

# Marginalia<sup>1</sup> on Marginality

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Wie orden en dink, boer altyd tussen twee ryke,  
dus asem ek vry in hierdie grenslandlug  
(Blum 1958:8).

Marginal notes on marginality—in the margin of what is already in the margin of. Of what? Some vast page of society—a society page. And I in the margin of that. My motto is by Peter Blum, a marginal Afrikaans poet who wrote a lot about marginal states and marginal figures. Celebrating the serenity of his estate at Ferney, he here presents Voltaire as conscious of being marginal between big France and little Geneva—conscious also of feeling free in this marginal state that contains ‘all the elements of the good life’. The two lines of the motto are not easy to translate, since *boer* means ‘to farm’, but also ‘to haunt’ or ‘to frequent’. An approximate translation could be:

He who structures and thinks, always haunts/ farms between two realms,  
I therefore breathe freely in this frontier air

Speculating on marginality: where does the limit of marginality lie? The far out fringes of the very fringes, the outer, colder, darker regions of society. Does it have a boundary? What is beyond this boundary? Which boundary is implied by the idea of marginality? For if we take the metaphor seriously the margin presupposes a certain demarcated space or terrain which it surrounds. Literally, the margin is the empty space demarcating the writing or print on the page. The margins of literature, of (polite) discourse. And where is that? The border of a page, the margin of some vast text spanning the whole country, power, society, literature or language?

The notion of marginality has played a crucial part in conceiving relations between different groups and cultures, especially in postcolonial thinking. And indeed, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (1995:49) attributes much of the melancholy of postcolonialism for its lost innocence having been institutionalised, much of its vagueness and amorphousness, to ‘an inadequately enunciated notion of the margin’. In what follows I will try to enunciate the notion a bit more adequately by making five

<sup>1</sup> ‘Notes written in the margin of a book or manuscript by a reader or annotator’ (Cuddon 1992).

notes in the margin: one on the margin and the written page, one on being marginalised, one on the marginal and the liminal, one on the centre and the periphery of the semiosphere and, finally, one on the marginal and the postcolonial.

**1st note: The written page and the margin**

A quote from the Dutch poet of the fifties, Lucebert, might shed some light on the matter. As well it might, since his pseudonym is a combination of *luce* (light) and *bert*, *bernt* (burning)—‘burning with light’. It also alludes to Lucifer, literary ‘light-bearer’, the name of the principal devil, but in Dutch also the word used for safety matches.

het boek rekt zich slaat haar ogen op  
wordt zichtbaar. blank zijn haar armen  
haar borsten zijn zwart zwart (Lucebert 1974:211).

the book stretches herself opens her eyes  
becomes visible. white/blank are her arms  
her breasts are black black.

These enigmatic verses embodies the book as a sensuous woman. Opening the book reveals the white margin like a woman stretching her arms. The written pages (or poems) are her black breasts, iconically repeated. Not one, but two centres. The page has become flesh—erotic and life-giving.

As this example indicates, speaking of marginality implies that we think of society as both like and unlike a giant page or book with some things or some people written in or relegated to its margins. For the metaphor to make sense, it seems, society has to be understood as high society, the in-crowd, the dominant or hegemonic group. At the very least it requires a conception of culture or society as like a clearly demarcated space—a space with well-defined boundaries where it is desirable to be as near to the centre as possible.

This is problematic, since a margin does not logically imply a centre, only a bounded space. Besides, a printed page doesn’t literally have a clear centre. One might pin-point the central line and the central word or letter on that page, but my contention is that the idea of marginality is not really based on an everyday experience or general knowledge of centrality (Lakoff & Turner 1989:60). Rather, the idea of a centre presupposes an underlying metaphor like *Society is a circle*—magic or not—which is based on an everyday experience of centrality.

In any case, since marginality is based on a writing/print metaphor, it seems to be not centred on the logos, but on writing—it is not logocentric, but grammocentric or grammologic. What does it mean to talk of a grammocentre? With a mark as its

origin? The secondariness of the letter as centre? Marginality seems to indicate a boundary around a certain space without a centre. Still, it is nearly impossible to think of a margin without also thinking a centre where categories of relevance are laid down, decreed, written, where laws are enacted. Yet the margin is a space beyond writing—beyond the categories—virgin, unoccupied. It is a parergon: alongside the written page, not part of it, yet also not part of the context. A zone of undecidability.

