White Mythology:
What Use is Deconstruction?

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Abstract

What follows is an attempt to examine the relevance of one aspect of
deconstruction with an eye to its usefulness, or otherwise, for the
purposes of a counter-hegemonic discourse. Moving quickly through
facets of Hegel, Derrida, Kant and Marx, I argue that only if
deconstruction is supplemented by historical contextualisation can it
reach beyond the confines of a narrow academic specialism.

Racisms are like weeds (Goldberg 1993:236)

The phrase 'white mythology' is often invoked as shorthand for both
imperialism and colonialist racism; the elevation of the experience of Western
man into the universal experience of humanity and the subjection of non-
Western 'others' to the imperious legislation of disinterested reason. Robert
Young (1990), for example, appeals to these connotations of the term in his
White Mythologies: Writing History and the West. Yet the exact functioning
of white mythology is rarely if ever elaborated beyond this rhetorical
invocation, and it is simply taken as self-evident and used with the confidence
of a given truth. I propose to examine the meaning of white mythology,
drawing out the thread of the aesthetic, with an eye to its suitability as a
resource for a counter-hegemonic discourse. (I don't propose to explore here
the weaknesses of the white mythology thesis.) I think this direction offers the
most promise for the use-value of deconstructive strategies that are
themselves always double-edged and never straightforwardly liberatory. Such
a perspective is more appropriate to the deconstructive trajectory than
Rodolphe Gasche's anxiously philosophical reading of white mythology in the
final chapter of *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of
Reflection* (1986).

Derrida (1982d:213) gives the following definition of white mythology:

> Metaphysics—the white mythology that reassembles and reflects the culture of the
> West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own
> *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still
> wish to call Reason ....

This cluster of propositions operates in critiques of Eurocentrism,
reservations regarding modernization and postcolonial imperialism, and in
attacks upon instrumental reason inspired by critical theory and ideological
critique. However, the complications of this thesis are not so well attended to
and consist of the following:

> White mythology—metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has
> produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in

white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest (Derrida 1982d:213).

This definition appears in the essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy'. White mythology is the erasure of the scene of production. When white mythology is invoked the mythological element is fastened upon at the expense of metaphor—doubtless because of the demythologising impulse that sees myth as ideology and aims to demythologise the ruses of power. But metaphor is the key to white mythology, it is how it functions.[1] Metaphor as the exchange or transportive substitution of qualities on the basis of a shared substance or nominal reserve *is* white mythology. The 'invisible design' is the possibility of the metaphorical and the literal, itself unreadable and all-pervasive. In contrast to the pathos of Derrida's 'fabulous scene' I want to lead the analysis of white mythology beyond the orbit of classical philosophy (the target of Derrida's deconstruction) to the tropic territory of colonialism where the cost of this erasure can be counted in real historical terms. Beyond its function as a slogan or invocation of postcolonial discourse theory white mythology has a precise tropological meaning and its usefulness in historical specific contexts demands more than well-intended sloganeering or theoretical generality.

The first thing to note about white mythology is its connection with an onto-theological heliotropism—the meaning of this philosophical vocabulary will become clearer in the following argument. The work of metaphor is inconceivable outside of this tropic system. I propose to begin with a) an outline of heliotropism (Hegel), and then b) follow Derrida's analysis of white mythology, extending these considerations into the topics of c) aesthetic genius (Kant) and d,e) exchange and colonialism using Marx to bring white mythology down to earth. I will conclude with some suggestions regarding translation, literary history and academic exchange.

a Hegel

In *The Philosophy of History*, a collection of lectures delivered in 1830/31, Hegel provides an apocryphal narrative of 'the geographical survey, [in which] the course of the World's History has been marked out in its general features'. This narrative of the great awakening of the West in the course of civilization and enlightenment marks out the destiny/destination of the West—that is, of Man.[2] Hegel's transcendental history is in tune with Western

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1. See Spivak's (1988:115) half-hearted attempt to use the deconstruction of the metaphor-proper opposition.
2. In his 'On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America' of 1782, Bishop George Berkeley writes in the spirit of this teleological geotropism: 'Westward the course of empire takes its way;/ The first four acts already past,/ A fifth shall close the drama with the day:/ Time's noblest offspring is the last' (see Lonsdale 1985:175). Henry David Thoreau, at peace in the radiance of America's Manifest Destiny, eulogises '[e]very sunset which I witness inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that to which the sun goes down' (Thoreau 1888:178). This tropism cuts across Albert K Weinberg's (1963:254) precious argument that the 'imperialist doctrine of inevitability was distinct from the traditional idea of destiny'. In the Herderian view of myth aesthetics, culture and history combine; a given mythology expresses a given people's conception of nature (see Richardson 1978:chapter 7).

triumphalism; inner clarity, revelation, destination and discovery are imperiously located in the West as the fulfillment and fruition of World History, *arkhe* and *telos*, the circle as destination/destiny. The West's perennial destiny is to recover what it has lost and myths concern ends, destinations, as much as origins. For example, the sun is central to the ideology of *Manifest* Destiny—the elemental association of truth and light—that guided American imperialist expansion. It is also integral to the Enlightenment project of enlightenment. This tropic play is not simply secondary or supplementary as an ornamental metaphor, but is central to the exterminatory aesthetic, the white mythology of European domination.

Accordingly, continues Hegel, at dawn in 'utter astonishment' and first blinded by the 'flaming glory of the ascending'. Eventually, 'when the Sun is risen, this astonishment is diminished; objects around are perceived, and from them the individual proceeds to the contemplation of his own inner being', and 'by the close of day man has erected a building constructed from his own inner Sun; and when in the evening he contemplates this, he esteems it more highly than the original external Sun'. The sun is internalised in the movement from sensory to spiritual, from physical to nonphysical. This transport is characteristic of what is called metaphysics (*meta ta physika*). Hegel writes that 'the outward physical Sun' rises in the East 'and in the West sinks down'. The setting of the Sun is its interiorisation and elevation for 'here consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance'. The solar course of interiorisation is the activity of recollective memory—a return or fulfilment of meaning in its propriety and unity, an ideal content that is an interiorised experience. This is memory as remembrance and recollection (*Erinnerung*) rather than memory as mechanical repetition (*Gedächtnis*). In this movement of interiorising anamnesis, memory and imagination achieve the production of signs. The trajectory of anagnorisis leads ultimately to recognition.

