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Introduction: The Shock of the Other

Esther Peeren and
Silke Horstkotte

I experience my own limitation through the encounter with the Other and . . . I must always learn to experience anew if I am ever to be in a position to surpass my limits.

(Hans-Georg Gadamer 285)

To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our ghosts.

(Julia Kristeva 191)

There is nothing new in proclaiming alterity – otherness – an inalienable aspect of identity construction and assertion. As Kate Khatib notes in her contribution to this volume, “social, psychological, and philosophical theory have, time and again, pointed out the inextricable link between the formation of the self (the ‘I’) and the positing of the ‘other’ to a point where the formulation ‘Identities and Alterities’ could not possibly be otherwise. (Where one goes, there follows the other, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*).” In their introduction to a special issue of the journal *Language & Communication* that thematizes alterity and difference in linguistic anthropology, Adi Hastings and Paul Manning similarly assert that “clearly, everyone *knows* that identity is always constructed in relation to alterity. After all, it takes two to differ” (293).

Yet, although acknowledging the dependency of identities on notions of alterity has indeed become a cliché, what has remained elusive is a situated, specific account of their intersection, the precise politics that arise at the points where the self’s desire for unity and self-sameness is crossed by its inevitable, multiple, and various encounters with otherness. These encounters take place internally – within the self – as well as externally, and may involve either concrete other subjects or more general principles of otherness, configured in terms of class, gender, sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. In the words of Hastings and Manning, “identity performances are *relational*

with respect to different aspects of alterity” (293). This means that heterogeneity cannot be homogenized: as the word itself implies, alterity is never the same. The perspective on alterity we propose in this book is that the interruption of identity by alterity delivers a particular type of shock to the system, depending on its precise form and the extent of its difference – a shock that is radicalized under postmodernism, where stable ontologies and clear distinctions of belonging or difference are replaced by a multiplicity of possible worlds.

In this respect, it pays to remember that alterity is not a mere synonym of difference; what it signifies is otherness, a distinction or separation that can entail similarity as well as difference. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines otherness as “a thing other than the thing mentioned or the thinking subject,” indicating that alterity comprises not only radical external difference, but everything that is in some way distinct from the subject, potentially including even certain parts of itself, such as the unconscious, disease, or the exteriorising physicality of bodily functions. Identity is not opposed to difference, but itself differential in nature. The other can be more like me than I expected or I can find myself to be other to myself. Each of these forms of alterity delivers its own shock, its own specific moment where identity is potentially rearranged in view of that which is not me. Alterity disrupts the illusion of self-sameness on the level of the subject’s body, her psyche, and her language, dislodging the subject – both on an individual and a collective level – from an ontology of origins and essences. When Kaja Silverman describes the condition or quality of being ‘other’ as “identity-at-a-distance” (15), she calls attention to the disruption of essences at work in alterity. Alterity can thus be understood as the *represented* other, or projected identity. One way of inquiring into alterity is therefore through the questioning of forms of representation, be they political or aesthetic; in this volume, we have chosen to focus predominantly on the latter, while at the same time not denying the interplay of the two.

The papers in this volume were chosen from two panels – on intersubjectivity and postmodern identities – of the 2004 international workshop on Identities / Alterities hosted by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.¹ All are concerned with theorizing the intersection of identity and alterity, or what we have chosen to call the shock of the other, in terms of situated and specific representational politics of the body, the psyche and language. Body, psyche and language emerge as crucial sites of alterity, since they mark the locations where identity and alterity cross most conspicuously and where the borders between them are hardest to draw. The contributors explore ways to define, locate and negotiate alterity in a manner that does not do away with the other through negation or neutralization but that instead engages alterity as a reconfiguring of identities, keeping them open to change, to a becoming without horizon. Alterity is radically specified and differentiated: there is no singular alterity, but a plethora of forms of alterity, each of which interacts with identity in its own manner. Hence, the outcome of this exploration is not a relativist view, but a vision of identities as multi-faceted

constructions that are continually being transformed by the various specific others, or principles of otherness, with which they intersect and which must be actively engaged in order for the subject to function effectively in the social, political, and aesthetic realm.