If we talk about a vast text, to which text are we appealing? To the book of nature, the book of society (its agenda of significant events or issues, for example), the cheque books of the financiers or the book of law or the Law, the Book itself (the Bible)? The metaphor means that we conceive the world as one big book with in its margins a few notes—to clarify a point, to raise a question, to sum up, to indicate the outline of the argument or a topic, to note a disagreement, to gloss. The margin is a space where the other can make his mark—can have his voice heard. It is the part where nothing has been written (yet)—empty, virginal. A space where men will want to write on—to cite from *The sound of music*. The pen is the penis.

By a strange logic, the margin is therefore a privileged place for writing. Academics at our institution were exasperated when, to cut costs, exam books were printed without margins. Where can the master then write his advice to the student? If there is no margin, where can the one with the final say, make his mark and by doing so, subject the writing/the text to his mastery? To write in the margin, it seems, is to desire to subject.

What can one write in the margin of society to enhance your own subjectivity? What lies beyond the margin, the tympanum or the hymen?

## 2nd marginal note: Marginalised—displaced from the centre, ignored, powerless

In contrast with this desire to master, to be marginalised generally means 'to be at the periphery', 'far removed from power or influence', 'virtually beyond the reaches of power', 'not quite powerless yet not powerful'. Definitely not in the centre, central or powerful. It also means: 'looked down upon', 'considered unimportant', 'ignored', 'negligible', 'pushed from the centre'; it indicates those who cannot be heard or won't be regarded as making sense anyway. To be marginalised is to be less than human; to be subhuman.

This is the situation of the magistrate in *Waiting for the barbarians* (Coetzee 1981) after he returns from taking the barbarian girl back to her people. He is displaced from his position of power at the margins of empire (in the province) and stripped of what power he had. He is silenced, jailed, and ignored. He is on a limbo, role-less, status-less, no longer protected by any law or structure, exposed to the whims

of those in power. The normal social rules no longer apply to him. He becomes marginal in the sense that he finds himself 'on the borderland of any recognised and relatively stable area, either territorial or cultural' (Fairchild 1964:183) and the implications of the term—of 'dissociation, unadjustment, and some degree or form of abnormality' (Fairchild 1964:183)—apply to him. Contact with the barbarian culture has made his own culture and the assumptions of empire strange to him—he now 'finds himself on the margin [of two cultures], but a member of neither' (Stonequist 1937:3). He has become, in the original sense of the term proposed in 1928 by R.E. Park, a *marginal man*.

As we know from personal experience, to be marginalised means to look longingly at the centre—to be bound in a dialectic of desire for being somewhere or someone else. Coetzee's magistrate perhaps does not long to be elsewhere, but to return to his old sense of self—the innocent state in which he has not yet realised that he is but an instrument of empire, that he was part of history and cannot live outside it.

If we deconstruct the opposition between centre and margin, it becomes clear that the marginalised serves to mark the limits of society, keeping the space of society intact. This social space is usually supposed to be a finite and bounded, homogeneous and unstratified space, stretching as far as one can see.

From conceiving culture and society as a space it is but a small step to the country as the space of the nation—the geographical borders within which the central structuring idea of the nation can emerge. Or is it the other way round: culture is like a country? Culture is a demarcated space (like a country) where one can live, and breathe freely? Here the metaphor of the book and its margins clashes with two of the strongest guiding metaphors of modernity: the geographical space of the country and the imaginary space of the nation. Within the country's defensible borders we can feel safe; within the nation we can have an identity. Both these metaphors are based upon the idea of a bounded self: personhood as a clearly demarcated space, not only protected by high suburban walls, but also by constitutional walls of rights and obligations (Nedelsky 1990). Behind these walls in a kind of sacred place the bounded self can realise its full potential (Adler 1989).

In any case, being excluded from the centre leads to loss of self-esteem and dignity and a negative self-perception. Marginal people lack recognition and respect and it is the task of multiculturalism and decolonisation to restore to them their sense of being themselves—to return them to their authentic selves and to open avenues of self-fulfilment and self-realisation to them. They have to be drawn back into the safe, bounded space of 'us' (Seshadri-Crooks 1995:50).

The cases of the magistrate (in Coetzee 1981) and of the marginal figures in the poetry of Blum clash with this view that the human is centred in a safe sacred space or *temenos*. Their experience indicates that one is only really fully human outside all

walls, in a marginal and exposed condition. Only then do you really exist. In other words, marginal man or woman is not subhuman at all, but truly, authentically human.