'The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning' (Hegel 1956:103).[3] The sensory sun is interiorised in the eye of the Westerner who achieves the essence of man illuminated by the true light. Hegel's metaphor of self-consciousness as solar orbit and world history as self-consciousness is an idealising metaphor. The telos of the fulfilment of man as the fulfilment of world history is the transformation of sensory presence into the self-presence of (self)consciousness—the propriety or property of subjectivity to and for itself that is the nature of man. The universal burden of man's destiny is carried by Western man. Hegel's metaphoric assembles man on the basis of a specular return to itself of the absolutely original, an interiorisation, or interiorising anamnesis and recollection of meaning. The representative experience of imperious Western man recounted by Hegel might well be

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3. '*Asia* is, characteristically, the *Orient* quarter of the globe—the region of origination. It is the Western world for America; but as Europe presents on the whole, the centre and end of the old world, and is absolutely the *West*—so Asia is absolutely the *East*' (Hegel 1956:98).

called sublime, where experience of the sublime gives rise to an imperious self-confidence.[4] Hegel's parable presents the metaphor of the domination of sense over sensory as the birth of (self)consciousness as *lumen naturale*; the teleology of meaning as return to origin. There is more to this mythopoetics than meets the eye. It is my view that heliotropism marks the frontier of the West, a discursive frontier that radiates out incising all hemispheres, and marks out the law of the frontier and, most problematically, the frontier of the law.

b Derrida
Derrida notes that the course of the sun is the trajectory of metaphor from sensory self-presence to spiritual self-presence. Light is the neutral element of appearing, the pure milieu of phenomenality in general. The proper, as origin and as destination, is defined as presence—either sensory presence or spiritual presence. The proposed deconstruction of this heliotropism goes as follows. Firstly, this heliotropic figure is not one metaphor among other metaphors:

> Everything, in the discourse on metaphor, that passes through the sign *eidos*, with its entire system, is articulated with the analogy between the vision of the *nous* and sensory vision, between the intelligible sun and the visible sun. The determination of the truth of Being as presence passes through the detour of this tropic system (Derrida 1982d:254).

Hegel's fable, however it might appear as the mythos of the West (white mythology), cannot be merely deflected or blocked even when it is seen in its ideologically self-serving context for it illuminates the resource of any attempt to counter the imperious mask of the West. There is no simple outside of this system (outside/inside is, of course, a spatial metaphor). The sun supervises the (helio)tropism that is white mythology:

> The presence of *ousia* as *eidos* (to be placed before the metaphorical eye) or as *hupokeimenon* (to underlie visible phenomena or accidents) faces the theoretical organ .... This circulation has not excluded but, on the contrary, has permitted and provoked the transformation of presence into self-presence, into the proximity or properness of subjectivity to and for itself. 'It is the history of "proper" meaning, as we said above, whose detour and return are to be followed'[5] (Derrida 1982d:254).

Derrida points out that as the sensory object *par excellence*, the exemplary origin, the sun is also potentially both present and absent and can always

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4. Ernst Cassirer (1951:330) notes the following of the Burkean sublime: 'There is no other aesthetic experience of man that gives him so much self-confidence and courage to be original as the impression of the sublime'. For Plato the sun was the son of the Good, the invisible source of light, and this ethical and teleological lure is taken up in the aesthetic equation of the beautiful as the symbol of the good.

5. Paul Ricoeur (1978) rejects the necessary complicity between metaphor and metaphysics; between the metaphoric pair of the proper and the figurative, and the metaphysical pair of the visible and the invisible. Derrida (1978) replies to these objections in 'The Retrait of Metaphor'. See Dominick LaCapra (1980) for a judicial commentary on this exchange.

potentially and improperly disappear. Such not-being-present is improper
because the sensory being-present of the referent is the proper *par excellence*
and that to which the unity and rigidity of the proper name testifies:

> There is only one sun in this system. The proper name, here, is the
> nonmetaphorical prime mover of metaphor, the father of all figures. Everything
> turns around it, everything turns toward it[6] (Derrida 1982d:243).

The sun discloses what is visible as what is present in so far as it discloses
the sensory and is thus the origin of propriety:

> The very opposition of appearing and disappearing, the entire lexicon of the
> *phainesthai*, of *alêtheia*, etc., of day and night, of the visible and the invisible, of
> the present and the absent—all this is possible only under the sun (Derrida
> 1982d:251).

The propriety of the self-presence of the sensory and the illumination of
interior sense are part of the heliotropic system. The sun itself is not beyond
the system of tropic exchanges it enables, and as the proper *par excellence* it
too is subject to turning. As the origin of propriety, the sun itself is subject to
the impropriety of absence.

Metaphor (*metaphora*) consists in giving (*epiphora*) the thing a name
that belongs to something else' (*Poetics* 1457b6).[7] Analogy is the mode of
this transportive exchange on the basis of a shared being-substance. 'Analogy
is metaphor par excellence' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III,10,1411a1). 'To produce
a good metaphor is to see a likeness' (*Poetics* 1459a7f) and this involves a
carrying over or transport of qualities, and this *epiphora* is linked to
metaphora by *pherein*. Resemblance and similarity intermesh with that of
imitation and truth: '*Mimēsis* is never without the *theoretical* perception of
resemblance [*homoiosis*] or similarity' (Derrida 1982d:237). As a sort of
immanent derivation of identity from a conjunctive sameness, 'the unity and
continuity of meaning dominates the play of syntax' (Derrida 1982d:266)
whereby metaphor executes its transference through the improper extension
of a predicate proper to one element of the conjunction to another element;
that is, names exchange or trade their senses on the basis of a nominal
reserve of being-substance, on the security of their nominal stability. There is
a connection between the primitive and the proper/original and semantic pro-
priety functions as the linguistic analogue of an ethnopoetics positing a pure
origin. Etymology (its Greek root *etymon* means 'discourse on true meaning')
means place of origin, the proper, and so bears upon the question of the
ethical-political. This heliotropism enfolds not only man but also questions of
knowing and of the ethics of the natural and proper implicit in truth:

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6. Derrida's analysis moves quickly here, and I want to register a reservation regard-
ing the equation of semantic unity and ontological unity within which Derrida is operat-
ing. Other works by Derrida (1976, 1982a, 1982b) address this issue. This equation is
what is termed 'logocentrism'.

