilation, and provides the tools necessary for determining the shape and function of our own world. The notion of a plurality of worlds or pluriverse, as he puts it, protects against Huston's "danger of reunification" and makes it possible to consider the relationship and therefore the

co-determination of opposing sides of language and space. This relationship, as will be argued here, is crucial in determining the shape and nature of each side of the relationship as well as the vital elements contained in each side. Although relationality between the known and the unknown or the mother tongue and the foreign language is productive and although the space in between languages is often the origin of the new, the act of crossing over from one to the other is difficult and most of Huston's characters admit that they would prefer to avoid it. The Italian theorist, Roberto Esposito, exposes the ways in which encounters between opposing sides can be daunting, dizzying, and life threatening, and can bring about terrible conflict. He argues that this is necessary in order to form the *communitas*, which is the space in which co-determination happens and beings come into existence. This space is reigned over by conflict but it is also a vital space for the elements it contains. Many critics have argued that Huston's passage from one language and one country to another in her writing as well as in her letters to Léïla Sebbar on the question of exile in writing result in the singular concept of multiculturalism or translanguaging. This chapter argues that the problem at stake invites conflict and irresolution as a way of preserving plurality, remaining divided so as retain the relationality between languages.

Translations of literary works are controversial exercises in rendering literary texts, written in foreign languages, accessible to readers in a language they understand. The controversy resides in the conflicting criteria in translations that lead, in some cases, to the need for many translations of the same text, each offering variations on these criteria. This problem stems from characteristics inherent in

literary works, the first being that literature does not simply seek to convey information or a specific message. In his essay "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin focuses on this problem and argues that a greater consideration of the act of translating literary texts can shed light on the relationality between languages and between the original and the translation of a literary text. He recognizes the problem in a common way of understanding translation: "Its [the literary work] essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations" (69). This notion of translation is also insufficient in that it says nothing of the relationship between languages and the relationship between the original and the translation. Beyond the importance of conveying meaning that is similar to the meaning in the original, translation, understood as a necessary task in the face of the multiplicity of languages, reveals what is essential in language itself, what matters the most in a translation will reveal what matters the most in the original. Benjamin argues for a literal or *wörtlich* translation not because it is the most effective way to capture the meaning of a text (grammar and context are seemingly more important), but because it makes it possible to continue to reveal the ways in which languages, by way of their plurality, are broken and unable, on their own, to materialize the objects and subjects contained in their sentences.

Benjamin refers to the "translatability," of a text, which is "an essential quality of certain works," or a "specific significance inherent in the original [which] manifests itself in [the literary work's] translatability." (71). This is still rather vague

in that it does not yet explicate the ways, if they exist, of expressing the “specific significance” in the translation or in the original. The term “manifests” clearly attributes a life of its own to the “specific significance” that appears in the translation. Therefore, although this significance originates in the original literary text, it takes on its own shape and *raison d’être* in the translation. Later in this essay, Benjamin refers to this “specific significance” that gets reborn in the translation as a simple “echo of the original” (76) with the distortions of intention and of sound that this image implies. Considering the relative independence of translation from the original is useful in understanding translations as “manifestations of life⁸³,” as works that produce their own effects, made of words that carry their own emotional connotations, and with a grammar that emerges out of their own set of rules. However, the relationship between the translation and the original is a “vital connection” that is maintained no matter how far the translation strays from the original. Benjamin describes translation as the “afterlife” of the original, explaining that an original literary text is immobile and unchanging, it does not mature with time, nor does it change as language and cultural and historical references evolve. It is dead and yet it maintains a connection with the ever-changing translation that manifests itself, depending on the work, with each new cultural era, looking back, always, at its dead originator. A good translation, therefore, recaptures and blows

⁸³ Many of the metaphors used to describe the process of translation in Henry Zohn’s English translation of Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator” belong to the trope of sexual reproduction, such as with “birth pangs,” (“douleurs obstétricales” in the French version), and human relationships such as with “kinship.” This is significant in thinking about translation as a greater process of understanding in general and understanding of the self in relationality in particular.

new life into the “means of signification” of the original, resurrecting the relationship with the original again and again.

The relationality between original and translation inherent in translation reveals essential characteristics of the original, but also of the translation, such as the modes of signification, the *locus* of meaning, the connotations that emanate from words, and the linguistic supplementation that is needed in the translation in order to manifest the “specific significations” of the original. Relationality is essential according to Benjamin because a single utterance, in the original or the translation cannot belong purely to the “reine Sprache” or pure language. Language has been broken up into a plurality of languages that must come into relationship with one another in a dialectic effort to unite and to return to the totality of the language of truth. Benjamin quotes Mallarmé in his short essay:

Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême: penser étant écrire sans accessoires, ni chuchotement mais tacite encore l’immortelle parole, la diversité, sur terre, des idiomes empêche personne de proférer les mots qui, sinon se trouveraient, par une frappe unique, elle-même, matériellement la vérité. (77)

And Harry Zohn translates this as:

The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent, the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialize as truth.

Benjamin draws the conclusion that therefore translation is between doctrine, the word of truth, and poetry, the earthly expressions or accessories through which the word of truth is uttered. Reference to Mallarmé’s text also sheds light on Benjamin’s

claim that all translations are failures to translate in that the plurality of languages underscores the failure of each one, and even of each one working together with the others, to access the language of truth. Equally important is the emphasis on plurality as the essential flaw in languages and the main obstacle to reaching the *reine Sprache*. Each language lacks something internally that would enable it to “materialize as truth” and therefore it is forced into relationality with the plurality of other languages⁸⁴. The idea of a *reine Sprache*, or a single language of truth is problematic in the context of an inquiry into the generative qualities of the relationship between languages. What Benjamin refers to as the *reine Sprache* is Nancy Huston’s “danger of reunification” in that it would bring languages back together and erase the differences between them and therefore eliminate the possibility of relationality between them. Therefore, in doing away with the language of truth, Benjamin is actually revealing a new realm of possibilities inside the failure of each language to contain the others.

There is a plurality of words and languages because the true language has been lost, and therefore nothing material can come of the diversity of languages in originals and in their translations. Benjamin describes translations as “fragments of a broken vessel,” which is an image that adequately captures the problem of incompleteness in each language and the possibility of a totalizing whole (the *reine Sprache*) that is lost. The notion of a vessel also locks languages into an ever-lasting relationship as they strive to fit together and to recreate the vessel that Harry Zohn

⁸⁴ The term “lacking” used in the English translation is also the way in which the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito describes the need for community in *Communitas* as we will see further down.

promises in his translation can be “glued back together.” These images are in themselves of a material nature and so the loss is felt all the more strongly as is the possibility of returning to the totalizing unity that is the *reine Sprache*. Harry Zohn translates:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resemble the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (78)

Translations are fragments of a broken vessel and since they “match one another in the smallest detail” they can be put back together if assembled correctly or “lovingly and in detail.” Consequently, the “greater language” seems rather accessible here and the only challenge is to glue the pieces back together, which means incorporating the “original’s signification.” However, at a talk at Cornell University on March 4, 1983, Paul de Man offers criticism of Zohn’s translation and argues that he left out key words which have distorted the original text to such a degree that the translation of Benjamin’s text says the opposite of what its original intended. Referring to Carol Jacobs’ translation in her article “The Monstrosity of Translation” de Man points out that the German expression “um sich zusammenfügen zu lassen” translated by Zohn as “glued together” should be translated as “articulated together”⁸⁵ and instead of the fragments “matching” one another as Zohn has it,

⁸⁵ Naomi Seidman translates it as “fitting together” and then quotes Zohn’s translation as well in her book *Faithful Renderings: Jewish Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2006.

Jacobs offers “follow one another.” It is mainly context that suggests these changes as the definitions provided by Zohn do appear in any given German/English dictionary and are not technically mistranslated. Thus, as Paul de Man denounces what he sees as flagrant errors in Zohn’s translation, he seems also to position himself strongly against literal translations and to argue that for each original text there is only one correct translation that is context based. De Man proposes a translation of the rest of this paragraph and continues to make corrections:

So, instead of making itself similar to the meanings, to the Sinn of the original, the translation must rather, lovingly and in detail, in its own language, form itself according to the manner of meaning of the original, to make both recognizable as the broken parts of the greater language, just as the fragments are the broken parts of the vessel. (32)

De Man departs greatly from Zohn’s translation:

In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (32)

There are many differences between these translations and de Man points several of them out. The most significant ones in the context of the present inquiry are the change he operates between a translation that “incorporates the original’s mode of signification” and one that “forms itself according to the manner of meaning of the original.” In the former case the translation contains the original and therefore the connection between the two is much stronger and is perhaps even one of dependency. In de Man’s translation, this connection is loosened and the translation is given more freedom. The translation will take shape based on the original, but it

will also, at least, have a form and a self of its own. This is supported also by the switch at the end of the paragraph from “fragments,” which clearly contain the notion of breaking or separating from the whole, for the German “Einzelheit,” to “parts,” which are pieces or segments of something and can be assembled or kept apart, but are not broken. By adding the adjective “broken” to the parts in de Man’s translation, the possibility of reassembling the vessel to form a greater whole gets dismissed. This is de Man’s greatest point in his talk: the plurality of languages with which we are faced and that fail continuously to come together in the right way so as to form the greater language will never be able to be put together. All they can do is reveal the broken parts of the original language and the broken parts of the translation. This, in turn, sheds light on the reason Benjamin refers to translation as a “mode” and not as a tool in that it will never reach its goal of forming a totality and will always be undertaken and failed. De Man goes on to say that in this way the notion of a *reine Sprache* disappears into the distance and ceases to be a material end. De Man writes:

This movement of the original is a wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile if you wish, but it is not really an exile, for there is no homeland, nothing from which one has been exiled. Least of all is there something like a *reine Sprache*, a pure language, which does not exist except as a permanent disjunction which inhabits all languages, including and especially the language one calls one’s own. (De Man, 33)

Every language is broken and translation reveals merely the failure and loss of a totalizing language that perhaps never existed but that is enough to set the translation mode into motion.

Failure to bring languages together to form one great linguistic unit causes great conflict and disagreements. Jean-François Lyotard in *Le Différend* argues that this is much more serious than the problem to translate since everything including politics, history, and justice are determined by language. He takes the example of a person brought to court and accused of a crime for which he could be sentenced to death. He reflects on a case in which there is a disagreement, not about the crime itself, but about the language used by the prosecutor and then by the defendant to describe the crime and to understand it. These are different languages or idioms and they can cause conflict and misunderstanding severe enough to result in misjudgment and in the death penalty. He writes: “J’aimerais appeler *différend* le cas où le plaignant est dépouillé de ses moyens d’argumenter et devient de ce fait une victime.”⁸⁶ The means needed in order for the defendant to defend himself are exclusively language based and Lyotard notes this directly: “Un cas de différend entre deux parties a lieu quand le ‘règlement’ du conflit qui les oppose se fait dans l’idiome de l’une d’elles alors que le tort dont l’autre souffre ne se signifie pas dans cet idiome.”⁸⁷ The question of justice in this case resides in the translatability of the act from one idiom to another and failure to do so causes conflict: “Le différend se signale par cette impossibilité de prouver.”⁸⁸ The necessity to cross over to another idiom in order to defend one’s self and the unavoidable challenge in doing so are central points in this work. The attraction to translation and the need for it are met

⁸⁶ *Le Différend*, Jean-François Lyotard, Les Editions de Minuit, 1983, Paris. 24.

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with the unwavering disappointment of discovering that conflict remains even after translation and that much of what must be translated is untranslatable, thus the *différend* or disagreement. The problem is that the person who committed the crime does not have the language with which to prove his innocence. This means that the possibility of innocence resides solely in language as does his possible culpability and so it is clear here that there is no extralinguistic meaning that can interfere as proof or truth in this situation. Without linguistic means that can be translated into the other idiom, the defendant will be put to death. Lyotard extends this argument to history as well, which is nothing but a linguistic narrative produced by those who chose to articulate it. The importance given to language is absolute and so, therefore, is the inevitable conflict or *différend* that comes about in the act of translation from one linguistic realm to another. Walter Benjamin joins Lyotard in considering the realm of language as the sole place for utterance. He distinguishes between the poet who is naïve enough to believe that he has something to say that is beyond language and that does not need language. The translator functions only within language and his or her function is to take one language and to confront it or to work it into another language. De Man, in reading Benjamin's text, writes: "Translation is a relation from language to language, not a relation to an extralinguistic meaning that could be copied, paraphrased, or imitated" (21). If all is located in the realm of language according to Lyotard and if the poet in believing that there is extralinguistic meaning is deemed naïve, then the role of the translator who causes the relationship between languages to happen is the most important figure. Translation is a comment on that which is beyond one language, which

according to Benjamin and Lyotard, is another language. Locating translation in the relationship between languages undoes the hierarchy between the original and the translation, setting them both on the same plane. Without hierarchy and therefore without anything to copy or from which to depart and without meaning outside of language, the relationship between languages is the sole means of production. Conflict and misunderstanding preventing languages from becoming one and the internal lack that draws languages together and ensures the continuation of the relationality are the main actors in the production of meaning itself. The “danger of reunification” of languages is much more than the loss of linguistic diversity and can now be understood as the loss of meaning.

At a talk in 2003 at the University of Toronto, Victoria College, the bilingual Canadian author Nancy Huston says about French and English that she is: “Handicapped in both, not happy, not satisfied, because if you’ve got two languages, you haven’t really ‘got’ any language at all.”⁸⁹ Nancy Huston has written thirteen novels and many essays as well as several plays in French and has translated most of her work into English herself after it was published in French. It may come as a surprise therefore that she deems herself handicapped in both languages and dissatisfied with her ability to write in either. In translating her own work and in claiming her own deficiency in both languages, Nancy Huston resists categories of consideration such as that of a francophone writer. She describes herself as a “faux immigré,” a fake immigrant, a person who has crossed geographical borders to settle somewhere other than her home country but who, for whatever reason,

⁸⁹ Cited in Nicola Danby’s article “The Space Between: Self-Translator.”

cannot truthfully be described as such. She takes her resistance to categories of representation further in a collection of letters she exchanges with the French-Algerian author Leïla Sebbar called *Lettres Parisiennes* when she describes herself as “une fausse Française, une fausse Canadienne, une fausse écrivaine, une fausse professeur d’Anglais.” (96) Her refusal to choose a side, to decide she is French or Canadian poses problems in the way her work is received and when in 1993 she was awarded the Governor General’s Award for French fiction in Canada for her novel *Cantique des Plaines*, a small controversy breaks out as some claim that it is not a French novel but the translation of an English novel. And *Cantique des Plaines* is in fact a translation of Huston’s novel *Plainsong*, which is the only text she wrote in English first and then translated into French. However, since the novel first found a publisher in its French version and only came out in English after first appearing in French and since the French version was written by Nancy Huston herself, it was decided that it was in fact an original French text. It is noteworthy, however, that even though the matter was settled, Nancy Huston has only ever been considered in Canada, after this affair, for translation awards, and never for English, nor for French fiction awards. In achieving this status, the Canadian author gives up her role as poet and becomes a translator, producing only inside the relation from language to language.