As the high suburban walls of our cities indicate, the safety of the nation is an illusion. The rainbow nation is not a safe space, but fissured by violence, injustice, clashing of interests and crime. Social space is not homogenous, but stratified. As Homi Bhabha argues, the nation is split and marginalised in itself by the double logic of narrating itself:

The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity. However, the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the 'nation' as a narrative strategy. As an apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing the nation. What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity (Bhabha 1994:140).

In other words, a nation is not a unity, but a DissemiNation—an appellation and a performance, a rhetorical figure created on a temporal plane by 'repeatedly [turning] the scraps, patches and rags of daily life into the signs of a coherent national culture' (Bhabha 1994:145).

But what does liminality entail?

### 3rd note: The marginal and the liminal as zone of contact and exchange

Victor Turner (1989) bases his views on ritual and theatre on van Gennep's analysis of ritual. Van Gennep distinguishes three stages in rites of passage: separation, transition and incorporation. In the separation phase, ordinary space and time is changed by rites and symbolic actions into sacred space and time—a space and time beyond ordinary space, outside ordinary time—and the ritual subjects are symbolically detached from their usual social status and often also spatially separated from the rest of the community.

In the transition phase—where they cross the margin or *limen* (threshold)—the subjects pass through an area and period of social limbo. In the third phase, the subjects are ritually and symbolically returned to a new 'relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society' (Turner 1989:24).

The transitional or liminal state is a state of moving away from one's usual status in the centre. Here a person becomes status-less, role-less. The subjects are often stripped of clothes and names and smeared with mud. People in such a liminal

state, like initiates in tribal schools, are often considered to be even sexless, as their nakedness symbolises. It is a state marked by spontaneity, concreteness, intense comradeship, and egalitarianism. Here, Turner (1969:126) writes, 'communitas emerges where social structure is not'. Communitas, the sense community, of being together with other people, emerges for Turner 'through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority' (Turner 1969:128). The point is that the essence of liminality, according to Turner (1989:28), is that it analyses culture into factors and allows them to be recombined in free or ludic patterns. In other words, the liminal is a zone of transformation.

In tribal societies it seems to be mostly the individual who is transformed from an immature state into a mature one, while society itself remains stable, and ritual might be said to stabilise society and to keep it from changing. But as Turner maintains, it is a fallacy to project tribal liminality without qualification onto modern society, since the industrial revolution is a watershed that, among other things, brought into being the ideas of work and leisure. After the industrial revolution participation in social ritual became optional, and distinguishes the liminal from the liminoid.

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission such a liminoid state has been constituted. Participation is optional. Though not status-less, applicants for amnesty lose their ordinary status and even their status as accused or sentenced people under the law and acquire a special status of being exempt from prosecution. In this special liminoid state and according to its rules, through a kind of public confession the truth, is supposed to emerge.

People in a liminoid state upset the normal course of events, question normality. That which is not understood, questions society's assumptions. And society's reaction is not only to reject but often to declare such people to be of the devil's party. This demonisation is enacted in Peter Blum's sonnet 'Voltaire at Ferney' (1958:8). The poem ends with the image of little Geneva closing its gates against Voltaire as against the devil.

*Waiting for the barbarians* (Coetzee 1981) can be regarded as an extended meditation on marginality. As the example of the magistrate indicates, the marginal is an in-between—a zone between two different systems where contact and exchange becomes possible. In this instance a very crude exchange takes place: not of goods or meanings—there is very little commerce or communication—but of bodies: people get captured, are tortured and misused, some returned to their own. And understanding seems to be precluded from the outset. The marginal in this case also forms the boundary between the known and what is beyond the known; beyond knowing, perhaps. It is in any case impossible to know the other, yet enslaving the other seems to be necessary in order to have a sense of the self.

There seems, therefore, to be a link between marginality and the unknown. Is it

always the case that beyond the margin lies the unknown or the not yet known? Where the categories of the own system becomes dubious? Where there are no maps? Here be dragons? The margin is the zone where categories, systems of relevance become deconstructed, where the power to dictate/control meaning becomes irrelevant (or threatens to become so), where power is questioned and no longer applies automatically or self-evidently. This linkage to the beyond is frightening and for this reason what lies beyond often gets relegated to the devil.