In keeping with the mission statement of the *Thamyris / Intersecting* book series, the politics of bodily, psychic and linguistic alterity – the other body, the body as other, the shock or shame of discovering the other in the self, and the fragmentation or multiplicity of the self’s discourses – will be conceived as crossed by vectors of sex, race and place. The politics of situation – of giving alterity a place and perceiving it in a contextualized, historicized and differentiated manner – are of particular relevance to our endeavour. We take up the notion of place as a productive framework for the analysis of situated identities and acts of identity negotiation and transformation that allow a move beyond narrow theories of identities based on the concept of self-sameness. Place, when considered in its specific interactions with intersubjectivity and alterity, allows for a conceptualising of identity as something that is situated and that marks a location of political agency, but that is at the same time never completely stable or identical to itself: identity has a place, but this place is always under contestation, never guaranteed. Places change and so do the identities associated with them. We therefore consider place not as a point of origin, unmediated presence or fixity, but as a way of situating identities – placing them in a social, historical, psychological and political context – on grounds that are never fully secure. Place, in this sense, is conceived as multiple, shifting, and invariably relational.

Far from representing a safe haven where otherness can be evaded, place becomes the site of the confrontation and negotiation with the other, the stake of the identity / alterity intersection. The interruption of identity by alterity prompts a taking place, a performative event where the self is forced to take a position in relation to otherness and its specific form. The self has to take a stand, claim a place, and re-assert an identity that can no longer remain the same. Alterity causes the ground to shift under the self’s feet, and the papers in this volume, in different ways, examine the conditions under which such shifts occur as well as their results. At best, these shifts prompt a productive reformulation of identity and a generous, respectful relation to alterity. This effect, however, is by no means certain, for the shock of the other may also induce a negating reaction or a rigid entrenchment of the self. The most important questions the papers in this volume pose are: when and where does alterity take place (i.e. become an event), how do we position ourselves in relation to it, and how does it re-position us in relation to ourselves?

In relation to identity, alterity is most immediately situated on the plane of intersubjectivity. After postmodernism and its declaration of the “death of the subject,” intersubjectivity can no longer unproblematically refer to two complete, unified subjects in consensual agreement, but has to be reformulated in relation to a situation where boundaries between subjects are blurred; where each subject is always already

other to itself; where many subjects live in displacement; and where an uncertain process of continuous confrontation, negotiation, and translation inheres between subjects and social groups divided from each other and from themselves in terms of place, time, race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, body, and voice. Intersubjectivity, moreover, is no longer only about relations between actual subjects, but about a general attitude towards alterity, towards principles of otherness, an attitude that presupposes a mode of negotiation, which, from a number of the papers collected here, emerges as a strategy of translation.

Translation appears as a way to mediate alterity, not only in the literal sense of translations between languages – in papers about literature and art from Quebec, Northern Ireland and Kashmir – but also in a more metaphorical sense: translating intersubjectivity into trans-subjectivity, translating the angel as familiar friend into the angel as radical other, translating the unified, homogeneous, closed body of classical philosophy into the excessive form of the grotesque, translating voice into body, translating the physical body into the virtual avatar, translating pornography and choreography in terms of psychic shock or trauma, translating memories between generations, and, finally, the translations that take place in the self when it is confronted with the (sexual or racial) otherness of particular artworks or performance pieces. Throughout, translation appears as an oscillatory process of transposition, a re-placing or displacing of alterity from outside to inside, from other to self and back again.

This volume takes its lead from the conference keynote lectures by Peter Hitchcock and Brian McHale. Hitchcock's paper provides a provocative theoretical perspective on intersubjectivity, reconceived through the concepts of becoming, matter, the specter, and the image. McHale explores the angel as the changing figure of the multiple worlds of postmodernism and beyond. Both papers question the politics involved in facing alterity, whether it takes the form of an angelic appearance, the Iraq war, or transnational capitalism. Between them, Hitchcock and McHale stage a meeting of the angel and the specter where these figures come to denote specific ways of negotiating the shock of the other: is alterity to be attended as a messianic message from another world, welcomed as a familiar friend, or exorcised as an unwanted ghost? Is it to be left undefined and without concrete features or should it be given form, made to matter as a material force? The angel and the specter prompt us to ask how to deal productively and responsibly with bodily, psychic and linguistic alterities that are both concrete and ephemeral, both particular and general, both inside and outside, both self and other, both one and two.