To describe Nancy Huston’s work, critics have opted for terms such as ‘translingual’ and multicultural in an understandable effort to avoid having to choose sides, languages, or categories. The term ‘translingual,’ which is the one most often used to describe Nancy Huston’s work, is different from multilingual in that it

does not add the languages up to form one larger whole, rather it denotes the ongoing process of traversing, of passing over the line in a constant state of flux. Being a “fake immigrant” enables Nancy Huston to both posit herself as an immigrant and to claim that she is not one and thus to make her status double in order to opt out of choosing which side she belongs to. Huston described herself elsewhere not as bilingual but as “doublement mi-lingue” (doubly half-lingual). By being both that which she is and that which she is not, Nancy Huston creates a space in-between being and not being, in which it is possible to cross over constantly from one side to the other. The only condition for the existence of this space is the double negative, the neither, nor that the author uses to describe herself and her work and that ascertains the presence always of one space and the other.

The author does not argue that she wishes to retain her individuality or that she fears being encapsulated into a larger category, rather she calls out for the doubling of her person as well as of her writing which she locates therefore in the space in-between. This limit exists only in the encounter between one side and the other as one hits up against the other, reaching its limit, and exposing itself. After her correspondent, Leïla Sebbar admits that in the absence of her community, be it of her family or her people back in Algeria, or her literary peers, she does not know where to situate herself. She writes: “Je ne me sens plus de communauté, de famille d’esprit.” And later: “Que me reste-il? Aussi, comment et où me situer? Et toi?” Nancy Huston takes this further and describes the groups of people that she believes she and Leïla Sebbar, because of their exile and because they write, belong to: “des êtres, comme nous, à l’écart, scindés, divisés, contre eux-mêmes.” (beings like us

that are set aside, split, divided, against ourselves). And in this sentence she creates a communal space with the personal pronoun 'nous' where she can situate herself alongside Leïla. In their longing for community, both Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar come to realize that the communal land that they can belong to is the one that is divided against itself, that exists only on the limit, and that does not have a stable place in which to position itself. The community of which they speak does not offer familiar habits, nor is it inhabited by family members or opportunities for self-recognition, rather it is a place of removal, departure, and escape where writers in exile can go in order to remain undetermined. The space in-between is neither foreign, nor domestic, neither immigrant, nor indigenous, and it does not constitute a bridge, nor take up the role of mediator between the two sides, borders, or languages. Divided against itself, the subject is placed out of position and is dispossessed and disposed away from fusional and communitarian modes of understanding.

Nancy Huston's bilingual text *Limbes/Limbo*, published in 2000, contains both French and English text carefully separated by the binding of the book. This text was originally written as one large text with 39 language switches from English to French and back again throughout the body of the text. The very first page contains the title in English on the verso and in French on the recto as well as a short text:

ENGLISH: *LIMBO*

Get it in Ing-lish. Shoved. Wedged.

Lodged in the language like a bullet in the brain.

Undelodgeable. Untranslatable.

FRENCH: LIMBES

¡*Caramba!*

Encore raté!

The French version admits failure right away and borrows from the Spanish to express its frustration. We understand the failure only in relation to the English text and so we begin to see a dialogue between both sides. The English text expresses the pain and difficulty of its own language. The entire text is in italics, except for the preposition “in,” which draws attention to the efforts to convert or fit the other text into itself. The word “English” is spelled phonetically to correspond to the way a French person would pronounce it and in making this change the author makes the preposition *in* become more apparent in the word “English” itself. This is also indication that the English version, although it is first to appear, is written in full awareness of the other side and speaks to the French side with a French accent. The verbs used “shoved,” “wedged,” “lodged” strongly express the challenges of this conversion and indicate more specifically that whatever the text is ‘getting [...] in Ing-lish’ is something that is too large to fit. The English version is thus aware of an incommensurable double that is the other and that cannot be contained in itself. The image of the bullet in the brain expresses the violence of such a project and alludes to a possible silencing of the text that would occur if translation were to take place.

The gap between the two versions that do not perfectly correspond to one another leads to further examination of the relationship between them. The

correspondence between one language and the other is problematic and the entire text is punctuated with calls for silence:

English: *Void. Cancelled. Censored. Silenced. Struck out.* (18)

French: Faux. Annulé. Censuré. Raturé. Tu. (19)

English: *Stopped. Stilled. Stunned. Stone.*

French: Stoppé. Sonné. Stupéfié. Ligoté. Etranglé.

English: *Nothing. No thing. Blank.*

French: Pas. Aucune chose. Blanc.

English: *Blast. Damn. Wall. All. Deaf. Blind. Dumb.*

French: Dévastés. Damnés. Muets, sourds, aveugles. Clamsés. 19

The call for silence, however, does not work and the flow of writing continues. The moment the text admits defeat on the first page ‘unlodgeable’ ‘untranslatable’ and is echoed by the French ‘encore raté,’ is strangely the moment that constitutes the beginning of the rest of the book. Failure to translate and to contain one text inside the other is a prerequisite for the existence of this bilingual text. The need to call for silence and to situate the material presence of the translator inside the text always at the point of breaking is an integral part of this double version. The word ‘Tu’ situated at the end of the first sentence in French is both the past tense (passé composé, plus-que-parfait, etc.) of the verb ‘taire’ to silence, but is also the second person singular used to address the other in an informal way, and, phonetically, it refers to a conjugated form of the verb “tuer,” to kill. The subject that is addressed here is both named and silenced in a single gesture. Thus, both sides of the text speak to one another at the same time as they hit each other, strangle, and kill each

other and by doing so they reveal their limits and also their place of interaction. There is a space that gets drawn between both versions of the text in which the translator locates herself. She can see both languages and can comment on her ability or inability to write in both.

The dialogue between the two versions of the text is at times more audible than it is literal. Nancy Huston plays on sonorous correspondences between words that have very different meanings. Making the association between words such as “rat” (in English) and “rate” (in French) forces the differences between these words to the surface as it becomes clear that these words have nothing in common except for their homophony. This dissimulation also calls attention to the fact that the correspondence between different parts of the text is not parallel. The text does contain a translation for the expression “I smell a rat” as “Il y a un os” and yet the sonorous connection between “rat” and “rate” is stronger and takes over. The phonetic relationship between French and English, especially for two words between which no cognitive connection can be inferred, creates a comical effect and draws attention to the absurdity of the effort to translate, itself:

It’s nothing to laugh about. If you keep on laughing we’ll rip out your spleen. Where exactly is the spleen, anyhow? I smell a rat.

Sérieux maintenant. Fini de rire. Si vous riez, c’est la rate que l’on arrachera. Où elle est d’ailleurs la rate? Il y a un os.

Nancy Huston admonishes the reader for taking this project lightly “It’s nothing to laugh about” at the same time as she reveals how bizarre it is to widen the possibilities of relationality between languages. She opens up the plane of associations and lets them be phonetic when they are not literal. It is clear here that

the translation, which takes place on both sides of the binding of the book, since both texts are aware of the existence of the other text, is purely linguistic and no longer, and perhaps never did, refer to a meaning outside of language. This gesture to liberate the relationship from a linear or literal translation is felt further on when she writes:

Oh! To be released from the obligation to live in any tongue! To relinquish language, once and for all! To vanquish languish. That's a good one. Well, so-so.
Ah! Ne plus être dans aucune langue. Ne plus languir. N'être. La bonne blague. Enfin, couci-couça. (28 and 29)

There is a kind of agony contained in the obligation to choose, which recalls the author's refusal to choose one language. But this passage is also noteworthy in that it introduces a sense of longing (*languir*) and obligation that further illuminates the relationship between the French and the English versions. The translator seems to bemoan the neediness that exists between both languages, which explains her desire to be released from both of them. Again, the difficult relationship between both languages is generative, which is made clear in the pun in the French version "n'être" which sounds like the French word 'naître' meaning to be born. The self-consciousness that surrounds these word plays reinserts the author and the translator into the text. She comments on her text and then nuances her comment, suggesting that maybe it is not as good as she originally thought. The translator and the author speak directly from their space in between by passing judgment on their own writing. In taking her place among the languages the translator comes to realize that she has lost her independence and that she longs for one language and feels indebted to the other. This relationship of translation between both sides of the text

destabilizes the notion of an original and a translation. Since both sides were originally part of a larger, fragmented text, neither language is the original and neither language is a translation of the other.

In the last passage, the author/translator positions the subject in the middle of the problematic relationship between the languages:

I yam that I yam, and never the twain shall meet.
Il ne faut pas chercher midi à quatorze heures. Je suis celui qui est, et ça fait deux. (54-55)

The subject (I/je) is positioned in between two sides that should not be confused with one another. Both singularity and plurality are maintained here and the self can seemingly not be posited without consideration of the other or others. The subject exists between the fault lines of two sides that long for one another, listen to one another, but also silence each other and refuse to meet and to become one. As we have seen, the text as well as the subject “I/Je” comes into being at the limit of its own finitude, which, in this text, is the moment when there is failure to translate, failure of one text to contain the other, deviation from a literal translation, as well as conflict, rejection, indebtedness, and desire. The myriad of pushes and pulls between the two versions of the text form or enter into the process of forming a space in which relationality takes place between units that are divided against each other and against themselves.

The impossibility of the superimposition of two texts that otherwise claim to be translations creates a space that is incommensurate to both. The translator, as well as the subjects, materializes in a space that cannot be located in one position but that is redefined at each encounter between one side of the text and other. Each

time the French text refers to the other or silences the other, the translator's voice can be heard and, as we have seen, on occasion, the text comes to generate something new. Jean-Luc Nancy insists on the role played by literature in the coming into being of community in his chapter entitled "Myth Interrupted," and writes: "literature [...] has as being (as essence, if you will, or again, as transcendental constitution) the common exposure of singular beings, their compearance. [...] It is a birth: we never stop being born into community."⁹⁰ Nancy Huston gives voice and protean shapes to the beings inside the community of literature by introducing opposing beings and letting them meet and reject each other repeatedly. It is clear that in doing so, the text is able to determine its own limit on which communication is possible and to begin to draw the contours of a space in which community is possible. Birth into community takes place in Nancy Huston's text in the very way she inserts birth into her writing. "N'être" is the limit of being, non-being, as well as the act of being born, and the friction caused by this encounter is precisely where Jean-Luc Nancy locates community. The friction is generative in Nancy Huston's text and in Jean-Luc Nancy's essays the friction is the moment of encounter that leads neither to silence, nor to fusion or encapsulation, but that ensures the existence of all that co-appears in this instance.

Jean-Luc Nancy wrote his latest essay titled *Dans Quels Mondes Vivons-Nous?* as a way of taking the measure of a disastrous world that is threatened with annihilation. The French philosopher addresses this again in a later essay on the disastrous effects of the earthquake in Fukushima, in an essay titled *L'Equivalence*

⁹⁰ *The Inoperative Community*, 66

des Catastrophes, in which he relates the oppressing interdependency of “natural” effects.⁹¹ As Nancy explains in the introduction to his most recent essay, the French expression “Dans quel monde vivons-nous?” in the singular, serves to express frustration and surprise at the dark state of a world that no longer contains meaning. The exclamation “What world do we live in?” both denounces the dysfunctional condition of the world, and suggests, indirectly, that there are other worlds with which to compare this one, worlds that are possibly better than the one in which we live. Nancy collaborated with the astrophysicist, Aurélien Barrau, to couch this question in scientific terms and to explore the possibilities, and, as he argues, the necessity, of the existence of other worlds. As he poses this question, Jean-Luc Nancy specifies a change in the position held by the beings that occupy the world. He writes: “Et peut-être ne vivons-nous pas plus dans un monde ou dans plusieurs mondes que le ou les mondes ne se déploient, divergent ou se recoupent *en nous et par nous*” (back cover, italics mine). The question is different from the way it is posed in the title of his essay in that it does not suggest the possibility of determining and establishing a permanent location for the world or for its inhabitants. The preposition “dans” implies the designation of a position that is inscribed in a duration that lasts at least as long as it takes to be established. It also implies that the container, the world, in which beings exist has a shape that can be determined and that therefore is enclosed and determined to a certain degree. By suggesting that the question should be reversed as in “the world is in us” and by replacing the preposition “dans” with “en,” Nancy introduces the notion of a process,

a passing through, and a transformation, all of which are also supported by “par,” which gives agency to those that are involved in the determination of the shape and position of the world. The preposition “en” does not imply an enclosed space and insists rather on the process of being present in a certain place rather than being contained inside the space itself as with “dans.”⁹²

Thus the problem is not to define or redefine the world in which we exist, but to witness the plurality of existences of the various worlds that get unfurled, that diverge, and that intersect in us and by us. There is plurality both in the worlds and in those that become the *locus* for the display and interconnection of the worlds. This question is significantly different from other paths of inquiry into the understanding of the world and of the beings that inhabit it. In posing the problem in this manner, Nancy does away once again with the notion of sovereign concepts for understanding the elements that constitute the world. He argues that the closest we can come to solving this question is to recognize a movement, an ongoing process of destruction and reformation that temporarily draws and interrupts the

⁹² Jean-Luc Nancy insists on the use of a different preposition in his previous essay entitled *La Création du Monde* in which he writes: “Et de manière corrélatrice, être ‘dans’ le monde ne pouvait plus obéir à une topologique de contenu à contenant, pas plus que le monde lui-même ne se trouvait désormais ‘dans’ autre chose que lui. C’est ainsi qu’être-dans-le-monde est devenu être-au-monde. Cette préposition *au* monde, en français, le résumé du problème du monde.” (40) Nancy insists on the connotations of enclosed container inherent in the preposition “in” and argues that it is no longer relevant to speak of the world in these terms. He locates the change in this passage at the moment of the secularization of a world that no longer contained God or the belief in God. The receding belief in God undoes the notion of the totality of the world, which then ceases to be perceived as having a determined shape. This recalls the transitional phase described by Georg Lukács in *Theory of the Novel* in which the author locates the passage from the epic, the narrative of the totality of the world, to the novel, a form that strives to bring together the separated and divided sides of a world from which the gods have departed.

lines of demarcation between one thing and the other or one person and the other⁹³.

