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Disorientation: An Introduction

Niall Martin & Mireille Rosello

Abstract   *This collection of essays analyses the concept of disorientation. It does so by questioning orientation as norm and disorientation as resistance. This exploration of disorientation does not interpret the disoriented subject as the privileged site of new knowledge, dissident pleasure or social critique. Nor does it propose to embrace disorientation as the invisible norm revealed by the study of supposedly exceptional subjects. Contemplating the concept of disorientation does not mean becoming disoriented, nor does it mean adopting a position of condescending mastery or blind admiration vis-à-vis the disoriented other.*

We argue that only when it becomes possible to imagine, simultaneously, many incompatible or at least discrepant possible forms of powerful, powerless, desirable and undesirable forms of disorientation, does disorientation become a political tool. We can then imagine disorientation as the name of the constantly evolving relationality between a subject and a conscious or unconscious cultural and political grid. Disorientation is the moment during which a world is produced by the acknowledgment of its dependency on the grid. It is also the moment when some subjects are enab led or disenabled by their relationship to the grid and the world in the absence of others who function as the guardians of the norm. What matters here is the subject's positioning vis-à-vis his or her awareness of dis-re-orientation. The question is not who is lost or who is foreign, who is comfortable or who has colonised, who decides where maps stop and start, but rather what kind of relationality explains who feels dis- or re-oriented.

This introduction to a collection of essays on 'disorientation' is already struggling with the kind of disorientation with which it wishes to engage. Should an introduction to a volume on disorientation at least try to disorient? But then could it still be an introduction? We seem faced with an uncomfortable alternative: either give up on the ambition to perform at least some disorienting effect in this text, or accept that there is something paradoxical about our gesture.

Like programme coordinators who organise 'orientation weeks', the writers of an introduction are expected to provide a map: the cognitive grid that will allow readers to have a sense of direction and purpose, itself readable because we assume that they have acquired the method or practice necessary to find their way towards their objective or destination. A successful

orientation programme will ensure that the participants know by which methods the coordinates are imagined and calculated, which guarantees that they will know how to interpret the signs that direct their attention to specific landmarks. An introduction may summarise the essays included in the issue to help readers 'go straight' to the ones that interest them, or might list the names of theorists or objects of study analysed here in an attempt to provide disciplinary landmarks.

Since this introduction exists, the reader may assume that we have decided against disorienting him or her. What has happened instead is that we have come to the conclusion that so many forms of disorientation exist that an unreflected-upon attempt at disorienting would be just as unproductive as a systematic and unreflexive search for orientation. Instead, we want to articulate the political and cultural assumptions that we had to respect or resist when we decided to obey the rule that introductions must be used as orientation devices.

One of the preconceived ideas that this volume has sought to trouble is that when there is no map, or the map is not legible, readers will systematically find their experience ineffective and unpleasant. They will feel lost, confused and alienated; and they will equate these emotions with a negative assessment of what it means to 'be' disoriented 'by' a text.[1]

Our first point, then, is to separate the idea of an affective reaction from the assumption that the affect will always be negative: yes there will be affect, but affect could vary from curiosity, wonder or enchantment to aggressive rejection, as well as a sense of deprivation and injustice. Consider Niall Martin's essay in this volume: he discusses the reaction of a nationalist party leader who feels aggressively un-homed when he does not hear English in public transportation. In this case, a conservative voice defines disorientation as the unpleasant distance from the usual, redefined as the norm. For a nationalist politician, an unquestioned association between disorientation and negative affect functions well as a rhetorical device that forges a direct link between the presence of strangers and the hostility of an environment. The speaking subject is convinced that it would be desirable to *not* feel disoriented and further assumes that disorientation would not exist if the foreign tongue were replaced by the native tongue. On the other end of that spectrum, a book such as Rachid Boudjedra's *Topographie pour une agression caractérisée* [Ideal Topography for an Aggravated Assault] (Boudjedra 1975) reminds us that Westerners are prompt to complain about feeling disoriented but that they are also very good at ignoring the foreigner's constant and unpleasant state of disorientation. Boudjedra's novel could thus be defined as belonging to a sub-genre of disorienting texts that construct and target one particular type of audience.[2] The author successfully disorients Western

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[1]When hypertexts and web-based environments were being developed, many of the authors or scripters recognised that the internalised textual practices of readers used to print culture constituted an obstacle that they often characterised as 'being lost' or 'disoriented' (see Baylor 2001; Chiu, and Wang 2000).