The first part of this volume deals with bodily alterity – other bodies and the otherness of our own bodies – which may appear as excessively material (the grotesque) or in the form of spectral appearances that appear to lack body altogether (angels, ghosts, avatars, disembodied voices). Spectrality, defined by Peggy Kamuf as “the dis-adjustment of identity” that perpetually haunts it (272), has, since the appearance

of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, become a prominent figuration of alterity. What remains problematic, however, is "the impossibility of effectivity to think ideality, and of spectrality to think materiality" (Debrix 18). By juxtaposing the spectral and the bodily, the virtual and the material, the papers in this section demonstrate how these concepts are not irreconcilable, but how each incorporates something of the other: the grotesque body's excessive materiality features a spectral fluidity and lack of borders, whereas the spectral can work on the body in a concrete manner, as a "situationist practice of effectivity," in the words of François Debrix (15). Matter and virtuality, then, should not be seen as binary opposites but as two aspects of alterity, expressing the paradoxical simultaneity of indeterminacy and specificity that makes alterity such a destabilizing and transformative force in relation to identity and subjectivity.

In "The Impossibly Intersubjective and the Logic of the Both," Peter Hitchcock asks how intersubjectivity is best represented now that it can no longer be predicated on a unified, universal, autonomous, intentional, and gender-neutral subject. He proposes a reformulation of intersubjectivity into a space of impossibility that is neither a mere play of signifiers, nor exclusively an aspect of actual interaction. Intersubjectivity, he posits, is not so much in-between subjects as it is across principles of subjectivity, which include notions of identity and alterity. Hitchcock theorizes the impossibly intersubjective through four interrelated concepts. The first is becoming in the Deleuzian sense, which breaks the unified subject up into molecules, introducing alterity into the basic components of the self. Second, there is matter, conceptualised as a performative process of materialization that is not in itself material but becomes so on the plane of intersubjectivity, which does not register or recognize bodies but materializes them in the tension between identity and alterity (identification and abjection).

Derrida's specter is the third aspect of the impossibly intersubjective. Against approaches that make the specter stand for everything (hence nothing at all), Hitchcock insists that "this symptom must be engaged and radically particularized rather than inflated." The specter must be situated, placed, and identified in its specific features and effects wherever it appears. This is not the same as exorcising the specter, something Derrida explicitly rejects and of which Kamuf remarks: "to have done with conjuration, to put an end once and for all to ghosts – all ghosts – is to put an end to the future, to bar it by and in a present entirely present to itself, without difference" (280). Finally, Hitchcock evokes the concept of image, which cannot secure a subject or an intersubjectivity, but situates the intersubjective as duration, as a trace in time and space. The intersubjective thus manifests as an impossible, inconsistent oscillation between identity and alterity, unity and fragmentation, self and other. Hitchcock's paper concludes by replacing inter-subjectivity with trans-subjectivity, indicating the way intersubjectivity simultaneously and impossibly contains a logic of substance (matter) and insubstantiality (specter, image) whose interrelationship is always still becoming.

Brian McHale's paper "What Was Postmodernism? or, the Last of the Angels" begins by questioning the temporality of the postmodern. McHale argues that, rather than viewing it as an age either of stasis or of acceleration, it should be conceived in terms of a multiple unevenness or non-synchronicity. We are postmodern in different manners and to different degrees. By arguing for the specificity and situatedness of distinct postmodernities, McHale encapsulates the argument of this volume that alterity and its negotiation are not universal but radically conditioned by specific circumstances. The figure of the angel serves to construct a particular "story" of postmodernity that brings out its non-synchronicity: where Hitchcock points out that the specter cannot be everything, McHale argues that one angel is not the next.