In attempting to understand these formations it is therefore useless to search for categories of representation or to argue in favor of one mode of representation over another. It is possible only to approach the process of formation of all that comes into contact in or by beings and to witness the protean shapes, recognizing, at times, the faces and voices of those that come into existence. The world, he argues is formed not by our articulation of its contours and limits, but by resonances among

⁹³ Nancy argues against the ongoing articulation of concepts capable of capturing and describing the changes that take place in the world and in the subject in other essays such as *Vérité de la Démocratie* and *La Communauté Affrontée*. In this way he differs radically from other critics such as Frederic Jameson who monitors the changes that occur in concepts of representation and uses these changes to understand new tendencies in literature and in art.

Frederic Jameson in *Postmodernism* describes the differences between modernism and postmodernism as follows:

We have often been told, however, that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism. (16)

By replacing “categories of time” with “categories of space” Jameson offers a depiction of postmodern writing in terms of the categories of representation (space) that dominate it. The sovereignty of concepts, whatever they may be, indicates clearly that a final definition can be reached and articulated in certain terms. Nancy denounces this tendency as the production of a founding speech that believes erroneously that these problems can be captured in language. He argues that once articulated, any given idea will interrupt itself, negate itself, and suggest only what it is not. Even this, he writes, is always in movement; the negative is no more stable than the positive. Nancy therefore undoes the notion of domination of one thing, the object, by another, the categories by which we understand the object. Everything exists on the same plane and only enters into being at the moment it intersects, diverges or is unfurled. This can happen only through constant flux and by way of a multiplication of instances of encounter and relationality. Therefore, his question receives no answer because the process inherent in the question is more reliable than a founding answer, no matter the source or degree of inquiry.

those that inhabit it and participate at every moment in its formation. He denounces the fact that the world has remained, up until now, dominated by the vision man has of it. He calls for the end of representation and in doing so he does away with the possibility of a founding speech or language capable of capturing the totality of the world and of its inhabitants. Jean-Luc Nancy proposes that the world be understood as a space in which a certain tonality resonates. He writes: "Mais celle-ci [the tonality] n'est rien d'autre que l'ensemble des résonances que se renvoient, que modulent et modalisent les éléments, les moments, les lieux de ce monde. [...] Il s'ensuit qu'un monde n'est monde que pour qui l'habite" (35). Nancy argues for the replacement of concepts of representation with the process of constant determination through movement, sound, and contact produced by those that live in the world. Therefore Nancy's question "dans quels mondes vivons-nous?" is not the announcement of a project he aims to complete, or a question he promises to answer, rather it is the answer itself. The question remains the furthest and most satisfying answer he can provide because, as it is posed in the present tense, and because it is an interrogation, it promises an ongoing inquiry that will always be taking place.

Nancy argues that, as a reaction to the domination of Western Civilization over the East, there is an increasing desire or curiosity for other worlds, whether they are real or fictitious. The multiplicity of these worlds ensures the ongoing process of determination of these through movement and relationality, and participates in fighting off annihilation through complete assimilation. He insists, therefore, that a study of pluriverses will not lead to the aggregation of the discrete

parts that make up the pluriverse of which he speaks, nor to the formation of a greater whole. He does not propose different universes as the components of a larger space, nor does he introduce the notion of the plurality of beings in previous texts (*Etre Singulier Pluriel* and *La Communauté Désœuvrée*) as units of a larger, unified group. Rather, in all of his essays, he insists on the division that takes place not only between beings, but against each being and each world itself. He writes:

Cette affection est une division et une supplémentation ou une suppléance : il y a bien un donné un, suivi d'un deuxième un, mais de ce fait le premier « un » ne peut pas rester immobile en soi. D'une part, il est lui-même passé dans le deuxième – à tire de « un », justement – et en cela il est divisé de lui-même. D'autre part, puisque cette division retire à l'« un » sa propriété d'unicité initiale, et puisque de cette manière on n'a pas vraiment commencé – on n'a pas vraiment compté « un plus un » -, alors le commencement ou l'origine avec sa propriété à la place de cela qui aurait dû ou pu commencer, cela que nous sommes portés à représenter comme devant former le « un » du premier pas, alors même qu'un « pas », de lui-même, se divise. (*Dans Quels Mondes Vivons Nous ?*, 30)

Jean-Luc Nancy expounds the notion of plurality in his idea of the pluriverse in this passage, insisting that it is not the slow formation of an amalgamation of “ones” being incorporated into a larger “one.” Rather, each “one” enters into spheres of other “ones,” positioning itself on a plane of “one + one + one, etc.” and divides itself against itself and against others. By dividing itself against itself it eradicates the possibility of origin or of a place of beginning since that place is already integrated into the sphere of multiplicity, but also because the elements inside the sphere resist fusing into one larger whole and prevent them from being traced back to a single origin. Resistance and division undo both the notion of linear progress or progression towards a unified compilation of all parts by interrupting the temporal

or spatial thread back to the origin, and prevent the various particles of beings or of universes from collapsing into one another and renouncing their own existence. Nancy cites a passage from André Breton's *Les Vases Communicants* to illustrate the problem of division against the self: "Il faut que l'un' se sépare de lui-même, se repousse, se condamne lui-même, qu'il s'abolisse au profit des autres pour se reconstituer dans leur unité avec lui."⁹⁴ And, of course, to reconstitute itself in its unity with others does not mean here to melt into a larger unity formed by the others that are already divided against themselves, but rather that in diving itself against itself, the "one" creates plurality that is maintained by preserving the division against the self and against others.

The problem of division against the self is one that interests the Italian philosopher, Roberto Esposito, who shares Jean-Luc Nancy's interest in the formation of communities. He addresses the problem of the division of the self against itself and against the other selves and claims that it not only produces plurality and prevents the self from collapsing into itself and into other selves, but that it also is the *genus*, if there is one, of community. In his essay entitled *Communitas* written in Italian in 1998 and translated into English in 2010, Esposito expresses his indebtedness to Jean-Luc Nancy for *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, which he claims first led him to inquire into the problem of community formation not as the generation of something larger than its parts, but as the space in which interruption, exposure, and finitude can remain unresolved and in constant flux. Esposito, like Jean-Luc Nancy, bases his own concept of community on Heidegger's

⁹⁴ André Breton. *Les Vases Communicants*. Paris: Cahiers libres. 1932

notion of *mitsein*, but insists more specifically on the nature of the relationship between beings situated alongside or with one another. Esposito writes: “From here it emerges that *communitas* is the totality of persons united not by a “property” but precisely by an obligation or a debt; not by an “addition” [più] but by a “subtraction” [meno]; by a lack, a limit [...]” This recalls Maurice Blanchot’s “principe d’incomplétude⁹⁵” inherent in subjects that pushes them to join groups of other subjects and to form a community. But, as both Blanchot and Nancy, and in turn, Esposito recognize, the incompleteness or lack of the subject is not fulfilled by the presence of others, it is simply exposed at the moment of contact or relationality with the other, and in that moment the subject or being is brought into existence. Esposito sheds light on the “unity” to which Breton alludes in the passage cited earlier and writes: “Community appears to be definable only on the basis of the lack that characterizes it” (16). It is important to draw the connection between the basis of formation of a community according to Esposito and the passage from Mallarmé quoted in Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator”: “The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking.” This lack is the cause for plurality and it is therefore the reason languages are forced into relationality in much the same way as Esposito describes here in regards to the formation of community out of lack. It is understood here that the unity that is formed in community is not that of a homogenous group, but rather a plural singular unit of incomplete beings, each temporarily drawing the contours of the other in the moment of contact. Esposito takes up Nancy’s insistence on the constant

⁹⁵ *La Communauté Inavouable*

interruption of the process of formation of the subject and of community but provides more specific details regarding the behavior of the being at the moment of interruption: "It isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject" (7). Here, Esposito demonstrates that the being does not reach over to the other in order to become larger or more than itself, rather it is drawn to the other out of lack, debt, or need, and the exposure to the other, the interruption of the self that follows, brings about a shaking or shattering of both beings, which, in turn, ensures a kind of existence of both subjects in community with one another. Esposito writes:

The common is not characterized by what is proper, but by what is improper. Or even more drastically, by the other, by a voiding, be it partial or whole, of property into its negative; by removing what is properly one's own that invests and decenters the proprietary subject, forcing him to take leave of himself, to alter himself. (7)

Roberto Esposito clearly indicates that it is not that one subject recognizes itself in the other, or that it becomes the other. The separation between the two is crucial in that it preserves the possibility of relationality, without which there is no relationship of attraction and of exchange. It is increasingly clear with regards to Nancy and Esposito that the formation of community is not an opportunity for the erasure of differences or separation between beings. Rather, community becomes host to the conflicts between beings that come to exist inside it, or rather by it. Conflict, division, rejection, and incompleteness become prerequisites for beings inside communities and, according to Nancy's *Inoperative Community*, community does not work to rehabilitate its members. On the contrary, it retains them in a state

of need of the other and division against the self, it remains inoperable, refusing to serve a purpose or to do any work at all.

Thus, *Dans Quels Mondes Vivons-Nous?* is an instrument for taking the measure of a disastrous world that recognizes the necessity of conflict as its means of existence. Jean-Luc Nancy addressed this problem in a previous essay entitled *La Création du Monde* in which he argues that the domination of Western civilization is threatening to homogenize the world and thus to eradicate it by erasing differences between the East and the West. He insists that the outcome of such political and cultural domination will not lead to a unified world, but rather, will erase the world altogether. He uses the threat of annihilation through homogenization as a way of understanding the increasing need for universes and worlds outside of our own, whether in actual exploration of other galaxies or in imaginary inquiries into otherworldly environments in fiction. He writes: "L'Occident en est venu à recouvrir le monde, et dans ce mouvement il disparaît en tant qu'il était censé orienter la marche de ce monde (16). He posits this as the impetus for the creation of other worlds, spiritual worlds, the discovery of other galaxies, interest in alternative lifestyles in the Western world, etc. Difference is both necessary and inevitable in that it must exist in order for the world to exist and that it cannot be overcome, no matter the level of domination or integration of one side by the other.

Esposito's own development of community sheds light on the manner in which community is formed and more specifically on the nature of the behavior of the individual entering into community. The dizziness, the lack, the syncope all paint a portrait of the conduct of beings bumping up against one another, resisting self-

annihilation, and coming into existence momentarily. The internal conflicts described by Esposito and by others reveal the protean nature of community, each being divided against itself and against others in an effort to not mesh with others and to come into existence⁹⁶. Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Inoperative Community*, argues that writing serves this very purpose: "Writing," he claims "is the act that obeys the sole necessity of exposing the limit: not the limit of communication, *but the limit upon which communication takes place*" (67). This limit exists only in the encounter between one side and the other, as one hits up against the other, reaching its limit, and exposing it as it exposes itself.

Birth into community takes place in Nancy Huston's text in the very way she inserts birth into her writing. "N'être" is the limit of being, non-being, as well as the act of being born, and the friction caused by this encounter is precisely where Jean-Luc Nancy locates community. The friction is generative in Nancy Huston's text and in Jean-Luc Nancy's essays the friction is the moment of encounter that leads neither to silence, nor to fusion or encapsulation, but that ensures the existence of all that co-appears in this instance. Nancy Huston uses the conflicted relationship between two sides that are drawn to one another but that are unable or unwilling to fuse together as a mode for representing that which is difficult to represent: the disasters and crises that take place in her novels. In her 2010 novel *Infrarouge*, Nancy Huston positions her writing at the limit of one language and in awareness of other languages and brings it to hit up against the limit between them again and again. The narrative takes place in different parts of Tuscany as Rena Greenblatt, a 40

year-old Canadian woman who lives and works in Paris, visits the Italy with her aging father and stepmother. Rena speaks a little bit of Italian but her father and stepmother speak only English. The novel begins with a misunderstanding when the hotel clerk thinks that her father and stepmother are Rena's parents:

Ah. C'est vous la dernière Greenblatt! Lui dit, bougon, en italien, sans la regarder, fixant plutôt d'un air maussade la photo dans son passeport, l'homme à la réception de l'hôtel Guelfa. Vos parents sont arrivés tard hier soir, ajoute-t-il d'un air lourd de reproches. Très tard. Rena ne le corrige pas, ne lui dit pas que ce ne sont pas ses parents, ou plutôt que l'un d'entre eux est son parent et l'autre non, elle n'a pas la moindre envie d'approcher ce panier de crabes, cette boîte de Pandore, ce radeau de la Méduse, alors elle se tait en italien, sourit en italien, hoche la tête en italien, affiche avec volontarisme la sérénité à laquelle elle aspire. (15)

In the context of this minor misunderstanding between the hotel clerk and Rena Greenblatt, the French language used to relate the events has no immediate relationship with the scene, the characters, or the events. The distance is further felt when the narrative pauses in its progression to play with its own imagery: "elle n'a pas la moindre envie d'approcher ce panier de crabes, cette boîte de Pandore, ce radeau de la Méduse." The combination of these three expressions does not aid the progression of the narrative. Rather the French narrator pauses for a short time to experiment with different expressions. A few pages later, this linguistic exploration is repeated: "Il la connaît bien, Aziz. Sait qu'elle a prévu de maintenir Simon et Ingrid à distance, de les mettre en joue, en cadre, en boîte [...]." (*Infrarouge*.16). The terms Nancy Huston uses do not depict new events in the narrative, nor do they conjure up different images. Although they are not perfectly synonymous terms they seem to offer themselves up simply as options or ways of saying more or less the same thing

in different ways. In playing with the language by offering different ways of saying the same thing, new text gets generated out of the absence of what Nancy Huston refers to in other circumstances as a single 'natural' way of saying something. There is a self-conscious relationship to possibilities of the language used for narration and the narrative willingly makes room for it, creating a space it occupies again and again throughout the novel. The text presents multiple groups of three terms articulating something once and then again slightly differently as if something were missing the first time and the second and, since the sentence continues somewhat indifferently after the third term, it seems that nothing in particular is achieved in the last attempt either. Thus, the language of the narrative stutters slightly and detaches itself from its mimetic representation of the events related. In these instances the author of the text surfaces as a foreign writer writing in a foreign language that she perceives as an exploratory tool rather than a 'natural' means for representation. This is not to say that a native speaker would not display fascination for imagery in the French language, but in the case of Nancy Huston the space between the language and the events related, that gets formed by the repeated pokes the author makes at common expressions makes room for the foreign writer as a subject in the text. In the unnecessary ranges of images provided, the text develops a way of remaining at the cusp of iteration without lending itself to the progression of the plot. It skids without moving forwards and thus launches a process without inscribing itself in a teleological plane and in this way it is able to remain at the moment of encounter between the text and that which is foreign to the text.