[2]The disorienting literary tactics can be linguistic, for example the use of Martinican creole in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1997); structural – the focalisation is

readers by making them experience the world through the eyes of a migrant who does not understand the map of the Parisian metro (Rosello, in this volume).

The two types of disoriented subjects mentioned above occupy very different positions vis-à-vis their maps; yet, in both cases, the disoriented subject experiences pain, and the reader is encouraged to relate to that negative affect. The political reasons for being asked to recognise disorientation as the correct response to an environment are, however, radically different in each case. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) party leader aligns orientation with nationalism, monolingualism and Eurocentrism, while Boudjedra criticises not only nationalism, monolingualism and Eurocentrism but also the assumption that they are inseparable from a feeling of orientation. That assumption is, in itself, a cognitive map, and that way of mapping the real might become the invisible and all-powerful precondition of our thinking about maps, unless we resist it by interrogating its presence and desirability.

When the connection between orientation, disorientation and the existence of a hegemonic map is disturbed and interrupted, then a moment of radical disorientation occurs. This collection of essays focuses on such meta-moments.

As a result, our introduction is disoriented/ing because it agrees to exist without being comfortable with the law of its genre. If we were forced to choose (politically, aesthetically or culturally) in favour of orienting and against disorienting (or vice versa), and also between performing disorientation and contemplating disorientation, we would have failed to suspend our judgment about one of the most important issues the essays discuss: who is empowered or disempowered when disorientation is taken to be the name of the problem and orientation the solution? Instead of choosing between orientation and disorientation, we focus on the strong pressures to orient and on what happens when that pressure is resisted.

We therefore wish to avoid two assumptions, or rather to articulate our suspicion that they are neither innocent nor harmless. First, we would like to move away from the idea that disorientation interrupts the norm of orientation. As Sara Ahmed suggests, feeling disoriented might be the moment when orientation starts existing to the extent that an oriented subject does not reflect on a comfort that he or she assumes to be the norm.

> When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think 'to think' about this point. When we experience disorientation we might notice orientation as something we do not have. (Ahmed 2006: 5–6)

Yet this is not exactly the point we want to make: we suggest here that moments of disorientation are not necessarily an undesirable exception, a

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multiple or uncertain – as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or the map itself is no map, as in Abe Kōbō's *The Ruined Map* (Abe and Saunders 1969). According to Ève Charrin, the 'roman de l'égarement' (disorientation novel) is a sub-genre of contemporary French Literature (Charrin 2012).

pocket of disorder to be avoided or promptly reordered. Rather, as David Farrier argues in his reading of Ruth Padel's *The Mara Crossing* (2012), the 'affective and intellectual disorientations' of contradictions can provide a means to engage ethically with the 'disempowered and dislocated experience of irregular migrants' (Farrier, this volume).

Sometimes, reorientation means forcing a map onto a reality and over-determining the destination and the journey. This is the case in China Miéville's novel *The City & the City* (2009) in which the inhabitants of Besźel and Ul Qoma are forced to 'see' only one of the two cities that have been arbitrarily separated by a map (see Schimanski, this volume). In that case, disorientation and the refusal to recognise the unity of what is arbitrarily divided is the beginning of rebellion.

Such stories make us aware that the 'dis' in disorientation is sometimes used as a not too subtle excuse to exclude, or even to blame. It is convenient to attach disorientation to the other's body, as if it were an identity, a condition or a destiny. From disorientation as a relation between the map and the subject, we have imperceptibly moved to the construction of identity markers: in front of us now stands someone who 'is' disoriented – clearly wrong, cognitively impaired, illiterate or perhaps drunk.