Between them, Hitchcock and McHale destabilize the opposition between angel and ghost as posited by Peter Fenves in his article "Marx, Mourning, Messianity." According to Fenves, the angel, going back to St. Thomas, stands for an irreducible individuality, exemplifying how "no two individuals can be exactly alike, differing only numerically" (255). Angels are unlike each other, distinguishable not just from each other, but also in themselves. They are non-identical and singular, unique and different – but at the same time, a promise that can never be attained in its 'pure' form. Ghosts or specters, on the other hand, are indistinguishable, identical members of a species. Through its endless return and repetition, the specter defies the notion of singularity (and thus, we might conclude, of a singular identity). A ghost is a ghost is a ghost: "their being, if they can be said to be at all, lies in being many, returning to one, returning as the same one, again and again. If each night a different ghost haunted a house, that house would not be haunted. So then: angels or ghosts" (Fenves 258). For Fenves, therefore, the two figures are mutually exclusive. The ghost signifies an unending, unresolved interaction with alterity (as in mourning), whereas the angel marks a finite confrontation with alterity, a resolution or, at least, an acceptance of indeterminacy (Derrida's messianic without the messiah). However, when angels proliferate, they come to form a species and when the specter is given a name, it is individualized: the ghost in *Hamlet* is not just any ghost, but the ghost of Hamlet's father and if it were not, it would not have haunted Hamlet so powerfully. The angel, McHale shows, does not always soothe the shock of the other and the specter, according to Hitchcock, can and should be particularized (not to say specified, which, like species and specter, ultimately derives from *specere*, "to look"). Kamuf, too, has argued that "the ghost is both specified, it is a someone, and at the same time of uncertain location and provenance. The violence this provokes would, so to speak, put the ghost in its place" (276). This putting in place, of both ghost and angel, is precisely what is at stake in this volume.

McHale distinguishes the period from 1994 to 2003 as the age of the angel in American popular culture – Fenves, incidentally, also notes that angels are literally everywhere (386 n.7), almost turning them into a species (of *Engelism*) himself – and

makes the angel a litmus-test for postmodernism and its wane. Of the two main traditions of the angel – the Christian one where the angel appears as a divine intermediary that is radically alien and the Swedenborgian one where angels are humans (posthumously) glorified into a higher spiritual state – it is the first that characterizes the postmodern angel in both popular culture and high art. According to McHale, the angel as not-us, as related to the alien and the medium of television (which is among the new media Derrida distinguishes as spectral) delivers an “ontological shock” to the self, revealing the existence of other worlds, other places, and other perspectives. The mode of alterity this type of angel represents is one of absolute difference and non-assimilability. In postmodernity, this shock is attended, expected and welcomed (like Derrida’s *arrivant*). However, in McHale’s view, the recent disappearance of the radically alien angel signals the rise of a different attitude towards radical alterity, a return to a binary, Manichean worldview inaugurated by reactions to the 9 / 11 attacks. It is not that the other has ceased to shock us, but that certain cultural and political forces conspire to no longer acknowledge and welcome this shock. Thus, alterity – even when it bears an angelic face – is not always met in the same way.

Sara Cohen Shabot’s paper “The Grotesque: On ‘Fleshing Out’ the Subject” takes up the alterity of matter or substance discussed by Hitchcock, conceiving it in terms of the politics of the body and its boundaries. Shabot notes how the concept of the subject as identical to itself has been subjected to a postmodernist critique, which presents a subject that is above all embodied and historically, socially and culturally defined. She approaches this postmodern subject through the figuration of the grotesque, which she sees as an under-explored paradigm of intersubjectivity and alterity. The grotesque emphasizes elements opposed to “the logic of the same,” which privileges the original, the essential, the true, above the copy, the excessive or the fake. As an ambiguous, differentiated figure of excess that defies clear definitions and borders, yet that is at the same time unmistakably flesh and blood, the grotesque grounds the subject in an ambivalent corporeality that prevents it from becoming neutral, de-sexualized or hyper-sexualized.