During her vacation in Italy, Rena's Algerian husband Aziz, who stayed behind in Paris, takes part in the riots in the outskirts of the capital. It is 2005 and through the many missed phone calls and interrupted conversations, Aziz tries to urge Rena, who is a photographer, to return to Paris where he thinks she should cover the growing violence in the streets. Rena delays her return arguing that she cannot leave her father and stepmother alone in Italy. After refusing to purchase an English or French newspaper to read about the events, Rena decides to listen to the news on the car radio while driving her parents back to the hotel:

Le présentateur décline à toute vitesse les chiffres: nombre de *macchine bruciate* dans chaque ville, nombre de policiers *fertiti* et de manifestations *arrestati*. Rena ne comprend pas tout mais les battements de son cœur s'accélèrent. Sur le siège arrière, Simon et Ingrid se taisent, exténués.

Rena Greenblatt has a hard time understanding the report she listens to and yet she is strongly affected by the general meaning. The decision to maintain several words in Italian rather than to translate them into French or English, which is what happens throughout the rest of the text, is difficult to understand. It is possible that Huston is passing the protagonist's misunderstanding along to the reader since the words left in Italian do not appear particularly necessary to the text. The text maintains both languages and switches back and forth throughout the report, creating a translingual space at the crossroads between both languages, that does not offer full linguistic understanding for Rena, but that makes it possible for her to receive the information she has resisted and rejected at every opportunity up until this point. It is through a layered misunderstanding and inability to translate that

the extent of the violence of the riots taking place in the outskirts of Paris finally affects her.

By being neither completely in French, nor completely in English, the narrative participates in the formation of a third space or a third language, which is perhaps the lens through which Rena Greenblatt and the novel itself can view the events of 2005. The urgency and the potential violence inherent in them permeate the entire novel but these are the only details that are provided. At the end of the novel, Rena decides to remain in Italy even though her vacation with her father and stepmother is over. Her husband Aziz who suffers from a terrible stutter leaves her and she loses her job because she does not return to France. She remains in Italy and as she thinks about the cars burning and the vandalism in the streets in France she hears the church bells in Florence ring out and mix with her thoughts. Italy is the space in between, in between Rena's abusive childhood in Canada, which she recounts throughout the novel, and the difficulties she has with her husband Aziz. Rena's removal from any of the countries and languages she considers her own is the porthole through which she is finally able to consider certain formative events in her life.

In a novel that contains lavish Italian, French, and Canadian art and architecture, several time lines, at least three countries, and that takes place in three different languages, it is difficult to speak of deficiency or lack. The superabundance of references to different cultures and languages and the many geographical allusions to three different parts of the world a feeling of excess that can be felt even in the unnecessary repetitions of images provided in the narrative and referred to

earlier. But as we have seen, when the text reaches for another language it does not add it to the one it has but rather it exposes its own limits and draws on the other. When Rena listens to the news in Italian, she has the same experience as she does when she watches RAI and tries to gather details on the events, her ability to grasp what is happening is challenged and she barely understands the words uttered by the news reporter. She translates a part of it and leaves a part in Italian and the languages work alongside one another, not to produce more meaning, but to function in relation to one another in order to produce whatever meaning is possible. In other words, Rena does not gain a greater understanding by not buying an English or French newspaper rather, she adopts the relationality of languages that, by being positioned at the limit of another, can expose the events and represent them. By representing violent events in this manner, Huston also reveals the limits of representation for events that are not themselves contained or immediately comprehensible. This recalls the basis on which Jean-Luc Nancy argues against attempts at categories of representation or of a founding speech.

The appearance of this excess is only in relation to the existence of categories of representation that are surpassed by their object. This points most immediately to the inadequacy of these categories and also to their need for one another. In chapter 1 and 2 a similar conclusion was reached and the efficiency of concepts and categories was also brought into question. The excess, however, is not purely a failure for any given concept to be exhaustive, it is the instance in which the category or narrative is interrupted and something new comes into existence. In the case of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, this referred to the possibility of writing outside of

the boundaries that are usually established. Therefore, the limitations of these boundaries form a space in which different kinds of beings can be exposed and can come into existence. In chapter 2, Michel Houellebecq's ongoing attempts to juxtapose the model and the object, or the map and the territory causes space and being to be reconfigured outside of these means of representation. In the case of *The Map and the Territory*, placing the object and its representation alongside one another does not complete the attempt to represent, rather it frees something up, and makes an artistic endeavor possible. Here, failure to translate properly in *Limbes/Limbo* is what helps the text to resist both its own order to silence itself and the fact that one translation should be able to replace and therefore to silence the other. As a result, to consider plurality as the object of study in contemporary literature, instead of attempting to organize it according to exhaustive concepts, is not only an approach that makes it possible to consider world literature without reducing it to nationalism, it is also one that leaves room for something new to be formed.

CHAPTER 4: GLOBALIZATION AND THE NEW MAGHREB NOVEL

The task the Franco-Moroccan author, Driss jaydane, sets for himself in his first novel titled *Le Jour Venu* (2006), is to write novels for “those who have not forgotten...”, meaning for those who have not forgotten the way Morocco was before it was colonized by France and Spain. Writing more than sixty years after Morocco became independent, Jaydane attempts to separate the domestic from the foreign in his novel and to retrace the lines of delineation of his country now that it has been freed from the grip of French and Spanish colonizers. However, as the author focuses on the city of Casablanca in his narrative, the main preoccupation is no longer to separate it from foreign influence, rather what takes over are the homogenizing effects of globalization. The flow of global goods, music, films, and mores fills most moments in the novel and pushes the original task of the author to the side. Globalization differs, of course, from colonialism in that it is not hegemonic and does not seek to dominate or control Morocco, rather it is readily welcomed into the country. Characters in this novel purchase as many global goods as they can afford and even come to see them as a sign of prestige and a form of recognition among those fortunate enough to acquire them. The novel is organized around the secret revolutionary political groups that are organizing riots that will one day overturn the monarchy and take their revenge on the wealthy classes. And although *Le Jour Venu* promises to end in a revolution, it loses its means for change when riotous parties come undone and begin to scatter until some of them drift away from their cause altogether. The trajectory of the novel, much like the author’s own

mission to draw the portrait of Morocco as an independent country, gets interrupted before it can be accomplished.

This chapter will focus on the implementation and status of categories of representation such as East and West, local and global, and on the limits of such categories. The novel seeks to capture the totality of the city of Casablanca and yet it readily admits that there are those that escape its categorization and defy the norms it attempts to enforce. The concept of community put forth in the previous chapters serves to provide an alternative to the limits of representation that come to light in this novel. The novel is forced to reveal the presence of excess, of something that overflows the limits imposed by representation and manages to stand on the outside of it. The narrative is forced to face the inadequacy of such a system and to recognize the limits of its own aim to capture the city and to represent it, it interrupts itself and in doing so it generates something new. In his chapter titled “Communisme Littéraire” in *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that a single narrative attempting to contain the entirety of its object must be interrupted before it leads to the kinds of totalitarian regimes that were formed during the 20th-century. Just as important, it must be interrupted so that it can become plural, so that there can be more than one narrative and so that each one can partake in the formation of the other. Nancy describes the formation of the community in literature as internal plurality while insisting, at the same time, on the ongoing mutuality among beings. Heightened individualism is impossible to consider here in that each being has no claim to existence outside of its relationship with the other. Nancy intentionally uses the term “singular” rather than individual

because *singularis* in Latin is always plural and does not exist in the singular. Nancy writes: "The concept of the singular implies its singularization and, therefore, its distinction from other singularities..."⁹⁷ A singularity is anything that exists and therefore anything that is exposed to the other. By existing by way of its exposure to the other there can be no individuality for the singularity, nor can there be a hierarchy among singularities that all need one another equally. The problem is double in that it is both necessary for there to be separate beings, but also for these beings to exist only in relation to the other. Nancy argues that without the process of constant encounter and interaction, existence is impossible: "In fact, pure identity would not only be inert, empty, colorless, and flavorless (as those who claim to a pure identity so often are), it would be an absurdity itself. Only what is identical to itself is identical to itself. As such, it turns in a circle and never makes it into existence." ("Eulogy of the Mêlée." 153) The constellation of discrete entities serves to trigger the process of articulation of the self and yet because its parts cannot be reduced into one definitive whole, it is a process that is never complete. As Nancy explains in "Le Myth Interrompu," it is essential to the lives of those involved in this process that it never come to an end. To establish something definitively is to kill it and therefore in what he refers to as the Western obsession with origin as the means for identity, it is essential that this process be interrupted again and again and that it attempt to encompass that which cannot be reduced to a final whole. Community inside literature is precisely that which resists completion:

Par elle-même, l'articulation n'est que la jointure: ce qui a lieu là où des pièces différentes se touchent sans se confondre, glissent, pivotent

⁹⁷ *Being Singular Plural*. 32

ou basculent l'une sur l'autre, l'une à la limite de l'autre – exactement à sa limite -, là où ces pièces singulières et distinctes plient ou se dressent, fléchissent ou se tendent ensemble et l'une par l'autre, l'une à même l'autre, sans que ce jeu mutuel – qui demeure sans cesse, en même temps, un jeu entre elles – forme la puissance supérieure d'un Tout. (188)

To articulate and therefore to represent means to capture the juncture between different parts, without ever letting them collapse in to a greater Whole. Because they never form a single greater unit, in order for the parts to continue to exist, they need to come into contact with one another again and again. This ongoing process is what makes articulation possible and the resistance to fusion ensures the possibility of exposure of one being to another.

The problem with this condition for articulation is that many of the pieces that must come into contact with one another are beginning to fuse into one another or to be discarded on account of one all-encompassing influence from the West. In *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*, Jean-Luc Nancy takes up the problem that we have examined in previous chapters in different contexts, also recognized by Nancy Huston, as the growing homogeneity of the world, even in the context of hybridity and writes: “L’Occident⁹⁸ en est venu à recouvrir le monde, et dans ce

⁹⁸ It is important to note that the East and the West are not pre-defined parts of the world. They come into existence alongside one another and as they do so they shape the world they exist in. However, as Nancy argues here, the resistance of one to the other is weakening and is therefore failing to play its mutually defining role. Not only is the East having difficulty maintaining itself, the West too, because it has nothing to distinguish itself from is beginning to dissolve. As Edward Saïd reminds us, the East and the West are fictions that take shape only ideologically: “The constructions of fictions like “East” and “West,” to say nothing of racist essences like subject races, Orientals, Aryans, Negroes and the like, were what my books attempted to combat. [...] I stated repeatedly that mythical abstractions such as these were lies [...]; cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too

mouvement il disparaît en tant qu'il est censé orienter la marche du monde."⁹⁹

Reading these essays alongside *Le Jour Venu* makes it possible to articulate the components of a new globalized world that no longer corresponds to either of the two models generally recognized in francophone literature. The possibility for the existence of the hybrid world in Jaydane's novel requires an ongoing experience with self-difference, meaning the acknowledgment of separation from something that is on the outside of the self. This is precisely where this process becomes problematic in that the world has already integrated otherness into itself and it seems, in many cases, as if the West is already present in most manifestations of Morocco, "old" or "new." The problem lies in the paradox between a global world that offers more encounters with otherness than ever before and the realization that absolute alterity and the actual existence of heterogeneous elements has been rendered impossible by the omnipresence of an already hybrid world. Jean-Luc Nancy condemns the process of globalization as one that is incapable of engaging in the process of the formation of the world. He claims:

Le monde a perdu sa capacité à faire monde: il semble avoir gagné seulement celle de multiplier à la puissance de ses moyens une prolifération de l'immonde qui, jusqu'ici, quoi qu'on puisse penser des illusions rétrospectives, jamais d'ans l'histoire n'avait ainsi marqué la totalité de l'orbe. (16)

interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like orient and Occident. (*Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Pantheon. 1994. xi-xii.). The repetition of this reference throughout this study serves to demonstrate the various ways in which globalization affects literature. The threat of homogenization targets representation of the space (chapter 2) and of language (chapter 4).

⁹⁹ *La Création du Monde*. 15

This is a new problem that has never occurred in history before, according to Nancy, and it is different in that the world, for the first time, is running out of otherness. In a previous passage, Nancy recognizes the internal differences, the “*inégalités de tous les ordres*” (14), but he argues that this kind of heterogeneity is integrated so thoroughly in each group that it no longer functions as difference among the elements in a given space. On the contrary, it erodes the characteristics of each being and standardizes each entity in such a way that in order for the world to continue to define itself and to resist annihilation, it must search further for new forms of alterity.