Here, observing the functions of disorientation enables us to perform the type of political and cultural work one could engage in by deploying other concepts such as disability and minoritisation in the area of gender, ethnicity, and class as social stigma (Sedgwick 1990: 85–87). Who could doubt, for example, that the Alzheimer's patient experiences pain when he or she becomes a 'wanderer' whose reflex is to leave home to 'go' home (Monacelli et al. 2003; Cipriani et al. 2014). Who, in their right mind, would wish to deny that their perspective, not ours, is disoriented? We suggest however that the systematic medicalisation of that kind of wandering masks a trickier debate about what exactly, in that type of 'wandering', is different from the dangerous travels of people disempowered by social rather than biological factors. Medicalising certain forms of disorientation is a gesture of bordering that bypasses the moment of identification of who is disoriented by what. Just as certain forms of mobility or immobility are created by the relationship between the body and enabling or disenabling spaces (Lewiecki-Wilson 2015), the disoriented subject is constructed as the person who fails to live according to the rules that make certain space-time environments 'safe'. For example, after describing wandering as a practice that seems 'innocent enough' (Cipriani et al. 2014: 3), the authors of the article enumerate the 'adverse outcomes associated with this aberrant behaviour' (2014: 3): 'accidents, getting lost, malnutrition . . . weight loss, fatigue, sleep disturbance, social isolation, earlier institutionalisation, and injury' (2014: 4). All the 'outcomes' listed above are now described as the characteristics or even the identity markers of the disoriented subjects, which makes it obvious that they should be medicalised: 'treated' or 'cared for'. An interesting alternative would be to ask what we could do to change our commonly accepted space-time coordinates so that they would become safer for a community that includes wanderers. Can we imagine cities or villages in which wanderers could wander safely, neither posing a threat to themselves nor putting pressure on caretakers or

public health resources?[3] If wanderers do not sit down for meals (presumably in an institution) and burn more calories than people who lie all day as a result of pacing (Cipriani et al. 2014), what forms of socialised feeding could be organised to guarantee an optimum intake of calories? If wanderers have more fractured bones because they move (and therefore fall) more often than other (elderly) people, would not cushioning the (normal) environment represent an advantage for all the bodies who will break if they fall, regardless of whether they wander or not? Should we not rethink statistics that conclude that 'wanderers' break their bones more often than others (which implies that we should control the wanderer)? Or rather can we not re-interpret those figures as saying that wandering (practices) force these subjects to (mis)fit – as Rosemarie Garlan Thomson (2011) would say – into another category of able bodies (defined, rather absurdly as normal people who do not break their bones)? Could the kind of technology that helps you find your smart phone be developed to accompany those bodies whose relationship to the map is less obvious than for those of us who read them? Can we envisage a technology that would enable them to recognise (so-called) landmarks or ask for directions (in a language both parties understand) when they get lost?[4] Haven't we, after all, as Satellite-Navigation-System dependents, already become such wanderers?

Forms of disorientation that entail danger, or at the very least discomfort, are categorised as disabilities and treated as such. Would it be so provocative to suggest that these forms of dis-enablement travel across subjectivities? Is it impossible to recognise that similar forms of disorientation are at work in the experience of the migrant as a sociologically dis-enabled subject? And that it is desirable to transfer the search for technological assistance between categories?

A migrant who does not speak the language of the country of arrival and a person who tries to go home even though she or he is 'at home' share something that is beyond the type of knowledge that migration studies or medical studies, taken separately, can produce. Could all the 'mad women' of literature, regardless of whether they are in the attic of a book (Brontë 1996 [1847]; Donaldson 2002; Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Hall 2011; Rhys 1982) or behind the walls of an institution help us approach disorientation from an intersectional perspective?[5] We could then go beyond the divisive and sometimes strategically disempowering identification markers such as gender and art, disability and class, age and origin without masking them under fake universalist gestures. Social, biological, spatial and cultural forms of disorientation do not have to be either collapsed or re-oriented

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[3]And of course the 'neither . . . nor' masks a potential conflict of interests between two priorities. See how 'reality' is constructed in the title of Janet Jankowiak and David Knopman''s article; 'Facing Reality: The Cost of Alzheimer Dementia – Who Will Pay?' (Jankowiak and Knopman 2006).

[4]This is in fact a rhetorical question, since such experiments are precisely carried out by researchers such as Jorge Torres-Solis et al. (2010).

[5]See Tobin Siebers'' discussion of the artistic work of Judith Scott, who was institutionalised at seven and spent all her life 'inside', so to speak (Siebers 2010: 16–18). She had Down syndrome, and could neither hear nor speak.

towards discrete disciplines, especially if the disciplinary work constructs binaries between normal and abnormal, citizens and vagrants, sane and mad people, dis(en)abled and able bodies.