Whereas Shabot locates alterity in the flesh, Kate Khatib’s “Auto-Identity: Avatar Identities in the Digital Age” expands on the discussion of spectrality by displacing alterity to the virtual realm of the computer game and the internet community. Khatib takes her cue from Levinas’ conceptualisation of the relation between self and other as one of alterity and transcendence, connecting the I and the other but separating them at the same time. How, she asks, can we understand ourselves if we are always already beyond ourselves? This question becomes particularly pressing in the digital age, in relation to the spectral figure of the avatar. The avatar, a (sometimes graphical) icon or representation of a user in a shared virtual reality, is related to other self-created identities such as transgender politics, cross-dressing, and postcolonial attitudes. Unique to avatar identities, however, is the mystical connotation of a truly virtual

identity which hovers just outside of the physical body. Thus, avatars can be seen as a kind of transcendent, self-created alterity.

For Khatib, avatars offer new opportunities for self-identification, identity formation, and collective organization, with a greater level of control for the subject. This counters Kamuf's argument that

with the accelerated dislocation or spectralization of place through tele-technology, that which makes this technology increasingly less subject to the control of any centralized, which is to say localized, apparatus, what has been called self-determination, though no doubt always with nostalgia, will doubtless have to give up the ghost, in other words, invent a living-on in its new, ghostly simulacra. (274)

Khatib sees the avatar not as a "ghostly simulacrum," but as a possible site of agency, of the subject imagining and enacting itself "otherwise" through an alterity that is no longer completely divorced from the self, but also not fully equal to it (as is the case with Baudrillard's ultimate simulacrum, the cloned human being).² The otherwise allows us to explore our numerous possible selves by pitching our idealized selves against our physical self, playing the roles of I and other at the same time, through each other, transforming each other.

The final paper in the first section is Esther Peeren's "(Dis)embodied Voices: Vocal Alterity and the Cultural Addressee," which is concerned with alterity as mediated through intersubjectivity and, in particular, the voice. Like Khatib, Peeren locates a particular politics of alterity in the oscillation between the material and the virtual. Her paper approaches the issue of bodily alterity through a discussion of the voice and its gendered addressivity in the American television series *Sex and the City* and the 1994 Michael Apted film *Nell*. The audio-visual rendering of the female voice as voice-over or voice-off indicates that the disembodied voice places itself on the border between self and other. The voice's addressivity is divided into a material addressivity, aimed at the concrete listener, and a spectral addressivity whose destination remains implicit. Peeren theorizes the latter through Jean Laplanche's enigmatic addressee, Bakhtin's superaddressee and Voloshinov's potential addressee, marking a distance from all three by introducing the concept of the cultural addressee. The cultural addressee signifies the orientation of the utterance toward a potential understanding that functions as a precondition to its being spoken. It determines who speaks, who remains silent and who is heard. As such, it is indicative of how a particular social group deals with radical alterity or the shock of the other.

At issue in the second section is the shock of the other and how we deal with it on a psychological and affective level. As Julia Kristeva argues in *Strangers to Ourselves*, the encounter with alterity inevitably provokes a – more or less violent – reaction:

Strange indeed is the encounter with the other – whom we perceive by means of sight, hearing, smell, but do not 'frame' within our consciousness. The other leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our

own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them – we feel ‘stupid’ we have ‘been had’ [. . .] The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy. (187)

Again, like alterity itself, the reaction to alterity is not uniform: it has many varieties and it is invariably situated, dependent on our specific place in the world as well as on our particular fantasies and desires. The papers in this section explore some of the affects through which alterity is confronted on the psychic level: confusion, repetition, anger, shame.

Victoria Best presents a meditation on the intersection of bodily and psychic alterity through the image of the female genitals as a figure for the Lacanian concept of *extimité* in three novels. The fiction of Georges Bataille, Hélène Cixous and Michel Houellebecq, each in its own way, explores the connections between the body, the erotic, desire, the vagina, the eye, the I, and the other. Best proposes that the figure of the erotic is always already premised on the dissolution and fragmentation of the individual; its own alterity or *extimité* to itself. *Extimité* refers to that which lies beyond the subject but which simultaneously appeals to her as always already internal: it designates a problematic confusion of the intimate and the exterior, a perpetual oscillation between habitual self-absence and an alarming encounter with the other. Although there can be no positive knowledge of the fundamental extimacy of the self, it may be glimpsed in moments of transition or unexpected otherness. Best argues that unleashed eroticism in art, in the form of explicit, disturbing descriptions of the vagina, forces the characters – and the reader – to negotiate a certain *degré zéro* of subjectivity, to explore a visceral response that defies all conventions and ethics, and ultimately to recognise the stranger of negativity within.