This is the case in *Paljas*—Katinka Heyns' recent acclaimed film (1997). It tells the story of the restoration of the marginal family of Hendrik McDonald. McDonald is in charge of an insignificant railway halt in the middle of nowhere. In the affections of his wife and children he is equally marginal, though he desperately tries to maintain his status by lording it in his back yard. He infuriates his daughter with his clumsy efforts to find her a boyfriend. The old love songs, like 'Somewhere in France with you' he hums along with, suggest a nostalgia for better times. For his wife no longer shares his bed and the family's marginality or abnormality is marked by the fact that his young son, Willem, can no longer speak.

By mistake a circus train gets stranded on this halt. The marvellous world of the circus, where a pierrot can waltz through the Karoo veld twirling his umbrella leading an elephant by his trunk, gives us the first inkling that things might change. In trying to maintain what power he has before the unconventional circus people, Hendrik strikes a very clownish figure himself. Yet the pierrot, with the highly significant name of Manuel, remains behind, and it is he that starts a process of healing by showing Willem the power of play, song and dance, imitation, masks, costume and make-believe.

After a quarrel between Hendrik and Katrien, Willem runs away to his friend, Manuel. Manuel sends him back, but the police has already been called, and they discover Willem's *toorgoed* in the barn—the things he conjures with. The police suspect *duiwelsaanbidding*, satanic rituals. When the broader society learns about it, the power of society, the dominee and the church is marshalled. This indicates how closely the marginal and the demonic are associated. In the confrontation between society and Manuel, 'that Beelzebub', as one of the instigators call him (Barnard 1998:73)<sup>2</sup>, is shot down as a scapegoat. Luckily, he is only wounded. But still, the power of art restores the frozen family relations, among other things by making Hendrik reveal that their exile to this small halt was a voluntary or self-marginalisation: he took the job, because he was jealous of his attractive wife. Willem begins to speak again and his sister resumes playing the piano.

<sup>2</sup> The actual film differs in some detail from the published script, but not in this case. In fact, the film is more explicit about the demonisation, for in the church scene Manuel is also referred to as 'duiwelskind'—son of the devil.

The film hinges on the meaning of *paljas* and *toor*. *Paljas* is a charm, a spell or a magic potion. *Toor* means both 'to conjure, to juggle', 'to charm, to enchant' and 'to bewitch'. White and black magic, art and the devil's art get confused. This place of limbo, of loss of status, loss of social integration is very aptly named *Toorwater*—Magic, Bewitching Waters. Willem's instruction into the magician's and clown's arts take place in the margin of the margin—in an old disused barn a little way removed from the station.

The transformative process is only complete after the family becomes fully demonised and is forced to leave the Volstruisdans, the biggest social event of the year. This leads them to realising their own humanity. 'I am Hendrik McDonald', McDonald says<sup>3</sup>, and his whole family follows him in this. Realising that they are Other, strange, but still human means that they can be reincorporated into society as the final party scene indicates. Only by proclaiming the marginal to be authentically human reincorporation becomes possible.

Clearly, as *Paljas* indicates, imitation, make-believe, play, magic, art form a liminoid zone—it subverts; it questions by its existence; it heals and recreates. This film—just like Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1997)—reveals the regenerative and recreative power of the comic vision. To be human is to realise your own strangeness and existence; your own alterity and identity. This again proves that the marginal is the authentically human.

The liminoid state is the state traditionally occupied by art and literature. The anti-structure of such liminoid states threatens the boundaries, so they have to be policed (by censorship, for example). And art, so it seems, can flower only in such marginal states—somewhat hidden, somewhat withdrawn from the public eye. The marginal is a zone of transformation and metamorphosis, of (re)creating and healing.

#### 4th note: The marginal and the semiosphere

In the first note I suggested that the metaphor of the written page problematises the notion of a centre. If society is to be conceived of as a bounded space, in what sense can we talk of its centre? Lotman's views (1990) on the semiosphere ties all the aspects of marginality that I touched on together in a grand (or totalising?) synthesis.

By analogy to the biosphere, Lotman proposes the idea of a semiosphere—'a universe of the mind'. He defines it as 'the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages' (1990:123).

As an example of the semiosphere he suggests that we (1990:126)

<sup>3</sup> These words are not in the script.



imagine a museum hall where exhibits from different periods are on display, along with inscriptions in known and unknown languages, and instructions for decoding them; besides these are the explanations composed by the museum staff, plans for tours and rules for the behaviour of the visitors. Imagine also in this hall tour-leaders and the visitors and imagine all this as a single mechanism (which *in a certain sense* it is). This is an image of the semiosphere. Then we have to remember that all elements are in dynamic, not static, correlations whose terms are constantly changing.