Is there not something inherently unhealthy in the principle of re-orientation that restores health without questioning the definition of health, something ignorant about equating literacy with local norms of knowledge and about assuming that sobriety can never cause disorientation? Consider the traditional and quintessential moment of disorientation for the anthropologist, the moment of panic supposedly induced by a violent culture shock. This is how Bronislaw Malinowski describes the beginning of his work in the Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific:

> I well remember the feelings of hopelessness and despair after many obstinate but futile attempts had entirely failed to bring me into real touch with the natives or supply me with any material. I had periods of despondency, when I buried myself in the reading of novels, as a man might take to drink in a fit of tropical depression and boredom . . . Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. (2002 [1922]: 4)

In the first paragraph, the feelings of alienation are overwhelming. They verge on the tragic. Disoriented by his inability to connect with the 'natives', Malinowski turns away from the incomprehensible chaos, gives up on connecting, on orienting and he starts 'drinking' books, the traces of his familiar cognitive map, in an attempt to alleviate his despair. Orientation has become a drug.

On the other hand, this account of frightening disorientation contains one of the most radical antidotes against the idea that disorientation will systematically induce lasting depression. The most important part of this quotation occurs at the end of the second paragraph, where Malinowski asks us to 'imagine' how he felt when he was left on the island. In other words, he is confident that we have the cognitive and cultural tools that enable us to vicariously experience what it means to live with, or exist within that disorientation. Is Malinowski then implicitly suggesting that imagination enables us to appropriate disorientation and embrace it, perhaps even celebrate it?

This possibility leads us, however, to the second of the pitfalls that we tried to avoid. Just as we do not wish to systematically fear disorientation and re-orient, we would also like to scrutinise the implications of a desire to celebrate disorientation. The archetypal figure of another celebrated 'wanderer', the nineteenth century (white, male, healthy, leisured) *flâneur* has many contemporary variations whose practices are varied and illuminating.

In *City of Glass* (1985), Paul Auster imagines a character whose willingness to embrace disorientation is worth comparing to the fear of feeling lost. In Auster's novel, just as in Boudjedra's text, the city is a labyrinth. Yet, the fact that Daniel Quinn's walks dissolve the city into 'nowhere' (Auster 1985: 4) does not produce anxiety or confusion. The absence of bearings is not tragic. Instead, a new reality replaces the old map and secretes a new 'self':

> New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal and it no longer mattered where he was. (Auster 1985: 4)

Disorientation equalises, that is, works against hierarchy and perhaps against injustices, be they social or physical or both – those which affect bodies whose access to mobility is reduced by cognitive or motor impairments. On the other hand, such enthusiastically embraced forms of disorientation are universalising and would not constitute compelling solutions for the unhappy, disoriented traveller. There might be something suspicious about who idealises. As Esra Almas points out, idealising disorientation also means exoticising: she points out that the nineteenth-century travellers arriving in foggy Istanbul were at first frustrated but then quickly enchanted by their own disorientation. Disorientation, she points out, was a form of pleasure for the Westerner who travelled to unknown countries. (Almas, this volume)

   In other words, the essays and this introduction seek to maintain a double dialectic tension between the theorising and performance of orientation and of disorientation. The conflation between disorientation and error, disorder or noise and the simultaneous equation between orientation and the norm or meaningfulness is one of the paradigms that this volume wishes to critique. Sometimes, a work of art suggests that storytelling needs to organise the real according to a map only to immediately question the artificial and violent imposition of that map on the story itself. For example, as Murat Aydemir shows in his article, the implicit and explicit map of a high school in Gus Van Sant's 2003 film *Elephant* (based on the Columbine school shooting of 1999) may tell us who is where at what time in that high school, and also who is supposed to be doing what at that time, but the particular filmic narrative chosen by the director refuses or fails to make sense of the two teenage murderers' journey. The film will therefore force us to imagine a queer form of narratology: it represents both our apparent understanding of the characters' whereabouts and our profound sense of disorientation. (Aydemir, this volume).