7. Nelson Goodman (1968) argues that metaphor is a redescription involving lables.
For Max Black (1962) metaphors confer insight. Donald Davidson (1984:245-265)
argues that metaphors have no cognitive value beyond their literal paraphrase.

> The condition for metaphor (for good and true metaphor) is the condition for truth. Therefore it is to be expected that the animal, deprived of *logos*, of *phonê sēmantikē*, of *stoikheion*, etc., also would be incapable of mimesis. *Mimēsis* thus determined belongs to *logos*, and is not animalistic aping, or gesticular mimicry; it is tied to the possibility of meaning and truth in discourse (Derrida 1982d:237).

The animal is without *logos* while man is the *zōon logon ekhon* for 'the human voice ... of all organs can best imitate things' (*Rhetoric* III,II,1404a 21f). For Aristotle, mimesis, imitation, is what is natural to man.

The course of this anthropocentric white mythology runs thus:

> Whoever does not subject equivocalness to this law is already a bit less than a man: a sophist, who in sum says nothing, nothing that can be reduced to a meaning. At the limit of this 'meaning-nothing', one is hardly an animal, but rather a plant, a reed, and not a thinking one .... And such a metaphorical vegetable (*phutos*) no longer belongs completely to *physis* to the extent that it is presented, in truth, by *mimēsis*, *logos*, and the voice of man (Derrida 1982d:248f).

What is proper to man is bound up with the law of nature. The lawfulness of the moral laws appeals via analogy to the mechanical necessity of nature. The naturalisation of the moral law is intimately part of an economimesis whereby there is a detour through the improper towards the unity of reappropriation. White mythology is thus a humanist 'aesthetics that posits the idea of the universal formal identity of the human' (Lloyd 1985:139). What is universally proper to man is declared from within this tropism.

Derrida (1982d:253) argues that the metaphor of the sun

> is there in order to signify metaphor *itself*; it is a metaphor of metaphor; an expropriation, a being-outside-one's-own-residence, but still in a dwelling, outside its own residence but still in a residence in which one comes back to oneself, recognizes oneself, reassembles oneself or resembles oneself, outside oneself in oneself.

As return to originary unity the sun is central to the system of white mythology. Hegel's fable tracks the transformation of the sensuous sun into the spiritual interior sun of consciousness; a sensory kernel, an original presence to be idealised-transported-idealised. This movement from the sensuous to the spiritual is the movement of metaphorisation from proper sensory meaning to proper spiritual meaning; the movement of idealisation and interiorisation, of meaning and meta-physics. The claim that metaphor concretises meaning does not escape this metaphysical circuit since the material is in its turn ultimately idealised. The movement of idealisation in Hegel's text whereby the sensory is conserved in the ideal is not simply to be opposed by a non-ideal, literal, sensory kernel of the proper.[8]

The deconstructive turn can be distilled to the following: the sun itself, the source of all propriety, harbours, according to Derrida's deconstruction of this exemplary origin, an originary impropriety since it can be both present and absent. It is inscribed in a system of relations that constitute it. It can

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8. For Hegel the ideal returns to concrete singularity via the creative imagination. See Derrida (1982c:69-108), on this fantastic production.

only be itself improperly named:

> This name is no longer the proper name of a unique thing which metaphor would
> *overtake*; it already has begun to say the multiple, divided origin of all seed, of the
> eye, of invisibility, death, the father, the "proper name" ... (Derrida 1982d: 244).

It is, then, the paradigm of both the sensory and of metaphor, of both the perception of originary presence and the transport/mediation of presence. What, then, has happened to the unique and natural sun, the paradigm of originality, the irreplaceable and properly natural referent?

It seems that the sun too is metaphorical and hence no longer natural and non-substitutable: the heliotropic system is divided at its origin. Metaphor resembles a kind of transport, communication, frontier crossing, or transplantation of meaning that can never be closed off by any legislative necessity positing the proper before metaphor, and Derrida (1982d:220) rather baroquely calls this indeterminacy 'the interminable *dehiscence* [bursting open] of the supplement (if we may be permitted to continue to garden this botanical metaphor)'. From metaphor to referent, and back to metaphor—up to this point metaphor is used to destabilise the proper to which it is conventionally opposed. This is the Nietzschean thrust of Derrida's deconstruction. But his generalisation of metaphor faces a logical impasse: all cannot be metaphor, for metaphor is only in opposition to the proper. Just as this argument does not valorise metaphorical language as that which identifies one thing with another, it also does not express man's harmony with nature (Aristotle).[9] Neither does it seek to reduce all to metaphor, seeing a conspiracy of deception and ideological mythology operating via metaphor (Nietzsche). Derrida proposes to reinscribe the conventional course of metaphor—metaphorisation as loss of sensible meaning or gain of spiritual meaning—by tracing its historico-problematic terrain. Metaphor puts the proper into circulation—or rather, the not-quite-proper since what precedes metaphor also precedes the category of the proper. Whether this fabulous scene is metaphorical or proper is what is undecidable. This is the 'result' of the deconstruction.

If the exemplary and original sun circumscribes the anthropocentric in

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9. For Berggen (1962:237) metaphor 'constitutes the indispensable principle for integrating diverse phenomena and perspectives without sacrificing their diversity'. Nor, alternatively, is the following critique of metaphor to be taken as an argument for metonymy over metaphor, since metonymy no less than metaphor is governed by resemblance. According to Jakobson (1971) metonymy is based on contiguity, correspondence and combination while metaphor is based on selection and resemblance. This distinction is designed to preserve the synchronic, combinatorial aspect of metonymy and the selective, comparative diachronic axis of metaphor. However, it is unclear why metaphor is not also contiguous and combinatorial and why metonymy is not also selective and comparative. As the bringing together of separates not relate by resemblance, the contiguity of metonymy (eg cause and effect, sign and signification) designates one idea by the name of another on the basis of a shared idea—this idea of a specific contiguity posits a resemblance, and so resemblance cannot be the monopoly of metaphor. This debate is still far from settled. Possibly metonymy, as pure relational contact, is more a matter of chance while metaphor is closer to necessity (see De Man 1979:14).

its orbit, engendering what is natural and proper to man, then its *modus operandi* is resemblance and mimesis. Originality is not only the characteristic of the irreplaceable thing, originality is also the genius of the sublime artist. Genius, as the exemplarity of the human, is an originality that claims to be incomparable; namely, a genius that transcends the species man and has ethico-political consequences.[10] The sun is related not only to the troping of metaphor but also to the originality of genius. The heliotrope manifestly generates disclosure and unveiling, cultivation (*Bildung*: formation, culture) and growth. I would now like to link this discussion of metaphor and heliotrope via mimesis to genius, moving from the aesthetic to the economic.

c Kant

Kant's discussion of genius and the sublime in *The Critique of Judgement* centres on a citation as an example of the sublime: 'Perhaps there has never been a more sublime utterance, or a thought more sublimely expressed, than the well-known inscription upon the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): "I am all that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face"' (Kant 1986:179).[11] Hegel, probably drawing on Plutarch as his source, also quotes 'the Goddess of Neith at Sais', who was introduced into the Ossirian cult and confounded with Isis: 'I am that which is, that which was, and that which will be; no one has lifted my veil' (Hegel 1956:220).