The Franco-Moroccan novelist, Driss Jaydane, wrote his first novel, *Le Jour Venu* in 2006, from the point of view of a 15 year-old male who serves as the narrator throughout the novel. It recounts the initiation of the young protagonist who ventures beyond the celestial grounds of his own neighborhood, *Anfa*, located on a hill overlooking the city, into the slums and secret spirituality of what Jaydane intermittently refers to as the “old” or “real” Morocco. The novel takes place during the year of 1980-1981, which places the narrator and his friend Daniel Perales, of Spanish descent, among those of the second generation of Moroccans after the independence of Morocco in 1958. In an interview, after the publication of the novel, Jaydane stated that: “Ce qui est important pour moi, c’est que l’on comprenne qu’il y a au Maroc des gens qui n’oublient pas...” The effort to remember the “real” Morocco becomes manifest in the nostalgic tone employed by such a young narrator as he circulates through new social environments and compares them to his own pristine

neighborhood. There is a faint hope of return to the ways things were before French and Spanish colonization, a search for the “old” Morocco inside the old Medina and in the outskirts of the city. But Western capitalism has permeated Moroccan life so thoroughly that it is difficult to separate the “old” from the “new” and “global” culture. The author gives his young protagonist the task of uncovering the original Morocco as it appears in the minds of those who have not forgotten and in doing so he seems to suggest that it is possible to separate the East and the West or the domestic and the foreign, which are categories that will be challenged throughout the novel.

Le Jour Venu takes up the tensions of its time by describing a Moroccan city and population that have obtained freedom from colonization only to be swept up in the waves of economic and cultural globalization, or, as Peter Burke refers to it occasionally in his essay titled *Cultural Hybridity*, “Americanization.” Driss Jaydane’s characters are active consumers of all products, counterfeit or not, that come from the West: sneakers, athletic socks, whiskey, champagne and Casio watches. They base their behavior on Western idols: when the protagonist’s driver drops him off to play tennis, he goes to his reserved court, (No.6), and imagines himself as John McEnroe: “je commençais tout juste de travailler la manière d’affiner mon look d’imitateur patenté de John McEnroe.”¹⁰⁰ The real danger is not the excess of Western goods or the disparity in the access to Western goods (many Moroccans have access only to counterfeit products), rather, it lies in the “danger of

¹⁰⁰ *Le Jour Venu*. 21

reunification”¹⁰¹ between the inside and the outside of the country or, the “old,” “real” Morocco that belongs to Moroccans and the influence and presence of the West. The city of Casablanca, despite its internal differences, is an increasingly homogenous world in which all lines of demarcation and distinction are eroded.

In this chapter, I will take the measure of the contemporary francophone world and characters presented in *Le Jour Venu*. In depicting the oppositions between the purely national environment and the influences of the West, I insist particularly on the instances of encounter between the two. In a novel about breaking out from one’s own environment, as is the case here, there is a multitude of new faces, neighborhoods, and traditions. The “old” and the “new” do come into contact with one another and yet the overwhelming presence of the West in these instances often debunks the binary between the two and threatens to erase internal differences inside Morocco with its homogenizing effect. In order to maintain a separation between Moroccan identity and the global identity that spreads slowly throughout the city, the novel pushes beyond its own boundaries, beyond the walls of the city, beyond categories of representation, and into new and sometimes disturbing forms of identity. In an effort to depict Moroccan nationals it seems necessary, in this novel, to exaggerate their traits, deform their limbs, and to give them inhuman features. The novel struggles to find alterity in an increasingly homogeneous environment and in doing so it distorts the world and the beings that it represents. Rather than to capture “real” Moroccan citizens and the “real”

¹⁰¹ This is a term used by the Canadian author, Nancy Huston, in her collection of letters exchanged with her Algerian correspondent Léïla Sebbar in *Lettres Parisiennes* as seen in chapter III. She uses it to express her fear at seeing both of her worlds unite into one, and at seeing the possibility of exile taken away as a result.

Morocco, the novel attempts to create them and in this attempt it is forced to revert to monstrous features and to exceed the category of national identity.

In order to articulate this problem I turn to Jean-Luc Nancy's essays on the formation of the world in an increasingly homogeneous context. In essays such as *La Création du Monde* and *Dans Quels Mondes Vivons-Nous?*, Nancy argues that the plurality or diversity that is needed in order to shape the world and to maintain an ongoing process of formation is threatened by the expansion of the capitalist culture of the West. He recognizes the difference between the market-generated global dimension of today's world as a result of globalization and the authentic and positive worlding-process that he terms 'mondialisation.' He argues that the increase in 'globalité' corresponds to the dissipation of the world as a place one inhabits. The former retains the possibility of internal difference, while the other points to a gesture of homogenization taking place on a global level. In his essay titled "Eulogy of the *mêlée*" in *Being Singular Plural*¹⁰², Nancy celebrates but also recognizes the limitations of the combination of eclectic characteristics in Sarajevo in particular, but in the city and human culture in general. His term "*mêlée*" is preferred over "mix" because it maintains the differences among those that are being brought together in a single space. For the city this means maintaining difference between the parts it is made of: "It means mixing together again the various lines, trails, and skins, while at the same time describing their heterogeneous trajectories and their webs, both those that are tangled and those that are distinct. It is the task of never believing in the simple, the homogeneous, the

¹⁰² *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2000.

present ‘man.’ Or ‘Woman.’” (147).¹⁰³ Nancy puts emphasis on the importance of maintaining the plurality of beings inside any group, and in this case, inside a city. A singularity (a human being, a city, a language), he argues, is always a *mêlée* of traits and not a uniform whole. Ten years earlier, in his essay titled *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, Nancy warned his readers that increased contact with the other in multi-racial postcolonial contexts would not necessarily render the possibility of community more relevant. He wrote:

La venue au jour et à la conscience des communautés décolonisées n’a pas modifié en profondeur cet état des choses, et la croissance, aujourd’hui, des formes inédites de l’être-en-commun – à travers ce qu’on appelle la société “multi-raciale” – n’a pas non plus déclenché le renouvellement véritable d’une question de communauté. (58)

Decolonized communities and new ways of being-in-common do not change the way we think about the emergence of communities, they do not make them more or less important. Therefore, according to Nancy, it is not the proliferation of difference and the possibility of putting different elements alongside one another that constitutes community. Community is always being formed since without it there can be no formation or being at all. It is not a question of overcoming inequality and erasing difference, but of providing a space in which Being can take place. Plurality will

¹⁰³ Although Jean-Luc Nancy is writing about Sarajevo in particular, the similarities between the capital of Croatia and the financial capital of Morocco are numerous. Croatia was greatly affected by a war between former Yugoslav republics in the 1990s during which former communist republics adopted national and liberal politics and attempted to impose them on neighboring countries. Croatia had to fight for its own independence after Serbia declared the dissolution of the union and then tried to maintain status quo by using its army. On June 26, 1991, Croatia declared independence and was recognized internationally as a sovereign republic, but it still had to forge an identity for itself, outside of the union, and beyond its own crisis.

always already be the condition of that which comes into being and therefore difference is not an embellishment or addition to community, it is the condition *a priori* of community.

Postcolonial authors such as Driss Jaydane, who are facing globalization, have a responsibility, according to many postcolonial scholars, to determine the place of the country and its relationship vis-à-vis the global market. Valérie Orlando describes this mission: "La littérature-monde contemporaine du Maroc offre un corpus littéraire conçu dans une société qui cherche à encourager le bien-être de la communauté, mais veut en même temps apprendre à l'individu à ne pas s'incliner devant une globalisation qui est souvent dépourvue de toute valeur et de toute composante humaine."¹⁰⁴ The mission is double and even paradoxical: the Moroccan author must both ensure harmony, which, in this novel means enjoying products and the effects of modernization from the West, and protect his or her people against the global forces at play. This supposes that it is possible to define the contours of the Moroccan community, which is a task that is increasingly difficult, and, some argue, impossible. For others, it is crucial to enforce African borders and to protect domestic literature from Western influence. African literature should be about Africa alone:

African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European and other literatures. And its historical and cultural

¹⁰⁴ "Dans l'autre, il y a moi': L'humanisme dans la littérature francophone marocaine face à la globalisation." *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, Volume 26, Numéro 1, Printemps (2011): 166-178. 167.

imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, altogether antithetical to the European.¹⁰⁵

Autonomy and complete separation are already impossible in Morocco and in many other African states on account of the linguistic and cultural remnants of very recent colonization. The other questionable aspect of this claim lies in the internal diversity of Africa itself, which contains influences from its various parts on other parts as well as influences that are not only European. This radical statement does not hold for a Moroccan novel written in French about globalization and its effects on Morocco such as *Le Jour Venu*, but it does correctly identify an ongoing concern expressed also by Valérie Orlando, which is to protect the people of the country or the “true” identity of Morocco, however impossible it may be to define.

This difference between an autonomous country that belongs solely to the Moroccan people that inhabit it and the integration of global culture inside its borders corresponds, according to Driss Jaydane, to the difference between the past and the present of Morocco. The past is mainly rural and devoid of the technological developments of the present, but other than that there are few details provided in Jaydane’s novel. In many ways, the past is that which is safe from global culture because it came before Morocco was first colonized and then introduced to Western consumerism. Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian poet and playwright expresses the difficulty inherent in accepting influences of the West and in moving into the present:

[We] are conscious of the irreversible nature of the transformations the impact of Europe has effected in our midst and which are so extensive as to define the really significant frame of reference of our

¹⁰⁵ Madubuike I. *et al. Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and their Critics*. London: KPI. 1985. 4.

contemporary existence. The traditional pre-colonial culture and way of life continue to exist as a ways of life among us, but they constitute an order of existence that is engaged in a forced march, in a direction dictated by the requirements of a modern scientific and technological civilization. It also happens to be the case that Western civilization, at least in its contemporary manifestations and circumstance, provides the paradigm of modernity to which we aspire. Hence, our mixed feelings, the troubled sense of acceptance and rejection, of our subjective disposition that is undermined by the objective facts of our life. There is something of a paradox here, for the intensity of the ambivalence we demonstrate in our responses to Europe and Western civilizations is in fact a measure of our emotional tribute: it is expressive, in a profound way, of the cultural hold that Europe has secured upon us – of the alienation it has imposed on us as a historical fate.¹⁰⁶

By calling African identity “subjective” in the face of the “objective” impact of Europe, it becomes all the more necessary for African authors to represent the subjects and culture of this subjective existence in literary representation. In writing for “those who have not forgotten,” Driss Jaydane takes on this task, however impossible it may be, and searches in the city of Casablanca for the “real” Morocco. He does not, however, attempt to eliminate the West in Casablanca as he willingly recognizes that in order to ensure the “bien-être” (well-being) of the Moroccan community he must accept that they idolize the West, wear its clothes, drinks its whiskey and champagne, and even speak its language. The problem, then, is where to look for those that have resisted the West. They are not among the dominant social class, they do not frequent the same cafés and shops as the narrator, and they do not seem to speak for or about themselves. Their very nature is to ensure alterity

¹⁰⁶ Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1976. xi.

for the novel that needs to maintain plurality in the face of the homogenizing West and so they exist at the limit of the city and of its culture.

With the departure of French colonizers in 1956, the Sultan Mohammed V put together a constitutional monarchy with a democratic form of government in which the king still retains final power of veto. Shortly afterwards, Spanish colonizers left the Southern half of the country as well as the international city of Tangiers. All parts of Morocco came together to form a single country again and the different histories and languages were incorporated under the hybrid monarchy/democracy governing system. The strong national movement led by members of the Istiqlal¹⁰⁷ watched closely as the new king brought the fragments of Morocco back together and unified the language and monetary system in an attempt to return to a single united country. Mohammed V seemed to have succeeded in pacifying the various political groups that were active during and after the independence in Morocco. However, as many postcolonial scholars claim, Morocco did not become the perfectly unified country Moroccans believed it should be and it retained the influences- linguistic, administrative, institutional, historical, economic, etc.- of its heterogeneous past.

These struggles get represented in Jaydane's novel by marginal characters who are dismissed on account of their attempts to return Morocco to the Moroccans:

[...] Bouchikhy était un homme, autrefois. Je veux dire un homme avec un passé, un présent, un passé, un avenir. Quelqu'un de fier de ses

¹⁰⁷ Political party in Morocco best described as conservative and monarchist. Its position in most affairs is nationalistic and it continues to fight for the independence of Morocco.

origines. Fils d'un résistant, d'un guerrier qui a combattu pour la libération du pays. Bouchikhy a grandi dans la fierté de ce père, qui lui a appris à garder la tête haute, lui a appris qu'après 1956 le Maroc n'appartenait qu'à ceux qui l'avaient défendu, qu'il revenait aux Marocains, et à eux seuls. Que c'était leur terre parce que c'était leur sang. Les Marocains ont cru que le Maroc était retourné à son peuple... (124)

Malik, the journalist who tells this story, is also demonstrating that history is not linear. What these people expected was a return to the way things were after they fought for the independence of their country, as though the country could be either free or colonized and that these were two clearly separated states of being. To take Morocco back from its Western colonizers is to assume that both sides are clearly delineated and that they are homogeneous groups. History, however, is not linear in that the periods that mark the chronological progression are not perfectly separate from one another and seem, in fact, to contain one another. In the portrait of the city of Casablanca (with a name of Spanish origin), the national division is impossible to trace on account of the overwhelming presence of communities of people from different parts of the world already living inside the city. However, the novel does make the inner diversity of the city quite clear by drawing distinct lines of separation among these communities based both on socio-economic class and place of origin. To begin with, there is a distinction between the narrator's neighborhood and the more popular neighborhoods located below it in the streets of Casablanca. Signs of the superiority of *Anfa* are even reflected in the sky: "La rue de Daniel va disparaître de mes souvenirs. Roule, Simo! Roule! Et rends-moi à mon petit paradis privé. [...] Plus nous avançons vers notre quartier et plus le bleu du ciel augmente d'intensité" (60). In this perfect superimposition between heaven and earth there is

seemingly nothing that the novel or its characters can do: celestial essence participates in the formation of this neighborhood, rendering it impervious to infiltration or deformation. Certain social circles and groups are also formed in a way that makes them impenetrable:

Les enfants de Ben Jdia étaient d'une certaine façon liés par ce même sang qui coulait, le long des rues, des avenues, sur les trottoirs, les égouts, jusque dans les boutiques et les boucheries, bien sûr! Tous frères d'un sang gris, celui du bitume qui irrigue Ben Jdia, la citadelle.
(38)

This is the neighborhood that Daniel, the narrator's friend of Spanish descent, belongs to. What unites them is the street and the shops along the streets and therefore the urban neighborhood itself. By depicting blood running through the streets and into the gutters, the narrative offers a foretaste of the attempt on the part of the people to overturn the system at the end of the novel. Focus on the ground, lower and lower, also emphasizes the distinction between Daniel's neighborhood and Moulay's celestial palace, even though the end of the description attempts, perhaps ironically, to create a castellated landscape with the image of a mote surrounding the citadel. Inside the *quartier*, the distinction between individuals is blurred by the flow of blood that runs down all streets, avenues, sidewalks and gutters. There is no internal hierarchy and all inhabitants exist on the same ground level. The walls of Ben Jdia as a citadel are impenetrable and even if one were to enter into it, as the narrator does, it would be impossible to join the brotherhood of those united by the grey blood of the neighborhood. The narrator experiences bonding with members of his own groups in very different terms: "Nous pouvions être amis car nous possédions les mêmes choses" (29). This sentence

concludes several lists of eclectic luxury items that the narrator and Yasmine's families own. These things are the same while still being different, they unite but still maintain internal distinctions. Both examples of group formation point to the national concern for Morocco's identity. While both groups are united by their similarities, one draws its commonality literally from the ground under its feet and the other, while celestial at times, reaches more often across its own national borders and picks up imported goods as the means for its solidarity. These instances reveal the novel's focus on group formation and point to the tension between homogeneous groups and the threat or possibility of introducing internal difference. This is of particular interest in the case of a novel that takes up issues relating to the "real" Morocco as it was before the invasion of foreign presence inside its national borders, situated also during a period of global expansion. The novel tirelessly traces the contours of groups and neighborhoods and explains the reasons for the combinations it displays and yet, as we will note, almost every one of them is ephemeral and dissolves quickly into something else.