   In other words, neither the introduction nor the essays in the collection look at disorientation as an object of study, something we could observe as if it already existed before each reading frames it. We do not treat disorientation as one particular moment of relationship to space and time that we can analyse, describe, treat or judge according to a set of aesthetic political or cultural values. We choose instead to look at how other discourses do that.

   This concern has implications for another familiar topos of introductions such as this: the issues of urgency and topicality. For us it entails that we are less interested in answering the question 'why disorientation now?' than in investigating what kinds of 'now' disorientation produces. Understanding the political topicality and theoretical relevance of disorientation in 2016, we believe, involves paying attention to the possibilities and intersections that moments of disorientation reveal. How can reflection on the relationship

between orientation and disorientation produce knowledge *at* this moment as well as *of* this moment?[6] How can it, for example, equip us to make sense of movement at a moment when the life and death distinction between being a refugee (good) or migrant (bad) seems to depend on whether one is running from or running to particular locations?[7]

To answer that question, it is instructive to consider a recent essay by German film-maker, artist and theorist Hito Steyerl who suggests that the idea of disorientation can indeed be invoked as the meta-trope of our contemporary moment – whether that moment be thought of in terms of post-modernity, post-coloniality or the post-human. Disorientation is a temporal trope, she argues, because it marks the dissolution of a specific history of the horizon. The historical emergence of a horizon with a single vanishing point in Renaissance art mirrors and produces the subjectivity of the individual observer, and marks the emergence of orientation as an ideological project. It produces a space that 'defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable' (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 18); a space which, insofar as it 'allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and, therefore, managed' (2012:18), is first and foremost a space of control. The linear space produced by the stabilisation of the horizon produces in turn linear time and linear progress: it constitutes, in other words, a vital addition to the 'tool kit for enabling Western dominance, and the dominance of it concepts' (2012: 19), furnishing the measuring stick for producing the difference through which the West marks its Others (20).

Inevitably, however, this moment of world-historical orientation contains within it the moment of its own disorientation, for even as the horizon of Renaissance perspective confers upon the viewer a stable body resting on a theoretical terra firma,

> the spectator's importance is also undermined by the assumption that vision follows scientific laws. While empowering the subject by placing it at the center of vision, linear perspective also undermines the viewer's individuality by subjecting it to supposedly objective laws of representation. (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 19)

As Michel Serres observes, '*le sujet naît de l'objet*' [the object begets the subject] (quoted in Brown 2001: 1), and the subject, consequently, is forever bound to the fate of the disavowed object.

We are, in Steyerl's account, currently living through a particularly acute period in the 'dismantling' (2012: 22) of that horizon, but the dissolution of the Renaissance paradigm is experienced less as emancipation than as a confusion

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[6]And here we remember the crucial distinction that Clifford Geertz establishes between studying villages and studying *in* villages: '[T]he locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods . . .); they study in villages' (1973: 22).

[7]See for example the UK Home Secretary, Theresa May's refusal to welcome refugees during the latest 2015 crisis unless it is demonstrated that they are not 'economic migrants' (Travis 2015).

of subject and object. To understand the peculiar character of this confusion, she suggests we try the following thought experiment: 'Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground' (2012: 13). The experience is peculiar, she observes, for one of the consequences of this 'groundlessness' is that one loses any sense of being in free fall:

> [p]aradoxically, while you are falling, you will feel that you are float-ing – or not even moving at all . . . As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 13)

The consequences of this proprioceptive confusion or mistaken sense of the body's relation to its surrounding space, is familiar to aircraft pilots who on entering this condition report that they have difficulty in distinguishing them-selves from their aircraft, and hence, '[w]hile falling, people may sense them-selves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered' (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 13).[8] We enter a liquid modernity in which liquid has suddenly become solid.

And here of course we recognise a huge paradox, for while the philoso-phers of liquid- and post-modernity 'have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness', the claim that '[w]e cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphys-ical claims or foundational political myths' (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 13) coincides with a new visual paradigm distinguished by views from above 'in which grounding effectively constitutes a privileged subject' (2012: 24). This moment of disorientation, in other words, coincides with a moment of hyper-orientation: the substitution of an oriented body for the disembodied omnis-cience of the satellite view and a 'new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen-based distraction' (Steyerl and Berardi 2012: 24).