In “Choreographies of the Subject,” Lucia Ruprecht addresses concepts of performance, performativity, and trauma in outlining identity as choreography through an interaction with Pina Bausch’s experimental dance piece *Bluebeard – While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók’s ‘Bluebeard’s Castle’* (1977). Bausch exposes the dynamics of gendered identity formation through the repetition of norms and codes in a reiterative and citational practice that is mirrored in the choreography of her piece, and in the piece as choreography. According to Ruprecht, the logic of this artwork excludes difference within the process of repetition and thus forecloses agency based on intention and creative variation, placing the traumatic – as an irresolvable alterity *within* the subject – at the heart of the concept of identity. It does, however, suggest a notion of agency which is bound up with the possibility of narration by transposing compulsive patterns of behavior into movement, and therefore providing possibilities for the articulation of otherwise unspoken constraints. The traumatic response to the shock of the other is here, quite literally, moved on.

Kate MacNeill's contribution on "Art that Matters" focuses on conceptual art that interrupts the binary of self and other, once more providing a shock of alterity within. MacNeill's argument proceeds by way of a detailed semiotic examination of two artworks, by Karyn Lindner and Deborah Williams, both of which were altered and / or censored despite the fact that they lacked representations that could be considered obscene. MacNeill considers what might have happened in the viewing of the works to provoke these violent reactions. She suggests that the identity invoked in the two works is not that of a recognizable other but that of the viewer him or herself. It is this absence of the other or confusion between self and other that disrupts viewing conventions and provokes the affective response wherein lies the possibility of a politically strategic moment. Although the artworks acquired a fixed meaning after the alterations and censorship, in their original ambivalence they possessed a multiple agency exerted in the interaction with the viewer.

"Shame in Alterities," by Alexis Shotwell, conceptualises the affect of shame as a paradigmatic kind of discomfort, always intersubjective and always other, and asks how shame might affect the racial (re-)formation of identity. Shotwell examines the performance art of Adrian Piper as one that elicits racialized shame, which may ultimately work against racism by effecting shifts in the spectator / interlocutor on the level of racial identification. Piper's work articulates and deploys the affect of shame in at least three ways: her work confronts the viewer in a way that shames, it enacts shameful situations through their depiction, or it interpellates the viewer as the shaming agent. Each of these modes indicates a vector along which we might pursue an anti-racist, non-white-supremacist subjectivity through shame-induced re-identification, through an encounter with alterity that not only shocks us, but shames us. Shotwell argues that shame produces a moment of contradiction in the multiple selves that make up the subject, a confrontation between the self it has been and the various selves it wants to have been (analogous to the "otherwise" enacted by Khatib's avatar identities). In this way, Shotwell translates a negative affect into a hopeful one.

The third and final part of our book is concerned with translational practices negotiating the alterities that inhabit particular places, nations, regions, or localities. These practices range from the recuperation of an "erased" language and script, a trans-generational narrativity, and an intercultural re-translation, to nontranslation. Each of the four contributions in this section proposes a form of negotiation adjusted to the specific place and form of alterity in the particular cultural-historical, geographical and political situations of Kashmir, Germany, Northern Ireland and Quebec.

In "A Language of One's Own?," Ananya Kabir engages with concepts of space and translation through a case study of the linguistic situation in Indian-administered Kashmir, where language functions as an index of a community under erasure. She charts the attempts of Kashmiri artists to overcome the marginalization of their language, which, due to the way postcolonial India has mapped its federal units onto

linguistic groups, has become other to the Kashmiris themselves. Despite efforts to articulate “a language of one’s own,” the Kashmiri language remains deeply under-represented, both in speaking and in writing, for reasons that have to do with affect, politics of multilingualism and politics of script. Configured as the long-neglected mother tongue, the Kashmiri language has become a trope of marginalisation, dis-possession, trauma and shame among contemporary Kashmiri artists and writers. Significantly, as in Shotwell’s paper, shame becomes a catalyst for attempts of expression and recovery – through practices of translation – in which the alterity of the Kashmiri language is thematized and partially mediated.