The modern concept of genius and the ideal of artistic self-expression, sincerity, authenticity and originality cut across questions of morality and aesthetics, and is tied historically via notions of hierarchy and propriety to 'a social consensus or, at least, recognition by some persons whose opinions have weight in terms of the history of culture' (Battersby 1989:125).[12] Since genius as the exemplar of individuality is ethically and politically charged, any interrogation of it has consequences beyond literary phenomena. For Aristotle the ability to use metaphor well and therefore to perceive resemblance is the mark of genius: 'To be a master of metaphor ... is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others and it is also a sign of genius' (*Poetics* 1459a55-57, and see *Rhetoric* III,II). Kant tells us that genius is constituted in one of its parts by 'the faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas* which are intuitions' (representations of the imagination), 'without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render

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10. Cassirer (1951:331) notes: 'The problem of genius and the problem of the sublime are now [after Burke] moving in the same direction, and they become the twin bases upon which a new and deeper conception of individuality gradually evolves'.

11. Lacoue-Labarthe (1991:9) notes that Kant's examples of sublime 'utterances are concerned with the nonpresentation of God'.

12. 'The cult of genius emerged in prehistorical times in the countryside around Rome. *Genius* was one of a number of household spirits that were all connected in some way with the ownership, protection and cultivation of property and land by a family or clan' (Battersby 1989:53).

completely intelligible' (Kant 1986:175f, sec 49).[13] Genius is traditionally the synthesising capacity of conferring on particulars the aura of universality: 'Genius does not receive its law from without, but from within itself; it produces its law in its original form' (Cassirer 1951:327).[14] Genius is the portrayal, or expression of *aesthetic ideas* consequent upon

> the free harmonizing of the imagination with the understanding's conformity to law ... such as cannot be brought about by any observance of rules, whether of science or mechanical imitation, but can only be produced by the nature of the individual. Genius, according to these presuppositions, is the exemplary originality of the natural endowments of an individual in the free employment of his cognitive faculties (Kant 1986:180f).

Genius is tied to autonomy and freedom. As with the Hegelian Sun which attains its proper element in the self-consciousness of Spirit (Nature as Reason itself), the return of nature to itself via the analogical detour of exemplarity-resemblance: 'naturality in general says itself, reassembles itself, knows itself, appears to itself, reflects itself, and "mimics" itself par excellence and *in truth* in human nature' (Derrida 1982d:237). Analogy proceeds not by direct correspondence, but by the transfer of reflection via what Kant in the *The Critique of Judgement* terms 'a symbolic hypotyposes'. Reflection, of course, is another optic metaphor within the orbit of heliotropism. What is proper to man is to be the privileged medium of the return of nature to itself. To be a genius is to have more nature, more seed than others, for genius perceives hidden resemblance and substitutes one term for another. Genius is then caught up in mimesis which aims at the pleasure of knowledge/discovery. Metaphor belongs to mimesis, to the fold of *physis* returning to itself and giving itself rules via genius.

It is at this point, within the humanist aesthetic of singularity and individuality, that Derrida points to the sacrifice of man in nature's return; this sacrifice is what is proper to man. In the humanist theme only man is capable of mimesis, and genius has its rules dictated by nature. Genius naturalises economimesis, and pure productivity becomes nature's functioning. Man, like metaphor, is simply a detour to truth even if a privileged one. Man is the only example. This sacrifice is part of the humanistic aesthetic that has traditionally presented itself as exhalting and preserving the individuality/singularity of man. This deconstructive incision into the aesthetic is of the greatest importance:

> What is art? Kant seems to begin by replying: art is not nature, thus subscribing to the inherited, ossified, simplified opposition between *tekhnè* and *physis*. On the side of nature is mechanical necessity; on the side of art, the play of freedom. In between them is a whole series of secondary determinations. But analogy annuls this opposition. It places under Nature's dictate what is most wildly free in the production of art. Genius is the locus of such a dictation—the means by which art

13. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1991:5-31), points out the significance of the sun, either rising or setting, to Kant's illustration of the sublime. See also Ernst Cassirer (1951:318ff) on genius.
14. Cassirer is paraphrasing Shaftsbury and traces the romantic aesthetics leading through Schiller to Kant. See also IA Richards (1936:115ff).

> receives its rules from nature. All propositions of an anti-mimetic cast, all condemnations leveled against imitation are undermined at this point. One must not imitate nature; but nature, assigning its rules to genius, folds itself, returns to itself, reflects itself through art. This specular flexion provides both the principle of reflexive judgements—nature guaranteeing legality in a movement that proceeds from the particular—and the secret resource of *mimesis*—understood not, in the first place, as an imitation of nature by art, but as a flexion of the *physis*, nature's relation to itself. There is no longer any opposition between *physis* and *mimesis*, nor consequently between *physis* and *tekhnè*; or that, at least, is what now needs to be verified (Derrida 1988:4).

According to Kant the moral law is conceivable only via analogy with the mechanistic laws of nature; this is the enigma of the analogy of the causality of freedom with the causality of nature (see Kant, 'Teleological Judgement', *Critique of Judgement*). In the Kantian schema man does not imitate nature: nature imitates itself. Kant's claim that art is not imitation, does not escape the economimetic economy affirmed from Aristotle to the present. The natural and the proper reconstitutes itself, gathering man into his propriety. The circuit or economy of analogical return uses man in the natural exchange of nature with itself. Genius is the medium of nature's recollection, and is caught up in white mythology—the reappropriation of nature to itself.[15] The singularity of man does not escape this reappropriation. Man is a means and not an end in himself. At its heart, the humanist, anthropocentric aesthetic is anti-human. What is it that man imitates? Self-present nature itself. Thereby nature returns to itself, reflects itself via what is proper (natural) to man. Mimesis is the unveiling of nature, *physis*. Mimesis is based on resemblance and the condition of truth is correspondence/resemblance and metaphor as the manifestation of analogy is the means of knowledge; of recognising the same. Even the mechanistic, *tekhnè*, is returned to nature, *physis*. Through man, exemplified by genius, nature swallows itself. The analogical resemblance between the imitation and the original is the basis of mimesis, is subject to the telos of return home, a reappropriation of origin and the temptation of romantic yearning for lost origin and unity. This is the dominant aspect of the aesthetic tradition that merits the name of white mythology.