The city of Casablanca in *Le Jour Venu* parcels out its discrete neighborhoods and puts them in contact with one another each time they come into being. By circulating with his driver Si Mohamed through the streets of the city, the narrator becomes a connecting thread between the neighborhoods he traverses. He compares and confronts them and points out their differences from other parts of the city while still serving as a connector. The transition from one to the other is what defines each space and determines its contours. Upon returning from his

evening in Daniel's neighborhood, the narrator describes the landscape of his own neighborhood:

Un cheval paisible tire une charrette et trotte sur une longue avenue bordée de beaux arbres, fins et racés, aux branches soigneusement coupées, par les jardiniers de la commune. Le sens du paradis à qui sort de l'enfer des quartiers où désormais, je ne veux plus me perdre.

Les trottoirs sont à ce point larges que les gardiens des villas qui bordent le boulevard s'y sont installés et regardent les belles berlines remontant du centre-ville. (61)

Having been outside of his *quartier*, the narrator can now draw the precise lines of demarcation of his own upon his return. In addition to this, the movement of articulation is sustained by the ongoing traffic due to the cars returning, alongside the narrator, from the center of the city. Exposure, concentrated inside the narrator, between the bottom and the top of the city makes it possible for him to recognize beauty and to trace the lines that define the hill of *Anfa*.

However, a closer look inside these clearly demarcated spaces and those that inhabit them reveals contradictory formations due to latent foreign influences and to their porousness, suggesting that they are not so unified after all. In the narrator's first extended absence from his own neighborhood he finds himself in Ben Jdia, in a dark, windowless room above a garage in the company of his high-school friend, Daniel, and several working class Moroccan young men. The codes of socialization are traditional and specific to the status shared by all of them. The Narrator is a clear outsider and he will be punished later for revealing his own social differences, mainly because of his support for the King, but also because of his shoes and clothes that are foreign and more expensive than those of the other young men. During their

gathering they mainly discuss their sense of belonging to this neighborhood: they know the rounds policemen make and which shopkeepers accept to give credit. However, as the evening continues, the distinctions between this group and that which lies outside of it become less clear. The contours of the group start to bend and to become distorted as the young men pass around a hashish cigarette: "La soirée, à compter de ce moment où j'ai accepté la cigarette recouverte d'huile a change de forme de longueur, le shit s'attaque aux contours, il déplace les coins, nous fait changer d'orbite" (50). The changes are clear and they affect the socio-economic classes to which each belongs: "D'avoir chuté dans mon corps aura cassé la barrière sociale. Voilà que je commençais à sympathiser avec le vulgaire. Que se défaisaient un à un les cordons de mon visage. Puis deux invisibles paumes qui viennent contenir ma tête, qui s'ouvre, et mon cerveau, qui sort par le haut." (54). The changes that occur here open up the possibility for the encounter between the higher economic class to which the narrator belongs and the vulgar social classes of the men with whom he is socializes. However, even in the confines of this hidden room, the West is present under the appearance of truly Moroccan identity. However, inside the clearly defined group of Moroccan men, there is a sudden illusion and comparison of one of them with a German person, and the homogeneity of the group is lost: "'Si tu le voyais l'été, disait fièrement Bouchikhy, un Allemand!'" (47). The presence of a foreign element inside this tightly-knot group throws off the binary between inside and outside and domestic and foreign. Now there is no homogeneity inside the group and the West has invaded the city all the way into this secluded space occupied by "true" Moroccans. This is not the only time in the novel

that it gets revealed that underneath the layers of Moroccan identity there is foreign presence. The sudden reference to being German though is only due to prolonged exposure to the sun that makes the man in question's hair lighter, like that of a German man. There is another example of nationality being only skin or cloth deep, while, as we have seen, Moroccan identity runs in the blood. Foreign presence is everywhere but it lies mostly in the characters' tendency to see it everywhere, no matter how fleeting or unsupported such perceptions are. The novel's tendency to represent and to lay emphasis on foreignness even when it is barely there is significant and it orients the attention away from the city of Casablanca itself and onto the modes of representation themselves.

Jaydane's novel clearly constructs social and geographic distinctions between its individuals and *quartiers*, but dissolves them almost as quickly through mechanisms of exaggeration, satire, imitation, and laughter. In penetrating into the old medina the narrator spots two elderly men engaged in a conversation. They are sitting on a bench, past the many stands selling counterfeit merchandise from France, Italy and the United States:

Presque, ou plus du tout de marchandises, mais deux vieillards assis, ensemble, riant, sur un petit siège en carton. Deux hommes, superbes, trop vieux pour chasser le lion, se racontant leurs souvenirs de jeunesse. Ce temps où ils croyaient qu'ils seraient forts, toujours. (168)

This passage is located near the end of the novel at a point when the narrator has almost completed his discovery of the city of Casablanca that lies beyond his own neighborhood. The two men laugh at themselves for thinking they could outlast the transition of the country into the new global era. Located, as they are, at the limit

between the medina that caters to young consumers in search of imported athletic wear and the clearing behind them in which the *azouia* or old mosque is located, they come to resemble two guardians standing at the entrance of the old world or two lions: “deux lions à barbe blanche, riant du monde, riant de leur tares.” However, instead of standing strong, they reveal the weakness of their old age and they laugh at themselves for believing they could outlive the transition. Their laughter weakens the boundary between these two worlds and the narrator along with his driver and guide walk past them, barely noticing the barrier they have come to stand for. These two old men best embody the author’s task of writing a novel “for those who have not forgotten” and yet in their frailty they do not seem to promise any kind of duration. In fact, instead of coming to represent a possibility for the future, they are ignored. Clearly, the past cannot live on in these two figures. When they are compared to lions they stop having an effect on the future of the country altogether and are reduced to the role of relics of the past or effigies of an extinct era.

The separation between the old world and the new world is very fragile and the narrator walks right through the barrier without even noticing it. The same is true, as we have seen, for the spaces and groups of people that are distinctly Moroccan, until an element of something foreign turns out to be embedded in them. This tendency to both sustain and blur the inner diversity of the city points to a different kind of threat that lies further away than the forms of European influences. Postcolonial scholars point to globalization in francophone novels and claim that it eradicates the true identity of the country in question as well as its inner diversity.

Francesca Canadé Sautman traces this problem in three African Francophone texts in her article "The race for Globalization" and claims that signs of Western culture are indeed linked to the threat of homogenization: "Such textual markers reflect disillusion with Western economic promises, resentment of dependency, anxiety at cultural homogenization, and resistance to the role of US-controlled financial institutions in African economies." The authors of these texts are increasingly aware of the disappearance of any promise of economic development or foreign investment formerly contained in the presence of these institutions. Sautman lists French bakeries, US soft drinks, the World Bank, and in *Le Jour Venu* there is also pop culture, music, commercial icons, athletic gear, etc. The lingering presence of these items decades after the departure of foreign government does not signify change in local economy, rather it points to the vestiges of a failed attempt to seize political and financial power. In *Le Jour Venu*, it is clear that the upper class, made essentially of consumers of imported goods, have replaced the former colonizers and now occupy the ambiguous position of belonging to the global economy, culture and history, and living in a country that still claims its own identity. As Driss Jaydane takes his narrator throughout the city of Casablanca, however, it becomes clear that through increased immigration, unusual transformations, and the acceptance of foreign presence inside its boundaries, that the entire population in the city are always already hybridic. The integration of otherness in each neighborhood and in each individual renders the possibility of a return to the "real" Morocco impossible. The author's attempt to remember the "old" Morocco is met with laughter in the novel and none of the characters can see further than two generations back. In this

way, despite Jaydane's objectives, the novel participates in a greater trend in francophone literature that accepts its hybrid nature. Kevin Carollo makes this clear in his article titled "Impossible Returns": "[...] in the aftermath of the nation-state, the consequences remain clear: there is no possible return to some 'true' national identity, no return 'home' for migrant populations, and no economic returns for the nations left behind by global migration of people and capital."¹⁰⁸ The cultural estrangement most felt in the upper social classes that have greater access towards a foreign way of life is still spread throughout Casablanca in *Le Jour Venu* and it often goes back further than recent colonization to much older migratory patterns. The threat of reunification or homogenization lies in the widespread cultural mixes that make hybridity part of the social norm in such a way that it excludes the possibility of difference among people and neighborhoods in the city.

In order to protect the quintessential difference some social classes believe to have in regards to other classes, they must reproduce among themselves. Ancestry gets intertwined with divinity and the fathers of these castes play a quasi-religious role of securing the values and beliefs in each next generation. A certain amount of rebellion is tolerated, but ultimately, as has happened for each generation, luxury and the power of tradition triumph over any social concerns for others, and the next generation joins the ranks of the previous one. It is of particular interest that Jaydane chooses to focus on members of the second generation after the independence of Morocco in that the change has not yet been completely

¹⁰⁸ "Impossible Returns: The State of Contemporary Francophone Literary Production", *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Special Convention Issue: History, Memory, Exile (Fall, 2006), pp. 114-132

forgotten (it lives on in the parents' generation) and the new identity of the second generation still remains to be formed. Jaydane situates this transition in historical terms:

Ainsi, les premiers avocats, ingénieurs, pharmaciens, chirurgiens, ensemble, se partagèrent-ils le pays. Un pays dans lequel ils vécurent en conservant les acquis que la généalogie n'était pas disposée à leur retirer, mais en introduisant ce qui, chez l'ancien colon, était à leurs yeux perçus comme une marque de puissance: champagne, whiskey, voitures, restaurants, hôtels, lunettes de soleil, cigarette, jazz, maîtresses en jupe et chemisier. (81)

Here, both worlds are maintained: the "old" Morocco is still imposed on this generation by the living members of pre-colonization and yet the values of the new generation, borrowed from their colonizers, participate heavily in defining their own behavior. For the second generation, the presence of difference that marked the previous generation has dissolved into a homogeneous environment dominated by Western culture. The question thus far in postmodern or postcolonial francophone literature has been one that David Murphy, among others, addresses in his article on globalization in francophone novels: "[...] does this process represent the triumph of a Western "us" over a non-Western "them" or does it (potentially) lead to the development of a genuinely hybrid, global consciousness?"¹⁰⁹ Applied to *Le Jour Venu*, this question offers two options: everything becomes westernized and reduced to the singular hybrid form (in this notion of hybridity internal difference has been erased), or these cultures are able to come into contact with one another and still retain their plurality. These options seem at first very fitting for a novel that

¹⁰⁹ "Globalization, Knowledge, and the Limits of (Inter)disciplinarity", *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 38, No. 3, The Preservation and Survival of African Oral Literature (Fall, 2007): 183-188, 184.

contains so many products from the West, and yet, a closer look at its diverse neighborhoods, distinct social classes, encounters with Islam, and growing spirituality, reveals the cultural hybridity that pervades Jaydane's world. In reproducing themselves, the hybridic social class, generates more hybrids: "Cependant, nous corrompions jusqu'à la pureté chimique de la misère. Avec des hommes comme Simo émergeait une race nouvelle, d'hybrides, qui mangeaient peu et mal chez eux, copieusement et bien chez nous, pour s'en retourner le soir dans leur cahute. Et mal manger, de nouveau, jusqu'au lendemain" (118). This clearly depicts the social class of the servants who fuse into the hybrid global culture in this novel, as they are too far removed from their own homes and unable to resist the temptations of items of luxury.

David Murphy's thesis, therefore, fails to capture the true concern in presenting a world such as this in contemporary francophone literature. From the integration of consumerism in traditional Moroccan society and the mixes of social classes in cafés and nocturnal gatherings, this novel clearly integrates hybridity into the world it depicts. And yet, the "danger of reunification" or collapse of differences is still omnipresent in that the novel combines heterogeneous elements so thoroughly that there is no longer any separation or rupture between them. The second generation of Moroccans is so accustomed to cultural and linguistic translation that it no longer denotes difference and does not call for reflection on the opposing nature of different worlds combined into one. This is a problem when considered alongside the revolutionary undertones of the novel. The title suggests that change will be possible one day and, in the context of this novel, this refers to

the social revolution. However, when this day comes it fails to affect change since there are no unified groups or clearly defined antagonists. In an entirely hybrid environment such as this, the contours of each space and character present such permeability that they are unable to maintain their separation from one another. Clearly there are different social classes represented here, but the instances of contact with one another do not provoke the kind of reaction that is necessary for conflict and revolution to take place. They intermittently join forces and separate again in a dance that suggests that the lines of demarcation between them are not maintained throughout.