The whole magnificent synthesis of the semiosphere is constructed on only two basic principles—binarism (or duality), and asymmetry.

Asymmetry is clear in the relation between centre and periphery. The centre is formed by the natural languages of a particular culture as the organising core. The semiosphere is always organising itself by self description—for example, by writing grammars and codifying laws. Here a dialectics of organisation and flexibility is at work. What the semiosphere gains by self description are unity and definition; what it loses are indeterminacy, a capacity for more ‘information and potential for dynamic development’ (1990:128).

The semiosphere determines how I describe myself, what counts as a deed, what exists. That is why what is beyond the boundary of the semiosphere is unknown, and regarded as evil, demonised. In the centre the norms and life more or less coincide, but at the periphery the norms contradict the semiotic reality underlying it (Lotman 1990:129). That is why the margin, the boundary is a zone of recreation and reconstruction. ‘The area of semiotic dynamism’, Lotman (1990:134) calls it.

Lotman suggests that social space is primarily defined by the notion of a boundary, which he regards as ‘the outer limit of a first-person form’ (Lotman 1990:131). In other words, it stretches as far as my own, our, safe, cultured world stretches. Beyond that, the world is theirs, hostile, dangerous, evil, chaotic (Lotman 1990:131). Lotman thus locates the centre of society in personal perception, which, to his mind, also accounts for the asymmetry of perceived space.

This is so because a very important way in which social space is defined is with reference to the asymmetrical human body—it has asymmetrical dimensions like up/down, left/right, front/back, male/female. Space is organised into an inside and an outside with a boundary between, Lotman (1990:133) argues. The boundary is the zone where new languages come into being. One of his examples is the upsurge of marginal forms of culture—a very important recent one being cinematography. Lotman regards boundaries as ‘the hottest spots for semioticing processes’ (1990:136). The boundary is that which demarcates, unites, but also allows contact and interchange. It is the zone where self description starts failing. A boundary is ambivalent, since it both separates and unites. It is ‘a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into “our” language’ (1990:136)—a filtering membrane where the outside is translated

into what is internal. In short, its function is to 'control, filter and adapt the external into the internal' (1990:120).

Lotman (1990:140) points out that the design of human settlements mirror the semiosphere. The most important cultic and administrative buildings tend to be placed in the centre; 'less valued social groups are settled in the periphery'—as happened under the Group Areas Act.

This is not the only insight that Lotman gives us into the present situation in South Africa. A new centre is at present defining itself—being encoded in the constitution and laws. Because it is still not strong enough to cover the entire semiosphere, there are different marginal or liminal groups—status-less, place-less, who will plunder and pillage until they can be reincorporated into a new community.

One further element of Lotman's amazing synthesis is dialogue. He models his view on the interaction between mother and baby and thinks two processes can be distinguished—a sending phase in which the mother smiles at the baby and a pause (in which the baby receives the message) before it smiles back. In the semiosphere, he believes, the margin is a place of incessant dialogue between centre and periphery, and the sender tends to be in the centre and the receiver in the periphery. Lotman therefore surmises that there is a cyclical process in the development of cultures—periods of high intensity (sending) alternate with periods of low intensity—periods of receiving. The history of cultures thus forms a sinusoidal pattern.

It is in Lotman's sense that we today can perhaps characterise Afrikaans literature and culture as marginal. In the usual sense of the word it can be regarded as displaced from the centre. It has become demonised in many respects. But in the heightened dialogue with the new emerging centre it is pouring forth, sending out a volcano of texts (in Lotman's phrase). Just like Postcolonial literature and art are sending back, pouring out what has been has received and recoded, Afrikaans literature is writing back to the centre—trying to (re)capture it.

Again, what Lotman's view indicates is that to be really human one has to be marginal. That is, in dialogue across the many boundaries that transect the semiosphere—which, in the final analysis, is like the sun, seething with semiotic activity:

The semiosphere, the space of culture, is not something that acts according to mapped out and pre-calculated plans. It seethes like the sun, centres of activity boil up in different places, in the depths and on the surface, irradiating relatively peaceful areas with its immense energy. But unlike that of the sun, the energy of the semiosphere is the energy of information, the energy of Thought (1990:150).

Social space, in Lotman's view, is therefore not homogenous, but stratified and split by countless margins—and at each of them more information is created.