One might speculate that the value of analogy is precisely to facilitate this inevitable return to itself of nature. Analogy must have a non-analogous origin and according to the conventional hierarchising anthropomorphism this origin is Man: the shared being-substance of human nature. But Man is enfolded in nature, (*physis*) and Man as a contaminated origin, itself functioning analogically with nature, is caught up in an analogical economy of self-presence whereby nature returns to itself. That is, the terms in the analogical (ie between man and nature) relation are already caught up in a metaphorical relation of substitution and resemblance. Man offers no security against this destiny of return to originary self-presence. Man, as Western

15. 'Therefore this artistic creation, like art throughout, includes in itself the aspect of immediacy and naturalness, and this aspect it is which the subject cannot generate in himself but must find in himself as immediately given. This alone is the sense in which we may say that genius and talent must be inborn' (Hegel 1975:283). 'Immediately given', that is, by nature.

man, possessed of reason and freedom, has a privileged place in this system but it is an unstable place that Derrida attempts to destabilise internally.

The metaphor of exchange and communication, the transfer of the proper (the 'literal, proper meaning, the propriety of the proper, Being'— Derrida 1982d:214) in metaphor signals that metaphor (*meta-phora*) is a meta-physical concept, perhaps even the concept of the meta-physical itself. The notion of the literal opposed to the literary 'is only an ideal that may never be realised in natural languages because whatever is said must be said in a language that is, to some extent, tainted by tropes and figures' (Bezeczky 1991:603).[16] Idealisation or assumption into the concept, that is, into the self-present idea, effectively transfers priority from the sensory to the sense and recalls the self-containment of the creative imagination and the sense of the sublime that for Kant in *The Critique of Judgement* is a source of our experience of the independence of nature. Derrida's solicitation results in undecidability in that the 'scene' that produces metaphor and concept is and is not metaphorical. What are the consequences of the analysis of white mythology, and what use can be made of it?

d Marx 1

The aesthetic is traditionally placed by Kant beyond the economic (although the remarks on art in the 'Teleology' section of *The Critique of Judgement* hint enigmatically at art as production).[17] Kant holds that '[i]n the kingdom of ends [a systematic union of different rational beings under common laws] everything has either a price or a dignity' and this is a means of distinguishing between things and persons:

> What is relative to universal human inclinations and needs has a market price; what, even without presupposing a need, accords with a certain taste—that is, with satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers—has a fancy price [*Affectionspreis*]; but that which constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not merely a relative value—that is, a price— but has an intrinsic value—that is, dignity (Kant 1961:96).

This dignity is particular to man and supposedly blocks the voracious economimetic system of exchanges.

But such an elevation beyond exchange marks the utopian aesthetic moment, a moment that also marks the place of the aesthetic within economics.[18] However, Marx is more ambivalent about this 'superfluous'

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16. 'Does this mean that literalness does not exist? As an ideally independent, self-contained and perfect language, it certainly does not exist' (Bezeczky 1991:610).

17. Susan Buck-Morss (1992:9) comments perceptively on *The Critique of Judgement*, '[i]t is at this point in the text that the modern constellation of aesthetics, politics, and war congeals, linking the fate of those three elements'.

18. Steven Connor (1992:58) notes: 'There is a certain congruity between such accounts and the early Marxist division between authenticity and lived "use-value" and the alienated inauthenticity of "exchange-value"'. See also Terry Eagleton (1976:167). Eagleton (1990:202) also sees the immediacy of use value marking out the utopian aesthetic in Marx: 'only when the bodily drives have been released from the despotism of abstract need, and the object has been restored from functional abstraction to sensuously particular use value, will it be possible to live aesthetically'.

norm/ideal of authentic exchange. Transport-exchange-value: this chain of transferences links the aesthetic and the economic and crosses over to the ethical. Exchange is bound up with representation and economimesis. Marx (1973:145,149) writes that

> [t]he commodity is transformed into exchange value. This doubling in the idea proceeds (and must proceed) to the point where the commodity appears double in real exchange: as a natural product on one side, as exchange value on the other.

Exchange supplements the natural original with a duplicitous reality in which 'all real products and labours become the representatives' of money, thereby inverting the original order.[19] In exchange-value, form dominates over content. The form/content distinction signals the operation of the conduit metaphor whereby words, like monetary symbols, are presented as having insides and outsides. Communication is a form of exchange and is equally bound up with representation and economimesis—particularly when communication is viewed as free exchange in the linguistic marketplace, where every participant has equal access to the means of exchange. Kant's desire to raise the dignity of man beyond the economic system indicates the danger of such a system to the ethical. Marx (1973:293) is of interest because, building on Hegel's critique of Kant, he attempts to work with an eye to contamination: '… processes of the same subject; thus eg the substance of the eye, the capital of vision etc.'.[20] Can the metaphor of the marketplace be eradicated or at least blocked by an intrinsic human dignity that transcends economimesis?[21] Can man transcend the economimetic system? In Kantian terms, what of freedom and the moral law? Does the metaphor of economy (exchange, transport, representation) swallow every value into the system of exchanges or does something original and proper transcend circulation and

19. Marx (1973:211) is describing the nexus whereby exchange value represents commodity and commodity represents exchange value. This is not a simple inversion but a 'constant movement' in which the propriety of the represented is the result of circulation and is not outside of this economimesis. Connor and Eagleton oversimplify Marx on this point. Despite the commitment to the proposition that labour time is 'the real common substance of exchange values' Marx complicates this economimesis: 'the reality of the price is here only fleeting, a reality destined constantly to disappear, to be suspended, not to count as a definitive realization, but always only as an intermediate, mediating realization' (Marx 1973:204,211).