Disorientation as the new orientation in which we experience ourselves as both subject and object – beneficiaries and victims of precarity, complicit in our own securitisation, performing our spontaneity and parading our privacy, has a persuasively orienting force. And this is the danger of orienting ourselves around disorientation; its appeal as a meta-trope quickly re-inserts its own horizon. Steyerl's own analysis seems to succumb to this horizon's pull when she celebrates the fact that, thanks to CGI and graphic-based tech-niques, her own medium, cinema, has 'finally . . . caught up with the represen-tational freedoms of painting and structural and experimental film . . . [and] gained independence from the prescribed focal dimensions that have normal-ised and limited the realm of its vision' (2012: 27). The idea of cinema catching

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[8]The term 'proprioception' to designate the perceptual knowledge about move-ment derived from elements of the body's musculature was coined in 1906 by Charles Scott Sherrington along with the terms 'exterioception' to designate infor-mation originating outside the body and 'interoception' for information about the internal organs (Sherrington 1906).

up with what it is thought to have superseded is of course superbly disorienting, however the dominant tropes of escape and emancipation from the tyranny of the focal length provides the ultimate interpretative frame.

What we miss in this highly persuasive and exhilarating account of disorientation as the trope of a global contemporary is any insight into the moment of relationality – any help in enabling us to think the (subject) position of someone that is neither running to nor running from.

In order to better investigate these questions, consequently, we think it is instructive to cross Steyerl's account of the horizon with a case-study which confronts us imaginatively with the experience of its loss. The 'Journey out of Essex' (1841) by the nineteenth-century English poet John Clare may be usefully articulated with Steyerl's account in this respect. Composed as a letter for the 'amusement' of his long dead 'wife' Mary,[9] it reports the poet's increasingly hallucinatory flight from a mental asylum on the edge of London back to his home in the Northamptonshire village of Helpstone only to conclude with the comment that in the absence of Mary, he feels equally 'homeless at home' (Clare et al. 1983: 161). Emerging out of amnesia, and reconstructed partly from scraps of paper Clare later found in his pockets, it is an account comprised of mysteriously emblematic figures, vivid memories and impressions that swim up out of a topography that constantly threatens to overwhelm him:

> I heedlessly turned back to read [a milestone] . . . I then suddenly forgot which was North and South and though I narrowly examined both ways I could see no tree or bush or stone heap that I could recollect I had passed so I went on mile after mile almost convinced I was going the same way I came and these thoughts were so strong upon me that doubt and hopelessness made me turn so feeble that I was scarcely able to walk. (Clare et al. 1983: 157)

In addition to its intensely realised accounts of proprioceptive disorientation, Clare's text is also aligned with the profound cultural and historical disorientation of the agricultural revolution with its horizon-shattering practices of 'improvement' and 'enclosure': a socio-economic experience of disorientation which forms the subject of much of his later poetry. As such, it is a text that directly registers the impact of the horizon described by Steyerl. Its disorientation arises from the imposition of the rational grid of profit calculation on a familiar landscape organised around association and customary ties. It orients through its disorientation, which metonymises the experience of the landless peasantry that in Marxist history primes the pump for the dramatic expansion of European industrial capitalism (Marx et al. 1990: 875–895). Clare's moment of disorientation is, in other words, redeemed in one of the nineteenth century's greatest narratives of teleological history.

Moreover, in the story of Clare, the 'ploughman poet' who had been fêted for a season in London but was abandoned by his metropolitan readership with the passing of the vogue for peasant poetry, he marks too the

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[9]Mary Joyce, to whom the 'Journey' is addressed, was the childhood sweetheart of Clare.

disorientations associated with the movement from oral to print culture. For Clare this was a crossing that left him an outcast in both London and his village, at home neither in the world of the lettered nor of the illiterate. As he wrote to his publisher,

> I live here among the ignorant like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seems careless of having anything to do with – they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I should mention them in my writings and I find more pleasure in wandering the fields than in musing among my silent neighbours who are insensible to everything but toiling and talking of it and that to no purpose. (Clare and Storey 1985: 132; Letter to John Taylor, 1822)

As such, Clare is the prototype of the disorientation not only of the journey from the village to the city, but of the reverse journey, from the city to a now unrecognisable village. He epitomises the condition of the migrant lost in translation described elsewhere in this volume by Stephen Wolfe in his analysis of Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (2006 [1956], see Wolfe, this volume); the condition which Iqbal Ahmed describes as being caught between a home to which you can never return and one where you can never arrive (Ahmed, quoted in Marc Isaacs' *The Road*, see Martin in this volume).