In her paper on the transgenerational mediation of identity and alterity, Silke Horstkotte examines a specific geographic space – Germany and its wartime history – and a complex process of translation, namely the translation of memory between different generations as it is configured in Marcel Beyer’s *Spies* (2000) and Rachel Seiffert’s *The Dark Room* (2001). Ever since WW II, but especially since re-unification, what it means to be German has been a weighty and complex question that is even today far from resolved. Recent manifestations include discussions of whether the Germans were only perpetrators or also victims, and whether all Germans have to continue feeling guilty about the war, even those born long after the Holocaust. Both debates presuppose that individual identity is a result of collective concerns and that the relation between the individual and the collective is mediated by the family; in particular, by family memories. Horstkotte explores this hidden mediation through the figure of the transgenerational, which is a specific form of memory that intervenes between the personal and the collective. The transgenerational does not entail a transparent transmission of experience, but a precarious, evolving, unstable translation between personal and collective, past and present, identity and alterity.

Nicole Côté’s paper examines the intersection between place, nationality, translation, and intersubjectivity – here, through the notions of the pathway, *l’étrangement*, and nontranslation in the work of the Quebec poet, essayist and translator Jacques Brault. Brault’s work, which Côté relates to Jessica Benjamin’s psychoanalytic theory of intersubjectivity, creates a mutual space in-between self and other, a nexus or liminal space that invalidates oppositions such as subject / object, self / other and individual / community. Significantly, Brault’s message of openness to the other is also an ethics of the transmission of a work of art from one language to another. His notion of “nontranslation” proposes a mode of negotiation that rejects or reifies neither the dominant nor the dominated tongue, but works within them both. Nontranslations are translations that appear as variations on the theme, structure and music provided by the original text. The prefix “non” makes explicit the impossibility of a perfect transfer between original and translation. Instead, nontranslation mixes one’s own writing with that of the other, thus revealing a porous (inter)subjectivity, a reversible and dynamic relationship with alterity. Nontranslation appears as a metaphor for the

unstable, provocative, shocking but also specific and situated relationship between identity and alterity, which opens the self up to potential change, to being otherwise.

Closing this section and the volume as a whole is Ingo Berensmeyer's contribution about mediating the alterity of Northern Ireland's complex postcolonial and post-modern situation through cultural comparisons in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, and Paul Muldoon. Contemporary Irish poetry, Berensmeyer asserts, is symptomatic of a type of cultural process that can no longer be adequately described from within the paradigm of identity but which requires a different set of interpretive tools. Poetic texts are not simply cultural "objects" in an objectivist sense; instead, they perform acts of cultural analysis by using and modifying certain cultural practices, in this case those of recursive mapping (a culturally embedded, evolving cartography without fixed reference points), retranslation (a reconnection to history without reference to origins or essences), and glocalization (bringing together globalization and local transformations). These practices are alterity-based and presuppose an effort of translation that is transformative, that changes the way cultural space is mapped and performed. In his discussion of the three poets, Berensmeyer moves from the lingering nostalgia of Heaney, via the utopian optimism of Ó Searcaigh, to the virtual space of cultural translatability erected by Muldoon, who represents the move by which strategies of identity give way to strategies of alterity. In this process, Berensmeyer explicitly invokes the methodology of cultural analysis as a practice where theory and object involve each other in a productive relationship of reciprocal intersubjectivity and where the object "from subject matter becomes subject, participating in the construction of theoretical views" (Bal 13). This practice formed the basis of the *Identities / Alterities* conference and, consequently, underlies all contributions to this volume.

Endnotes

1. Selected papers from the other two panels at the conference on "The Politics of Identity" and "Postcolonialism: Formation as Representation/Representation as Formation" will appear in the companion volume to this book. This volume, edited by Anette Hoffmann and Saskia Lourens, will also be part of the Thamyris/Intersecting series.

2. See "Clone Story" in Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he describes cloning as a way "to deny all alterity, all alteration of the Same in order to aim solely for the perpetuation of an identity" (96).

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