Driss Jaydane carefully preserves the entanglement of plural traits inside each one of his neighborhoods, beings, and groups. He sets up groups that have the ability to oppose one another and then he puts them in contact with one another, and much like the social experiment that is Morocco at this time, he watches to see what will happen:

Même si Daniel était plus que des nôtres, même si son père connaissait, en grand chasseur, les moindres cailloux du Maroc, Daniel et son père n'était pas des nôtres. Mais grâce au fils Perales, un miracle social s'était produit.

La capacité de réagir, dans le silence impossible de notre chair de marocains, et, sans doute, de musulmans, c'était cela peut-être, l'égalité entre Marocains: toi et moi, enfin semblables, grâce à l'irritation que provoque l'étranger. Alors Malik, devenu mon frère, me tendit un second verre de thé, enturbanné de mousse blanche.
(92)

The social miracle that takes place here is a direct result of the co-appearance of a young man from Spain and a group of Moroccan men. Because of the irritation caused by the introduction of something or someone foreign into the body of

Morocco equality among Moroccans is possible. Here, to be “semblable” is not to collapse into one another and the author maintains the separation by naming “toi” and “moi,” but to become entangled with one another and to appear alongside one another. This, in turn, makes it possible to adopt the Moroccan nationality for all, insofar as diversity is upheld under the label.

Julia Kristeva refers to the coexistence of foreign and domestic people in the same country, living under the same government as the “communauté paradoxale.”¹¹⁰ She predicts:

Une communauté paradoxale est en train de surgir, faite d'étrangers qui s'acceptent dans la mesure où ils se reconnaissent étrangers eux-mêmes. La société multinationale serait ainsi le résultat d'un individualisme extrême, mais conscient de ses malaises et de ses limites, ne connaissant que d'irréductibles prêts-à-s'aider dans leur faiblesse, une faiblesse dont l'autre nom est notre étrangeté radicale. (290)

This community supposes heightened individuality that resists the influence or effects of the other and that, in most cases, does not need one another. The paradox lies, however, in the awareness on the part of the individuals of their own limits and weaknesses. Kristeva's concept of community supports the possibility of being both similar (“semblable”) and distinct (“toi” et “moi”) in that she claims that absolute alterity is possible even inside collective modes of being.¹¹¹ At first glance this model seems radically different from Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of community and yet it

¹¹⁰ *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*. Paris: Librairie Athème-Fayard. 1988. 290

¹¹¹ Kristeva inserts the foreword Baudelaire wrote in his collection of poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as an epigraph to this essay: “Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère...” In doing so she illustrates again the possibility of maintaining both similarity and individuality.

follows a similar process of both maintaining separation between its members and of making them aware of their own limitations or finitude. Nancy takes the need for the other further and undoes the notion of individuality by arguing that existence is predicated on relationality with the other. Nancy denounces the proliferation of the “immonde” or the non-world alongside the gradual domination of the West and that is precisely what we begin to see in *Le Jour Venu* in that the novel increasingly pushes the limits of representation of Morocco in order to sustain itself. The Arab class the protagonist attends in high-school presents several difficulties in its attempt to capture and to inculcate Moroccan identity. Faced with illustrations of Moroccan youth in their “livre d’Arabe,” Moroccan high-school students are repulsed both by the characteristics of these children and by the book as a poorly constructed and cheaply printed support:

Alors, nous, les Arabisants de la Mission, les nationaux, nous ne voulions pas être les enfants bernés de ce livre, de ce grimoire mal imprimé, mal relié, avec ces illustrations aux traits trop gras, aux couleurs criardes, ces garçonnetts en short bleu, et mocassins noirs, ces fillettes en kilt, ces petits Arabes déguisés en Anglais, qui nous jetaient leur encre sous les doigts. (100)

The thick lines, exaggerated colors and poor drawings suggest that these drawings are closer to caricatures than realistic depictions of contemporary Moroccan youth. Even here, the stereotypical figures represented in the Arab textbook are described as outdated, cheaply represented, and wearing inadequate clothing. In its attempt to produce purely Moroccan children, the textbook makes fools out of its subjects (“enfants bernés de ce livre”), belongs to a period before civilization (“vieux grimoire”) and is unable even to maintain its original appearance as the ink of its

pages continuously rubs off on the fingers of those forced to flip through it. These illustrations are so distorted that the children do not recognize themselves in them. And yet, here too, even a medium whose sole purpose is to capture and articulate the identity of Morocco, the West dictates its own appearance to the subject represented. The boys wear blue shorts and the girls wear kilts, disguised, according to the protagonist, as English people. This textbook fails therefore to produce an exemplary Moroccan person but also to keep out external influences and even though many of the actual young Moroccans in the novel love to wear foreign clothing, they resent seeing it on these Moroccan caricatures.

The struggle to find otherness outside of Westernization continues in the novel and it appears increasingly necessary for the formation of otherness to take place inside an ongoing process that resists definitive articulation, as in the case of the Arab textbook. As the narrator wins Si Malik's trust, the young revolutionary journalist begins to share the struggles of the people with his new aristocratic friend. Before sharing information, the narrator is sworn to secrecy since any anti-nationalist thoughts would immediately be denounced as betrayal and Malik would be punished. Malik reveals to the narrator the now latent anger of the patriots that fought for the independence of the country and who believed that after the independence in 1956 the country would be theirs. They opposed Hassan II who wanted to reconcile Morocco with the foreign countries that had either colonized the country or that wished to control part of the country's economy or politics. He speaks of the group of people called the *Mejdoub* who were revolutionaries and who believed in a pure country defined only by real Moroccans: "Le rôles des *Mejdoub* a

toujours été de dénoncer les dualités, la duplicité, cette mixture qui n'est ni musulmane ni moderne. Qui n'est rien! Nous ne sommes rien!" (123). To be in relation with the other is to be nothing according to the *Mejdoub* who fought for the totalizing identity of Morocco after colonization. The Moroccan identity that is possible here is not one that mixes with the West, it must maintain its separation even if that means reaching the limit of human form. Si Malik recounts, for the narrator, the plot of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in order to illustrate the transformation the *Mejdoub* undergo when the power, which is dual power that collaborates with the West, imposes its law on them. These men thought they would win their country back from France and Spain: "Ils ont cru que le Maroc était retourné à leur peuple..." Instead, the power of the country, the "on" that defines the identity of the people from above comes down hard on them and alters their shape: "Des lions...dont le pouvoir a fait des chiens pour certains, des cafards pour d'autres" (126). The continuity of the historical narrative that captures the revolutionaries in the aftermath of the war of independence is interrupted before it can be completed. Because they do not comply with the hybrid nature of a monarchy/democracy shaped by the West, they are banished as well, or pushed to the limits of the human community. The interruption of the endeavor to return Morocco to Moroccans maintains plurality inside the country, which turns out to be salutary in many ways. One of its chief functions is to enhance the resistance to the global culture that is threatening to invade the country by resting outside of the categories of representation imposed on it. It difficult to ignore, however, that the possibility of escaping categorization comes at the price of paralyzing disillusionment, as in the

case of the *Mejdoub*, complete alteration of the self, and, in some cases, physical deformity to the point of being banished from the category of humans.

The narrator believes it is possible to arrive at a balance between the West and the nationals of Morocco, but when he describes his position, it is evident that he already perceives Morocco through the lens of Western culture: “Nos pieds tenaient parfaitement dans des chaussures pensés par des Européens. C’est sans doute ce qui nous faisait nous entendre et commercer avec. La réussite de nos sociétés d’import-export tenait à une affaire de chaussures. D’ajustement” (170). The shoe fits and therefore it is simply a matter of adjustment. The adjustment relies on the import-export sector in Morocco and yet this movement of exchange or of give and take, seems to go in only one direction: from West to East, from Europe to Morocco. Successful adjustment for a young member of the new generation of free Morocco is to wear European shoes. His “Nike” sneakers carry him through the streets of Casablanca and are either alienating or inviting, depending on the socio-economic class of the group to which a person belongs. This model fails almost immediately, of course, because it includes only those that can afford to purchase these goods and therefore those that belong to his own socio-economic class and who have already embraced global culture. While the narrator presents this model as a mode of representation that successfully encapsulates all citizens of Morocco, he quickly adds certain beings are left out, but only because they are so deformed that they could not possibly be included.

The balance between the East and the West is a matter of locking both sides into one another, like a foot fits into a shoe, but only for those that already belong to

either side. There is a category of the population that does not partake in this balanced negotiation because of its physical deformities and its asocial behavior. This category of the population is referred to as the “tropicals” and they cannot fit into these shoes because of their “pieds difformes, aux bulbes gigantesques, ces pattes de marcheurs sur boue, ces panards ingérables, ne pouvaient réussir avec de telles dispositions, une telle aptitude à faire éclater la norme édictée par l’Europe” (170). These beings are barely human because of their disproportionate dimensions, “gigantesque” and because of the fact that they cannot be controlled, “ingérable,” which in both cases illustrates the impossibility of fitting them into a category of representation and being able to determine their existence thereby. They do not fit into either side and they appear to be a kind of excess, the “trop” that not only escapes categorization, but also points to the limitations of a system that sought to capture the totality of a world. The distinction that should be made, therefore, is not between Moroccans of different socio-economic classes, but between the West as a predominant category that has already invaded most parts of the country, and those Moroccans so deformed (compared to the European norm) that they cannot participate in the Westernization of the world. These beings resist the effects of global culture on account of the fact that they do not fit the global mold represented here as the European shoe. Europe has a homogenizing effect on the inhabitants of Casablanca: most of them fit into this system and become hybrid and therefore homogenous or unified beings, those that do not are pushed to the limit of being by their deformities and inhuman appearance. The monstrous abnormality points to the limits of the categories used here and their ability to capture reality.

The francophone scholar Kevin Carollo sheds light on the reasons behind the monstrous appearance of those left out of the system of representation:

To exist in a national imaginary means accepting the various paradoxes posed by the entangled assumptions of cultural hybridity and homogeneity; it means writing through the simplifications offered by national as well as “hyphenated” literary domains. The final throes may last indefinitely, but in the aftermath of the nation-state, the consequences remain clear: there is no possible return to some “true” national identity, no return “home” for migrant populations, and no economic returns for the nations left behind by global migrations of people and capital.¹¹²

The way to survive, i.e. to continue to be represented in the novel is to conform to the Western norm and to find a way to fit into its hybridic homogeneity. The narrator defends this position, as we have seen, and yet the novel seems to challenge it, at the same time as it promises to write along the lines of the national norm.

The “troparabes” spill out of any defined norm and even though they have had to accept their alienation from the city itself, they do seem to have survived. More than survived, even, they thrive on the outskirts of the city or in the dark alleys and manage, in an indirect way, to reproduce themselves. On one of their first trips beyond the city of Casablanca, Malik takes the narrator and his driver Si Mohammed to a large wasteland in which people come to scavenge for food. One of the most well-known scavengers was found as a baby in an onion crate and has fused with onions to the extent that he has lost his purely human appearance: “Ibnou l’Bassal, Fils de l’oignon, avait appris aussi bien à mastiquer des viande et des quartiers d’orange décomposés qu’à se vêtir: Le mutant, mi-homme mi-bulbe, courait, sautait,

¹¹² “Impossible Returns” 126.

entreposait des pots de yaourt vide qu'il curait, ensuite, du doigt, de la langue" (158). This mutant has managed to marginalize himself in such a way that he is protected from pervasive global culture. He has been pushed outside of the walls of the city and has merged with a vegetal form while living on a wasteland. To exist on the extreme limits of that which is human and of the city itself is to put down anchors to resist the all-encompassing threat of global categorization and it is successful in this instance. But even in this remote character the lurking presence of global civilization is present, in the yogurt containers the man finishes with such care. In his nonsensical behavior and his monstrous appearance, he is forming a pile of remnants of global culture and ingesting whatever parts of them he can.

For the meantime though, these creatures are the only ones capable of presenting difference. Those that are part of modern society continue to see their inner differences overcome again and again by techniques of adjustment. Cultural hybridity for this category of the population extends to the language they speak, which is a carefully crafted mix of Arabic and French that has no other origin than the advent of colonization and global culture. The hybrid language separates the "old" Morocco from the "new" by disrupting the connection between generations, which took place for Moulay's father's generation: "La langue docile qu'ils s'étaient inventée, le pouvoir qu'elle leur conférait, ce jeune royaume dont ils avaient fait leur pâture, tout cela fit qu'ils s'étaient coupés de leurs géniteurs" (82). Based on these images, it is clear that this language is more than a different way of speaking; it is a way of life, a place to live, and a new era. It requires a balance between both and the ability to master both: "Invincible génération qui inventa un homme maîtrisant le

français comme l'arabe et l'art nouveau et terrible à la fois, consistant à se prémunir des contraintes de chacune des deux langues en sautant, dans la même phrase, de l'une à l'autre" (82). Amid the instances in which bilingualism is forbidden (Malik's journalistic writing, for example), this hybridic expression is both widespread and exclusive. The novel itself mixes the languages together by spreading Arabic words throughout its narrative. The use of "interlanguage" in this novel erodes the difference between French and Arab by providing immediate translations for each Arabic term as a footnote in every case. "Moulay," for example, which is the nickname given to the protagonist and the protagonist's father, receives a full explanation: "C'est ainsi que l'on nomme, par respect, les authentiques descendants du Prophète, au Maroc et dans tous les pays arabes Musulmans" (20) The explanation dissolves the national specificities of Morocco by including all Arab Muslim countries. Peter Burke observes that this phenomenon is increasingly widespread: "In other arts, we are witnessing another kind of homogenization. Thanks to the growth of a global market, some writers, like some directors of films 'consciously or unconsciously build translatability into their art forms.'"¹¹³ To write for translation or to incorporate translation into one's text adequately illustrates the problem at hand. As Burke argues here, there is a difference between languages and cultures novels and films, and yet, by including an immediate translation for every code or foreign term, the difference gets erased.