His value to us, however, is less as a prototype, a prefiguration, or an iteration of the 'disoriented' than as a figure who confronts us with interpretative problems that force us to consider the relationality of disorientation. These interpretative problems are significant. Presented to the reader in journal form, the 'account' begins at what seems to be the date of its assembly, 23 July, after Clare had reached Helpstone, but then plunges us back into an indeterminate temporality whose deixis is suspended between the iterative present of the journal writer and the horizon of a narrative telos. The entry for 19 July, for example, which reads simply, 'Monday – did nothing' (Clare et al. 1983: 153) could refer to the empty time of asylum life or to the progress of his plans for escape. The 'Journey out of Essex' is in effect a text without horizon, where the traveller's disorientation becomes radically textual.

The irresolvability of Clare's text inducts its reader into the experience of a journey that has no origin or destination, and in so doing it demonstrates that there can be no 'now' of disorientation, for disorientation can have no deictic reference. In this abolition of spatial and temporal distance (and the lessons distance structures), it finds an important conceptual avatar in Jacques Rancière's figure of the ignorant school master, the school master who recognises that what separates teacher and student is the former's knowledge that the latter's ignorance can never be overcome because it is inscribed in the grid that assigns them both their identities. The schoolmaster is ignorant 'not because he knows nothing, but because he has renounced the "knowledge of ignorance" and thereby uncoupled his mastery from his knowledge' (Rancière 1991: 11).

The pedagogy of ignorance elaborated by Rancière thus relies precisely on recognising that what the schoolmaster must renounce is the distribution of the sensible which *a priori* proclaims the student ignorant of her own ignorance. He is ignorant because he recognises that the oppositions which

construct the grid that confirm the positions of teacher/director/instructor and student/viewer/reader are 'embodied allegories of inequality' (Rancière 2009: 12). In Clare's case we can add the categories poet/peasant, writer/walker and author/subject to those oppositions and note how the interpretive disorientation of his text is the condition of their re-connection. Clare's text can instruct because its subject and its voice are all produced through the dissolution of the distance between the figures of mastery and ignorance. The 'Journey out of Essex' is not his account of the journey for the Clare that instructs is produced precisely through his inability to provide such an account. He is not the 'author' of the text but rather he is produced in its writing and it is this writing which means that he can never return 'home', that marks him as homeless among his illiterate neighbours.

For us, his readers, seeking a pedagogy in disorientation, its primary lesson lies in our corresponding inability to possess the whole, in our inability to decide whether the text is reported or narrated as if reported, whether it is narration which seeks to pass as reporting, or reporting which achieves the form of a finished narrative by virtue of the completion of his walk. For, in this performance of its author's disorientation, it performs too his subaltern condition so that Clare becomes the historian of his own absence, who emerges as a teacher by passing back and forth over a border of the irrecoverable that is constituted in that indecidability (see Martin 2015: 169). Put another way, we might say that Clare's text becomes legible as an expression of disorientation through its lack of that 'permission to narrate' (Said 1984) that Gayatri Spivak identifies as the crux of the problem of representation: the knowledge that narrative implies a possession/consciousness of the whole which Clare, as subaltern, cannot be seen to possess (Spivak 1988: 283).

What this lesson in disorientation can provide, as Steyerl suggests, is an opportunity to hear the voices and possibilities produced at intersections that are realised only when deixis is troubled: when objects become living things. The first step of a disoriented/wandering scholar/peasant/poet may thus be to change the value of the terms in such familiar oppositions as subject/object, viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity. But the second step involves an awareness that a simple inversion of the terms of these dyads maintains the distribution – simply shifting the conditions of ignorance. Rancière, in order to figure this pedagogy, turns to the disorienting image of a 'forest of signs': 'Distance is not an evil to be abolished, but the normal condition of communication. Human animals are distant animals who communicate through the forest of signs' (Rancière 2009: 10). In the image of the forest of signs, Rancière's reader will recognise another iteration of his concept of *partage*: that which simultaneously signifies sharing and parting, connection and separation (Rancière 2006).