### 5th note: The marginal and the postcolonial

Lotman's analysis is grand and universal. Huge in scope it necessarily has to lose contact with local reality. Though it adds a number of arguments to the claim that the margin is a privileged site of semiotic activity, it doesn't offer much help with one of the problems of postcolonial times, viz. how to open up space for different cultures within a modern state without appropriating the other. Is it possible to conceptualise the field in a less asymmetric way? To not think in terms of centre and periphery? To think postcolonialism in a less oppositional way?

Of course, the picture of marginality that emerges from *Paljas* is over simplified, since real factors like race, nation and ethnicity are excluded. What does marginality become in a postcolonial context where these factors are in contention? Or rather, where marginality becomes a central site of innovation and critique?

Seshadri-Crooks (1995:59) argues that we can conceive of margin and marginality in two ways. The first is a spatial sense of the margin as a subject position—as 'the excluded other that must be coaxed into the centre through incorporation, inversion, hybridisation, revolution'. In this sense the margin is also a space of agitation, subversion, theoretical innovation that has become central in recent years. This sense of the margin also covers multiculturalism as 'marginality studies'—the effort to understand marginal cultures in their own right in order to restore to them their sense of authentic selfhood—to give them dignity and respect.

The second is 'margin as irreducible other—the condition for the production of our discourse (and all positive knowledge) that must be acknowledged as incommensurable and irrecoverable' (Seshadri-Crooks 1995:60). This second sense she traces back to Foucault: it is the margin as condition of possibility: the unthought and unsaid that makes positive knowing possible (Seshadri-Crooks 1995:60).

Seshadri-Crooks goes on to argue that these two definitions (the marginal as the excluded and as the limit) map out the 'realm of postcolonial scholarship' which is then duty bound to be self-critical of the enterprise of finding the final margin, the authoritative critical position and 'must rehearse continually the conditions for the production of its own discourse' (1995:66). The tension between the excluded and the limit seems to maintain the innovative power and the oppositional stance of Postcolonialism.

As discourse of the privileged margin Postcolonialism is inherently unstable, since a margin can have no centre, however much we desire it, and the metaphor of the margin continually disrupts the view of society (or intercultural relations) as homogeneous with layers and levels of margins. The idea of the authenticity and subversivity of the marginal position is contained by the fact that it is often a creation of global capitalism or of mimicry—miming the categories of the metropole. Even such an authentic marginal voice like Said's can only speak from a position from within the

metropole with the resources of the metropole (personal contacts, the New York Public Library) at his disposal.

## Conclusions

In my marginal notes I have traced the idea of the margin through different permutations. In Blum's view, as he mimics Voltaire, the margin contains the elements of the good life and is a site of freedom, fecundity and a point from which the world can be surveyed intellectually. The analysis of the metaphor of the margin has pointed out that it does not imply a centre, though, perhaps, we do need one. Marginal man, being on the fringes of society, contrasts with our accepted notions of the bounded and enclosed self. Unlike the magistrate in *Waiting for the barbarians* (Coetzee 1981), who discovers in himself the wish to be outside history and remains for ever in a state of waiting, a state of limbo, being marginal has recently become a privileged subject position, which the centre wants to incorporate into itself. Incorporation or appropriation, however, leads only to a misrecognition of the other—forcing the other into our own categories. Turner's views on the liminal and the liminoid opens the way to regard the margin as zone of contact and exchange and of ludic recombination and innovation. The marginal thereby becomes a zone of regeneration and of the authentically human, as the analysis of *Paljas* indicates. Lotman's views on the asymmetry of the semiosphere amply support the notion that the margin is a semiotic hot spot, a zone of transformation. At the same time he posits a plethora of margins, since he regards social space not as homogeneous, but as fissured by innumerable margins where semiotic activity can take place. In so doing, he makes everybody marginal in some sense.

Lotman's view of the long term sinusoidal cycles of cultures is much too idealistic to fit the present situation of Afrikaans intellectuals. At our own margins (real or perceived) we can only devise strategies of creating new information, like Spivak's (1988) strategy of the *subaltern* or Bhabha's of *mimicry*, *hybridity* or *sly civility* (resp. Bhabha 1994:88, 112, 93). We cannot get outside history and reach a point of total authority, but by a kind of double movement we could on the one hand accept the hegemonic, but on the other try to enter into dialogue with it, to use and subvert it—and by our interventions try to bring about a change in the configuration of the signifiers.

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