20. This sentence is a continuation from a missing page of the notebooks that make up the *Grundrisse*.

21. 'The metaphor of economy has proved in recent years to have had a very great binding and explanatory power in philosophy and literary and cultural theory' (Connor 1992:57). Mediating representation, exchange, produces the original and real. Georg Simmel (1978:441) compares money to 'the forms of logic, which lend themselves to any particular content'. The danger of the economic metaphor can be seen in *The Pelican History of the United States of America* where Hugh Brogan (1990:27) blithely writes of the early American colonists' prosaic wait for the price of slaves to fall before they could own slaves themselves; 'they had to wait for the price to fall as Africa began to *export* [!] its inhabitants in really large numbers' (e.a.). *Export* suggests free trade, which is exactly what such trade for its victims was not, and it erases the dissymmetry of colonialist imperialism.

substitution? Marx and Saussure introduce complications and reservations into the analogy of money and language, but both exploit its explanatory value. This analogy has a historical lineage; money and language are linked in Aristotle's discussion of metaphor in the *Poetics*, and FE Sparshott (1974:81) reminds us that 'the exchange of meanings is explained much as the exchange of goods in the market is explained in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, V 6,1131a,29-b24'.[22] As a *symbolon*, a coin, like other graphic symbols, stands for what is absent and thus possessed of *ousia aphanes* (invisible substance). Both paper and coin money are statements, numismatically impressed by legitimated and official inscriptions. This would seem to enforce the analogy between language and money. As statements circulating in the medium of exchange these inscriptions effectively promise a certain correspondence between the abstract value they represent and actual commodities; in short, money has a performative dimension, and the erasure of this scene of production and representation is the ruse of capitalist ideology.

Perhaps the economic metaphor, or rather the metaphoric economy, the economimetic white mythology, is the site *par excellence* of a post-colonial mythology. And perhaps money is part of a wider metaphysics and economimesis that includes the ethical discourse of character.[23] Recall that the category 'person' is what Kant wishes to put beyond exchange as the locus of the dignity of the moral law. Attempting to limit the economic metaphor and preserve the dignity of man, Kant (1961:96) distinguishes between what 'has a price, something else can be put in its place as an equivalent', and what 'is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent'.[24] The equality of this dignity and the substitutive reciprocity it implies recalls Marx's (1973:238) notion of 'simple circulation as such [the metabolism of circulation, i.e. exchange] [as] exchange among equals equivalents)'. The economic and the ethical discourse cross in this notion of an original propriety, and economimesis enfolds even the category of the person. The ethical subject as person, persona, character is not beyond economimesis. The metaphysical, like the metaphorical, is a *trans*-ference; an exchange or what we might call a frontier crossing. *Metaphora* (carrying across) is equivalent to the Latin *translatio* and 'both words, *metaphora* and *translatio* have the root meaning of 'carrying across' or 'transportation' across frontiers.

22. Marc Shell (1982:180f) suggests that perhaps 'money talks in and through discourse in general' such that '[t]he monetary information of thought, unlike its content, cannot be eradicated from discourse without changing thought itself, without whose tropes and processes the language of wares (*Warensprache*) is an ineradicable participant'. See also Shell (1978:31ff). Derrida (1982d:216) notes that the analogy between money and language is used by Marx, Nietzsche, and Saussure to explain or signify the metaphorical process. See also Gayatri Spivak (1988:165).
23. Gregory Jay (1990:149) argues that the abstract denomination of character 'is not unique to the end of the monetary economy as it arrives at paper money; rather such metaphysics are requisite to the production of economy per se, to the coinage that enables an appropriation, exchange, or distribution of values'. Jay offers the suggestive description of capitalism as 'a restricted economy of translations, exchanges, and metaphors that enable the ascription of properties and the capitalization of proper names'.
24. See also Halpern (1991) where the juridico-political notion of the sovereign self is placed in its historical context.

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Metaphor is intertwined with translation and exchange. Consider Stephen Greenblatt's (1991:110) account of the frontier economy:

> Where they might have imagined mutual gift giving or, alternatively, a mutually satisfactory economic transaction, the Europeans instead tended to imagine an exchange of empty signs, of alluring counterfeits, for overwhelming abundance. Objects of little value provide access to objects of immense value; indeed the more worthless and hollow the trifle, the value is gained in the exchange (see also Barnstone 1993:15).

The colonial encounter is enfolded within economimesis, and the mimetic and ethical frontier is inscribed within this discursive nexus as surely as it is inscribed in a geopolitical location. It is an asymmetrical exchange on the basis of a common substance; not here Marx's labour time (the proper possibility of values—Marx 1973:297) so much as the internal systematics of colonialist capitalism monopolised as the possession of, and serving the interests of, Western man. If Greenblatt locates this exchange as a fraudulent or asymmetrical exchange—as opposed to a reciprocal, nonconstraining encounter—it is still nonetheless an exchange that, as such, supplements or parasitises an idealised, authentic use-value that is normative. It is not simply aberrant to proper communication. This ideal of nonstrategic, authentic encounter is located by Marx on the edge or the frontier of the economic system as the 'direct, unmediated exchange' of barter. It is not outside of the system, but neither is it completely inside either:

> Firstly, this character [of exchange as barter] does not yet dominate production as a whole, but concerns only its superfluity and is hence itself more or less *superfluous* [like exchange itself]. It therefore takes place only at a few points (originally at the borders of the natural communities, in their contact with strangers) ... (Marx 1973:204).

If we see these 'borders of natural communities, contact with strangers' as refering to the colonial context of frontier encounters—and supposing we drop for the moment reservations regarding the nature of 'natural communities'—it is possible to move toward a few conclusions.

Both superfluous and normative, extrinsic and essential, inside and outside—authentic exchange as use-value remains ambivalent: the origin of exchange remains at the edges of the system of exchange, both impurely inside and outside of the economimetic system. The propriety of authentic use-value is improperly contaminated. One of the terms used to designate contact with strangers is 'colonialism'. Colonialism is then superfluous and yet normative of 'production as a whole', or of what we have termed white mythology. The fact that Marx sees it as an exchange of equivalents rather than as an asymmetrical exploitation suggests to me that the normative ideal of reciprocal equivalence and universality is not exterior to white mythology. Consider the intertwining of the conventional aesthetic of originality with the criticism of abstraction in the following:

> This economic relation—the character which capitalist and worker have as the

extremes of a single relation of production—therefore develops more purely and adequately in proportion as labour loses all the characteristics of art; as its particular skill becomes something more and more abstract and irrelevant, and as it becomes more and more a *purely abstract activity*, a purely mechanical activity, hence indifferent to its particular form ... (Marx 1973:297).