Clare's readers might see in this notion of *partage* a key to what is peculiar and disorienting about his poetics, for like Steyerl's aircraft pilots, Clare's lost horizons, his doubled sense of groundlessness, produces a poetry distinguished by its fusions of object and subject, a poetics in which the poet who has been forced to see himself as a commodity, is seemingly attuned to the voices of everything undergoing the same transformation including, in his long poem 'The Lament of Swordy Well', the ground from which he has been expropriated:

I am the last

Of all the field that fell;

My name is nearly all that's left

Of what was Swordy Well. (Clare and Bate 2004: 219)

In free fall, Clare's poetry, with its emphasis on mistaken identities and sudden irruptions of the grotesque, deploys a sense of *partage* to realise the distributed sensibilities suddenly apparent in the experience of groundlessness. In 'A Mouse's Nest,' for example, the speaker, having mistaken a ball of grass for a bird's nest, is shocked by the sudden appearance of an old mouse '[w]ith all her young ones hanging at her teats' (Clare and Tibble 1965: 234). Only after this disconcerting encounter has been resolved by the mouse's return to its nest does the poem pan out to gesture derisively at the conventions of the picturesque and re-orient us in the final couplet by an appeal to the horizon: 'The water o'er the pebbles scarce could run / And broad old cess-pools glittered in the sun' (Clare and Tibble 1965: 234). Is the mouse as inhabitant of this scene of environmental devastation its victim, a grotesque emblem of the persistence of life, or both?

Knowledge is not the outcome of a journey, but the skill learned in navigating the ambivalences involved in signs that separate and connect. The distance between the mental asylum and the asylum of an empty home can, like the distance between ignorance and knowledge, never be traversed, however, in the forest of signs we can discover through Clare a subject that is seemingly equidistant from both mouse and man. To learn to live with signs that separate and connect, Clare's poetry suggests, is to inhabit the threshold where forms previously occluded by the horizon may be glimpsed and heard.

Returning to our opening dilemma – the choice between orientation and disorientation – with Clare and Rancière's instructions in mind is to be reminded that this moment of suspension is always inherent in the introduction as a genre of the threshold: a genre which even as it welcomes also abandons the reader to the terrain it has provisionally surveyed. In this case, having problematised the notion of any map that might emerge from this orienting function, it seems possible that it may be the notion of the threshold itself which will prove the most useful tool in negotiating the terrain ahead.

Thresholds as dis/orienting scenes and tropes recur as organising principles throughout the volume. For Mireille Rosello, the threshold is directly related to the concept of accompaniment – a recognition of the impossibility of the 'arrival' contained within notions of integration or assimilation and which she tentatively proposes as the name for a 'permanent, mutual, and disorientating process of differed arrival'. Once you realise that some thresholds can never be crossed, she suggests, all that is left is the possibility of sharing that knowledge of permanent isolation.

Niall Martin's discussion of the problem of 'hospitality without ownership' is similarly preoccupied with the realisation that both the native and the migrant will forever be guests. As such, he is concerned with the constitutive role of the threshold as that which makes the idea of home conditional on the disorientation of the stranger. Recognising the necessity and difficulty of

preserving the possibility of the stranger in the absence of a threshold could be a step towards re-thinking the familiar rhetoric of the world made unfamiliar in right-wing nationalist rhetoric, he suggests.

In Timothy Saunders' account of metaphor, the trope is seen as 'fundamentally disorientating and disoriented . . . because it is itself a metaphor [and hence] undermines the very systems of interpretation that make it manifest, and which it makes manifest, in the first place'. The suspension between dis/orientation comes to act as a process of territorialisation; if all truths are forgotten metaphors, the terrain we border with metaphor is the product of the crossing etymologically present in metaphor itself. (Saunders, this volume).

For David Farrier, finally, the threshold is a site of vulnerability that becomes apparent in our attempts to 'unsee' the details which would invalidate the maps to which we cling in order to mask our vulnerability. In his account, disorientation consequently takes on an ethical role as a 'deliberate seeing' or recognition of 'the way in which we are all enmeshed in an unevenly composed world of common vulnerability'. However, as the following essays will demonstrate, the threshold is itself also a metaphor for its own inadequacy.

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