The city, the language, and the inhabitants of Casablanca are all subject to the danger of reunification that Nancy Huston experiences personally as well as in her

¹¹³ *Cultural Hybridity. Ibid.* 105

own need for exile and for the existence of foreign languages in her writing, for bilingualism and exile. She writes:

En somme, nous avons besoin d'un pays et de l'autre; de la différence entre les deux; le mélange ne nous intéresse pas, il nous effraie. Danger de réunification, comme tu disais il y a déjà longtemps... Sans doute l'avais-tu compris avant moi: l'exil n'est que le fantasme qui nous permet de fonctionner, et notamment d'écrire. (*Lettres Parisiennes*, 193)

Jean-Luc Nancy recognizes this same danger in his preference for *mêlée* or entanglement over mixing and therefore for separation to be maintained. Nancy Huston argues that in order to write, it is necessary to find separation or rupture inside the world she creates. The “worlding-process” requires plurality and so the effects of a homogenizing force coming from abroad and overwhelming the categories of separation of a space, language, and population, have an annihilating effect on representation. The Moroccan author’s task to write for those who have not forgotten becomes a way of maintaining difference in a space that is threatened with homogeneity. The problem is that therefore the author is charged with the almost impossible mission of finding absolute alterity inside a hybridic world. By revealing that inside even the most patriotic characters, there is the presence of the West, the author demonstrates the impossibility of the task he assigned to himself. Those who do qualify are fragile, deformed, and elusive. They can hardly be chosen as exemplars of a “real” Morocco as they are at the limit of human form. At the end of the novel, the narrator’s guide, Si Malik, who has taken the protagonist on numerous quests to show him the other parts of the city, admits defeat as well. After organizing social riots against the privileged socio-economic classes in Casablanca

as a way of winning back the city he belongs to, Malik decides to leave Morocco with his French girlfriend and go live in Paris:

Elle voudrait que nous allions vivre à Paris. Elle pense que le Maroc ne me vaut rien. Une chose est sûre, elle n'a pas besoin de prier pour avoir le cœur plein d'amour et envie de faire le bien. Elle est venue au Maroc par curiosité. Et le temps qu'elle a passé ici aura servi à quelque chose, au moins. Il y a plus d'islam en elle que dans un bataillon d'oulémas. (204)

This is the first time in the novel that the West (Malik's French girlfriend) contains elements of the East (Islam) inside of it. Not only that but the combination of the two is presented in a positive and promising manner. Malik's interactions with the narrator have mainly been an attempt to turn him back onto his own country and imbuing him both with pride for his country and the desire for greater social and economic equality. In his French girlfriend he finds both of these traits and he seems to realize that these values can exist outside of the divide between the East and the West. This is another example of excess since Malik's girlfriend has more Islam in her than an army of Ulamas but instead of being marginalized, Isabelle is dictating the course of the future of Morocco for Malik. This positive example of something outside of the East/West binary sheds light, once again, on the limitations inherent in both categories of representation. Difference is not inherent in national borders but in the myriad parts and beings that participate in the formation of the world. The responsibility of the contemporary francophone author is not to attempt to reinforce the national borders of their country and to maintain separation from others, but to participate in the formation of the world by coming into encounter with the other. The very nature of community, according to Nancy, opposes the

possibility of substantial identity, of being absolutely one thing and not another. To be is to be exposed to singularity and therefore to be scattered together, like the piles of shoes outside of Mosque, Babouches and Nikes alongside one another, not quite face-to-face, and oscillating between communion and disaggregation. It is this ecstatic relationality that exposes our own finitude to ourselves, enabling us to catch a glimpse for a mere moment, not long enough for articulation, nor enough time to pin it down, of our selves.

The excess or that which escapes a system of representation explodes the dichotomy and liberates the subjects from their categories and roles inside the novel. Jaydane is forced to realize that he cannot write for something or someone beyond the novel since anything he sets forth to represent is always plural and always located alongside the other. Jaydane, therefore, fails to accomplish his task and in failing he interrupts any possibility of representing a purely Moroccan Morocco. In addition, by having his characters run away to France in the moment that they are attempting to reclaim Morocco is to interrupt the novel's course as well. When the day comes in *Le Jour Venu*, the main revolutionary figure in the novel, Malik, leaves the country and in this way he too frees the future of the country from his grip and enables it to simply be. To interrupt the task of representing a nation is to prevent the possibility of another form of domination of the country, such as the one the novel already struggles with. Something, however unusual it may be, remains ungraspable and impossible to capture in representation and therefore attempt to capture everything is made impossible. In a more general sense, the novel itself is generated on account of the interruption that took place

during the history of the country: the linear development of the country was interrupted by colonialism and the author is attempting to place his novel inside that gap and to fill it or erase. Interruption, according to the novelist is what prompts the novel to exist. In this sense, Jaydane's novel aligns with the process of literature described by Nancy, not as something that is operable outside itself, but as something that communicates only, without teleology. He writes:

La "Littérature" pensée comme l'interruption du mythe, communique seulement – en ce sens qu'elle ne met en jeu, qu'elle ne met en œuvre et ne voue au désœuvrement que la communication elle-même, le passage de l'un à l'autre, le partage de l'un par l'autre. La littérature n'a pas elle-même pour enjeu, à la différence du mythe qui se communique lui-même, communiquant sa communion. (*La Communauté Désœuvrée*, 163)

By failing at its task to capture the city and to represent it, *Le Jour Venu* also fails to fulfill the role Nancy assigns to the myth and falls to the rank of literature. Literature is that which simply communicates itself, beyond and unaware of a greater task. It is not indifferent to the faces events that exist inside of it but its sole function is to manifest itself. As we have seen, the task of the francophone author is often thought to be to resurrect the nation that has been altered and changed by the West. And yet here, we see that this task is impossible both on account of the fact that a novel cannot operate outside of itself and that its system of representation is necessarily incomplete and unable to capture the totality of the world. Therefore, it is necessary to change the perception of the francophone author not as one who has a task but as one who communicates simply and in communicating he brings his object into existence.

Although the novel's title holds within it the promise of a day when change will occur, the novel interrupts itself and lets the events that were building towards a revolution be scattered. The lesson of the novel, if there is one, is lost on the narrator who already accepts so many contradictions in his world that he cannot use encounters with the new to effect change.¹¹⁴ The final pages depict a world that coincides exactly with the one presented in the beginning and offers no promise of change, despite repeated investigations into the far corners of the city with the help of Si Malik. Upon hearing about the riots that take place in the street of Casablanca the narrator's father attempts to reassure his son that the hybrid monarchy/government system that is in place is there for the best and that it operates in the only way that it can. In justifying the political system, the narrator's father does not remain inside the borders of Morocco:

Crois-moi, ce pays a besoin de son Roi. D'ailleurs, le monde entier admire notre Roi, à commencer par la France, Valérie Giscard-d'Estaing est un grand ami de notre Roi. Avec ces socialistes, je me demande ce qui va se passer. Pauvre France! Crois-moi, *ouldi*, Dieu protège sa Majesté, et pour longtemps encore! (218)

The gaze of the rest of the world on the Moroccan king and his friendship with the French president Giscard-d'Estaing justify his presence. The independence of Morocco seems conditional here insofar as the approval of France and of the rest of the world still occupies a central place in the perception of the narrator's country.

¹¹⁴ By situating his novel within a school year, in 1980-81 and by depicting naïve high-school students as main characters, Jaydane sets his novel up to be a *roman d'apprentissage*. This is another opportunity that the novel does not seize to promote change and growth in a country that is looking for something to happen.

The ongoing interruptions in the novel prevent the narrative from dictating the identity and behavior of its beings, domestic or foreign, rich or poor, male or female, and lets its plurality of voices and encounters trace their lines of demarcation, temporarily, before they are formed again in the next moment of encounter. No single authoritative voice, not even the narrator, has the power to dictate the identity of any space or character, rather, they are all part of an ongoing process that lets them communicate themselves. This point is made clear in the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo's, essay titled *The Transparent Society* in which he puts the single authoritative voice of representation on trial and calls for a multiplicity of sources of communication. He focuses on the question of community in postmodern societies made possible by the implementation of mass media and prolific social networks. He underlines the necessity for there to be more than one portrait of any given event and notes that in postmodernity everyone gets to step up to the microphone. This is important in regards to the question of representation of a newly freed country such as Morocco and to the imperative some assign to the francophone author to reinstate it through literature. Vattimo writes:

What has happened is something quite different and of far greater magnitude: the so-called primitive peoples colonized by Europeans in the good and rightful name of 'superior' and more evolved civilization have rebelled, making a unilinear and centralized history problematic. The European ideal of humanity has been revealed as one ideal amongst others, not necessarily worse, but unable, without violence, to obtain as the true essence of man, of all men.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *The Transparent Society*. Trans by David Webb. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1992. 4.

European colonialism cannot be erased by a novel, but its hegemony over a country can be dismantled by recognizing that it is only one model among many others and that each receive representation in the novel. The threat that remains is that of homogeneity by way of globalization but perhaps, as we have seen with European colonialism, it will come to be only one influence among others. So far the country is able to resist such totalizing models by giving life to marginal, deformed, quasi-monstrous characters that, although they are not beloved, are at least free.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study I have focused on the impossibility of securing identity and of reducing it to a single articulation or exhaustive system of representation. No matter the means used to capture and to represent identity, spatial or personal, excess gets generated, which then calls the categories of representation into question. These novels have in common a retrospective gaze at a past that at first seems to hold the foundation of identity and the reasons and means for existence. More than one of these texts attempts to retrieve those explanatory systems from the past by recounting their childhood, tracing their lives back to their origin, or by recreating a portrait of the “old kind world.” Community demonstrates the futility of such a pursuit in that there is no beginning and no end and there can be no foundation for the self, past or future. Each novel under consideration here witnesses the downfall of these systems and in doing so, come to realize that these processes themselves are what generate the beings and environments that get represented. The novel relinquishes or attempts to relinquish all operations and becomes a space for the formation of community. In the case of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, characters are brought into the narrative having already been severed from the traditional means of identity. They are bereft of family ties and because they are clones they have had to forego any claim to uniqueness. They cannot aspire to a profession or a future other than their death on account of the organ donations they must make, and they are not equipped to reproduce. Everything lies, therefore, in their relationships and in the way they maintain one another alive the collective memory that is the narrative. Relationality is the

platform on which they can come into being. Community makes it possible to view the sequences of relationships between these characters and in the structure of the novels as part of an ongoing process of positing the self always alongside the other, without ever finalizing it.

There is a similar process of liberation that occurs in Michel Houellebecq's novels. In chapter 2, I focus primarily on the impossibility of juxtaposing the map as representation onto the territory, which will always exceed, overspill, or escape it. The few times that the protagonist in *La Carte et le Territoire* manages to apply the map to the territory, the effects are bewildering instead of defining. Houellebecq struggles, in his latest publication titled *Configuration du Dernier Rivage* (April 17, 2013) again with the grid of representation and the liberation of his writing and subjects from any defining structure or concept. In a much earlier text titled *La Poursuite du Bonheur* (1991), he wrote "La structure est le seul moyen d'échapper au suicide. [...] Croyez à la structure. Croyez aux métriques anciennes, également."¹¹⁶ There, the structure is that which sustains representation and protects both the author and the text from being annihilated. Now, however, he does not hesitate to exceed traditional versification and to spill into prose in certain poems in his latest collection of poems, or to disrupt and interrupt his verses with a sudden metrical shift.

Much like the map and the territory, translations in Nancy Huston's bilingual texts have difficulty fully encapsulating one another. In fact, they explicitly reject one another and in doing so they expose translation as a re-writing or as the

¹¹⁶ Paris: Edition de la Différence. 1992. 15.

generation of something new. In Huston's imperfect translations, she is able to call attention to that which is left out or altered in each version.¹¹⁷ I look specifically at her bilingual text *Limbes/Limbo*, but most of her novels may also be considered alongside their French or English translation. Huston's texts celebrate their differences and their refusal to collapse into one another and therefore are able to maintain difference and plurality. Since one version (usually French) precedes the other, it would be considered the "original" and its subsequent English version, the "translation." However, since the translations do not perfectly coincide with one another, this order is blurred and each one serves as both an original and a version of the other, which makes their relationality a fundamental part of their own existence. In Huston's novels, characters grapple with their own bilingualism and difficulties in articulating certain ideas. Her novels contain passages or words from other languages as well as characters who stutter and are forced to interrupt themselves again and again as they attempt to express themselves. These repetitions as well as the imperfect translations demonstrate the impossibility of maintaining each language separate and the necessity to organize communication according to an ongoing process that is always at the limit of not being or of being other.

So far, this study has mainly brought to light the limits inherent in attempting to represent beings and their environments according to categories of representation. I have argued that community developed by Jean-Luc Nancy is a way

¹¹⁷ This brings about a certain difficulty in categorizing the author as a Canadian author since she writes in French first and then translates into English and since she lives primarily in France.

of becoming a witness to events inside and outside of the text, without attempting to organize them. Community lets beings and worlds say themselves as they embark on the process of interaction in which they come into being by hitting up against one another and exposing their limits. The last chapter supports these claims and also demonstrates the ways in which approaching literature by way of community is particularly adequate when considering world literature. It examines a Francophone novel by Driss Jaydane who belongs to the fourth generation of Maghreb francophone writers after the independence of Morocco. I argue that Jaydane's novel shifts the debate surrounding the role of the francophone author away from one that either enforces or opens the national borders in writing, to one that is faced with the homogenizing effects of globalization. *Le Jour Venu* is filled with imported products, music, food, and lifestyles from the rest of the world and can no longer be concerned with national imperatives. Plurality can, however, be maintained in a novel that invites the formation of unusual creatures that are half man half vegetable or beings that are defined only by their excess ("les troparabes) and that create permanent exceptions to the categories of representation, rendering them ineffective. In the end, any attempt on the part of the author or the nation to make the novel operate outside of itself as a way of resurrecting or preserving nationalism is interrupted and abandoned.

Community as a process for becoming witness to transitory formations manages to emerge as one that escapes the traps and problems put forth in the categories of representation. However, as we have seen in the case of Jean-Luc Nancy's writing itself, it is not entirely immune to these risks. To assign content to

community by reading literature alongside it is to run the risk of both essentializing and defining it and of turning it into a category of representation of its own. The particularity of these novels is that they all interrupt any attempt to complete the formation of community and in that way they preserve it. However, community is still under the threat of the disappearance of plurality, which requires that we look in less and less likely places and that we consider unusual creatures in order to find manifestations of plurality. Difference is precarious in an environment that has seen its traditional distinctions become eroded and new and greater measures must be put in place, as we see in *Le Jour Venu* in order to uncover diversity.

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