Exchange value is always contaminated, distorted, and the history of colonialism is the narrative of this distortion of the ideal exchange between equals, equivalents. The exchange of equivalents presupposes an exchange on the basis of a shared substance: Marx's human labour time or the ideal of community formed on the basis of shared substance, ethos or spirit as the basis of exchange. Community, as a form of social integration, is constituted by tropological processes such as narrative, metaphor, and myth. Even where equity and reciprocity are inserted into the frontiers of the econommetic system this white mythology of the exchange of equivalents presupposes a universalisable substratum that in effect erases difference. To move quickly from the economic to the pedagogical, we can note that 'our' context is not outside white mythology. As the exchange of equals or the same, prescriptions of universal equality and dignity both propose and withdraw the individuality ideally associated with the person:

The formal identity of the subject which aesthetic education designs to form is in fact their 'indifference'. For what this subject finally represents is the ideological figure of the individual summoned and annulled in the same moment (Lloyd 1990:122).

Where equality is imagined and the formal identity of the human is posited in the supposition of a shared anthropomorphic substratum—human nature—the universal formal identity of the human makes all examples of man substitute on the basis of Western man.

Conclusion

In conclusion I propose to use as a pretext a recent South African study by Helize van Vuuren, 'Forgotten Territory: The Oral Tradition of the /Xam'. This essay attempts to attend to the cost of colonial exchange in a way that brings to the fore the functioning of the academic marketplace, and it addresses itself to an area of the South African literary canon that highlights the dangers of white mythology.

Van Vuuren (1994:57,62) argues for acceptance of the 'impurity' of the written transcription/translation—'contaminated as it has become by endless mediating processes'—of the testimony of the Bushmen, 'survivors of a society of which the last signs are the languages, the rock paintings, and the oral narratives':

it is highly paradoxical that we do not have any possible entry into the 'orality' of the tradition, except by way of analogy with the role of the oral tradition in African languages in southern Africa ... by way of analogy one may look at the function of oral literature in other societies.

Analogy is central to this projected recovery, and this negotiative exchange

takes place within the rubric of resemblance and metaphoric transport. Analogy also operates the mechanisms of ethnocentric exclusion/inclusion. The pious conclusion of such a literary historical route is usually the insertion of a representative (here the Bushmen) into the place reserved for the authentic South African voice that, as the aboriginal embodiment of national unity, can serve as the proper origin of national identity. This course would enact the reappropriation indicative of white mythology, assuring self-identity through resemblance via tropism.

Acknowledging the 'inevitable distortions and loss of precise spirit of the original through the process of translation', Van Vuuren (1994:65) suggests that '[t]he reader must imagine the original which is always deferred into the mediation of the translation-transmission'. Imagination operates by way of representation, and is the inventive faculty of genius, yet the temptation to represent the /Xam poetry as archaic site is precisely what is to be resisted. Recall that for Kant the analogy between nature and art always provides a principle of reconciliation. There is no pure origin free of interpretation, no original 'object' as self-identical and unmediated given. There is here a declared refusal to interiorise and idealise the /Xam; Hegel's *Erinnerung* (recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience) is rejected as romantic pathos. There is no innocent natural memory. The colonial context determined the ethnographic interest of the translators Bleek and Lloyd, and the translative nexus is one of exchange as appropriation. The mode of recollecting the /Xam via the poetry/testimony of /Kabbo (who's name translates as 'Dream') is after all a product of colonialism and the academic/pedagogical scene is formed by this same history; the mnemotechne of the written transcript is contaminated with ethnological fascination.

Acknowledging in a common sense way mediatory cultural context and history is to display a scholarly tact integral to what is best in the humanistic tradition: an implicit imperative to respect the event of /Kabbo's narrative performance, its colonialist/racist context in which addressor and addressee are overdetermined as civilized Western man and natural savage. The mute imperative to respect the singularity of /Kabbo's discourse addresses us through the performative dimension of Van Vuuren's text. Calling attention to the pragmatics of communication draws attention to three things; that the question of the intention behind /Kabbo's poetry/testimony is vital to its meaning, that as the testimony of a survivor such poetry has a moral force, and that the use of a circumspect literary-aesthetic approach might offer the most promise for the study of Bushman poetry. By 'circumspect' I mean one that does not simply consider the testimony as poetry and submit to an aesthetic uncritically contained by white mythology. The political and the aesthetic would cross in making the Bushmen symbolic.

I read into Van Vuuren's critical manoeuvre an implicit criticism of the academic postcolonial exchange whereby objects of little value (here translations of oral testimony) provide access to objects of immense value (original oral art). Attempting to leave a place for the proper, original testimony of the /Xam and warning against the neo-romantic yearning for the

original, Van Vuuren attempts to avoid both the pretense of representation and the pathos of romantic nostalgia.[25] She leaves room for distance and inexpressibility and this tact or practical judgement (*phronesis*) stands opposed to theoretical generality; it evinces a receptivity to the 'otherness' of the work of art or the past. /Kabbo's poetry is also his testimony. Commemorating what has 'dignity' without exacting the price of white mythology involves the strategy of making her own impure interpretive exchange resist the fascination of an assured destination or primal unity. Despite the attraction of 'a unifying seamless history which would be inclusive of all the peoples of South Africa' (Van Vuuren 1994:57), the unifying origin is deferred into mediation/translation. But this strategy is not without complications.

The purpose of writing is to assuage genealogical anxiety by conserving and supplementing genealogical classification. Including Bushman art within this narrative without questioning the geneticism of literary history accords with this purpose. Writing is the condition of enthno*graphy* and within the history of writing the ideal of the oral scene of communication as without mediation, authentic communication, marks the ideological atmosphere of anthropology and has an ethical force. The direct contact implied by oral communication suggests a Rousseauistic crystalline community as the site of authentic exchange, a social authenticity grounded in the transparent proximity of face to face encounter. Resisting the rage for unity does not rule out succumbing to an anxious desire to unify the new South Africa, to locate a benign non-black and non-white origin—a gesture full of political pathos and not untouched by an anti-ethnocentric ethnocentrism; an idealisation or Rousseauistic melancholy that makes the Bushmen serve the domestic agenda of unity. To propose a communication/ encounter with Bushman literary 'relics' on the basis of a shared substance of South Africanness erases the victimisers and their descendants in an aura of benevolence. An ethic of nostalgia for origins, of archaic and natural innocence, haunts even the acceptance of contaminated origins. To concede the loss of the myth of simplicity of origin, to speech reciting the origin, is not thereby to escape the historical form of South African pedagogy and the social, economic, and political structures of its institution; its particular historical deformation of white mythology.

The search for a ground and bedrock of the South African literary canon is also a search for a common root or bridge over the painful abyss of colonialist mediation. This project of recovery is embedded in analogism: how far can it hope to avoid reconstituting economimesis, succumbing to the law of the same and the proper, of eventually reappropriating the other to the propriety of the natural? The dominant metaphors articulating Van Vuuren's argument are the 'new' South African literary canon as a corpus or body, and

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25. This sense of remorse is, according to Derrida (1993), the mood of anthropology. Derrida proposes to replace this with a deconstructive affirmation of the noncentre as otherwise than the loss of centre, a joyous Nietzschean play. This is where reservations regarding the use of deconstruction might begin to be heard—and this is not simply a matter of tone.

the more inclusive 'we' of South Africa. These tropes are not mere formulaic academic superfluities; they mark the distinction between outside and inside. These tropes figure a conceptual schema that has a history. To introduce marginalised *matter* into the *form* of the South African literary canon is to frame the identity of the Bushmen as South African, a literary citizenship that is little better than a *fait accompli* for the victims and smacks of the utilisation of an undercapitalised literary reserve. (Such a gesture elides the problems of representation and restitution faced by those descendents of the Bushmen, trapped, like their predecessors, in the exigencies of South African history. The site of this present injustice is what would be elided in the sentimental construction of the Bushmen as symbolic community.) So this investigation needs to be supplemented by other questions: Where does this frame come from? Who supplies it? Who constructs it? Whose interests does it serve, and who does it silence? This raises the historical, political, economic, institutional context of Helize Van Vuuren's own signature, the basis of its propriety and legality.

Noting the almost ubiquitous use of metaphor that permeates both the written and the painted or engraved documents of the Bushmen, Van Vuuren (1994:65) remarks upon the resemblance between a 'story' and a 'presentiment' which 'suggests something of the function of story-telling in /Xam oral tradition'. The same can, I think, be said of the academic study of such sources which function within the Western tradition as unifying stories and commemorative exchanges. Academic study, if it is not to succumb to white mythology and erase the fabulous scene of its creation, if it is not to settle into the metaphysical/metaphorical idealization complicit with white mythology, must attend to the channels of invisible power we read/hear/receive via mediation in the context of /Xam metaphorics as 'Thinking Strings'. The task is not to explain /Xam metaphors by literalising them, substituting the literal for the metaphorical, thereby representing them in accordance with the explanatory impulse. Aristotle notes, '[f]or all metaphors imply an enigma; plainly, therefore, a metaphor (so borrowed) must itself be well converted' (*Rhetoric* III,1405b), but the task is surely not to better translate /Xam metaphors into equivalent synonymous metaphors under the illusion of an equitable, respectful exchange. Neither is the task to aestheticise /Kabbo as poet since poetry is conventionally (for 'us') seen as the summit of the fine arts, distinguishing the property of man as freedom. As the poetic genius has his role dictated by nature, so might /Kabbo be reappropriated by nature whereby the poets' gift is the gift of nature (even a nationalised South African nature). In this ahistorical ideal the poet submits to no exchange contract and is above commerce and political economy. For both Hegel and Kant poetry is the highest of the arts. Finally, the pleasure that such poetry might afford us, while it might depend on some ideal of universal communicability, is also grounded in sociality, a certain *socius* or reflective intersubjectivity, a community: a community (both academic and societal) constituted here in South Africa, and entangled in its historical and psychological roots, with the cost to the exterminated Bushmen's communities.

While the attribution of metaphor to the Bushmen credits them with invention and imagination it also runs the risk of succumbing to an ethnocentric trope of white mythology—seeing the primitive as metaphorical (Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*). In characterising Bushman art *as* metaphorical the interpreter is really announcing a decision to read those artifacts as metaphors (as analogous to what are called metaphors), thereby inviting a tropological seduction towards presence, truth, and naturalness. Oral literature lends itself to the collapsing of the difference between author and narrator, the self is displaced from the referent into the figure of the narrator, and the transparency of meaning intention crystallises in the performative act. If /Kabbo's poetry/testimony offers echoes from afar that remain active and stirring, evoking an obligation to respect that is not beyond contaminatory exchange, then in this exchange something is irrevocably lost. The sense of this loss can assume the lure of the proper embalmed in the poignancy of belatedness to which we must return as a source of authenticity and unity on which to ground a desire for 'natural community'. The discovery/recovery of the authentic voice is, of course, one of the archetypal metaphors of the tradition and part of the historical process of tradition in its negotiation with continuity and discontinuity, similarity and difference. Recovery is not innocently apolitical or disinterested, and one would need to point to the historical complements of such centres of reliance that might pre-empt or recuperate the potential for transgression.

Or discover/recovery can highlight the violence of transport, the appropriation/exappropriation of interpretation and cognition, and the contaminatory nature of encounter that marks the course of history in its general features. 'Our' white mythology casts a shadow even where it promises to illuminate. Perhaps even more so when the 'we' sheltered in that 'our' conceals the work of analogy and erases the scene of its own production —as Marx (1973:293) the arch-historiciser perceptively remarks:

> Such belletristic phrases, which relate everything to everything else by means of some analogy, may even appear profound the first time they are expressed, all the more so if they identify the most disparate things.

Still, there is the promise of a critical reinscription of the tradition so as to displace its dominant presumptions by rethinking the border or threshold. The inescapability of translation opens up the field of Southern African studies to the greatest risks but also affords the opportunity to problematise white mythology and suggest, perhaps, the potential use-value of deconstructive strategies. That is, a use that can only have value if it is turned and attuned to the historical context of South Africa, rather than uncritically imported on the basis of a naive belief in some international academic free market. In this exchange, as in any other, the contingencies of evaluation are inescapably ideological and never purely academic—always contaminated, always demanding the vigilance of economy and strategy. Any use of deconstruction must carry a cautionary and deformatory belletristic codicil: What Us(e) is Deconstruction?

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