



Xin Liu

Trilling race

The political economy of racialised visual-aural encounters

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the matter of race in the context of Finnish language acquisition among adult migrants in Finland. Here matter denotes both the materiality of race and how race comes to matter. Drawing primarily on an auto/ethno/graphic account of learning the Finnish language as a participant in the Finnish for foreigners classes, this thesis problematises the ontology and epistemology of race, i.e., what race is, how it is known, and what an engagement with race entails. Taking cues from the bodily practices of learning the Finnish trill or the rolling r, this study proposes a notion of “trilling race” and argues for an onto-epistemological dis/continuity that marks race’s arrival. The notion of dis/continuity reworks the distinction between continuity and discontinuity, and asks about the *how* of the arrival of any identity, the *where*, and the *when*. In so doing, an analysis of “trilling race” engages with one of the major problematics that has exercised much critical attention, namely: how to read race *differently*. That is, to rethink the conundrum of the need to counter “representational weight” (Puar 2007, 191) of race on the one hand, and to account for the racialised lived realities on the other.

The link between a study of the phenomenon of host country language acquisition and an examination of the question of race is not as obvious as it might seem. For example, what does the argument that the process of language learning is racialised actually imply? Does it mean that race, as a process of racialisation or an ongoing configuration of sets of power relations, exerts force from an outside on the otherwise neutral process of learning the host country language? Or does it mean that race, as an identity category, presents as among the analytical perspectives, along with gender and class for instance, of the phenomenon of host country language acquisition?

With these questions in mind, and to foreground the examination of the question of race in the context of Finnish language acquisition among

adult migrants, this thesis opens with a discussion of the art installation *Finnexia* by Lisa Erdman. *Finnexia* is a fictitious drug said to facilitate Finnish language learning through accelerating the cognitive learning process and reducing the anxiety of speaking the Finnish language. Not only does the *Finnexia* installation make visible the ways in which the lack of skill in Finnish is figured as the threshold – a border that separates the inside from the outside – to integration, but also, and importantly, it raises questions about the nature of difference, and the process of differentiation that separates the individual from the social, fact from fiction, nature from culture. These puzzles animate much of the analysis in this dissertation. These concerns continue to be addressed in the rest of part one. Whereas chapter two offers a reconsideration of the ambiguities of *ethnisme/ethnicity* and race, chapter three dilates on the methodological implications of a conception of the *dis/continuity* of race. Part two focuses on the matter of race and examines the political economy of visual-aural encounters, whereas part three shifts the focus and rethinks the possibilities and limitations of transforming racialised and normative constraints. Taking up these particular problematics, this thesis as a whole argues that race trills itself: its identity/difference is simultaneously made possible and impossible.

Part one

Chapter One

Introduction



Are you married to a Finn, or do you have Finnish relatives? Learn the language faster and create stronger bonds with your family.

Afraid to join in on Finnish conversations? Finnexia boosts your confidence level, and helps you overcome social barriers.

Are you seeking employment in Finland? With its fast-acting formula, Finnexia gives you an edge in the job market.

Finnexia has helped many people obtain Finnish citizenship more quickly ... (and) many ethnically mixed families in Finland stay happy. Studies show that Finnexia can strengthen family bonds and prevent divorce and domestic conflict.

Finnexia.fi¹

Finnexia is a fictitious drug that features in an art installation. As I pass

¹

www.finnexia.fi. There is also a video advertisement for Finnexia on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB2D8NJE-88>. This video was played during the installation, and presented as a live commercial at the Helsinki railway station between 20 - 22 September 2012, last accessed 11, July 2015.

by the product display booth that is located in the busy central train station in Helsinki on 20 September 2012, the Finnexia poster catches my attention. Against the blue and white background, the poster reads “Finnexia – Learn Finnish *faster*”. The word “*faster*” is emphasised using an italicised and bold font. Is this a new course? I stop walking as I continue to read and move my body closer to the product display: “Finnexia is the first medication to help people learn the Finnish language. The Finnexia formula is a unique combination of cognitive enhancement, anxiety reduction, and speech therapy, all in one medication.”

What? Is this a joke? A medication for enhancing Finnish language learning? As a migrant in Finland who is trying to learn Finnish, and as a researcher interested in exploring the language learning process among adult migrants in Finland, I feel intrigued, confused, excited, suspicious and worried about the existence of such a product. Wondering about the incentives of this pharmaceutical research and production, I approach one of the organisers of the Finnexia advertising campaign. (I find out later that she, Lisa Erdman is in fact the artist behind the installation).² She assures me that Finnexia has gone through a clinical trial,³ and has proven to enhance and to accelerate the language learning process. She tells me, for example, that trials have shown a drastic reduction of learning hours from 200 hours to 25 hours, and that the drug has been proven to correct accents and lessen anxiety associated with language learning.

The live commercial for Finnexia attracts the attention of many passers-by. During the campaign, the organisers invite interested bypassers to sit together and to share their Finnish language learning experiences. If it proves difficult for some participants to speak about their experiences of learning the Finnish language, they are provided with a variety of pictures that express emotions such as joy and sadness

² This live commercial is the major part of Lisa Erdman's doctoral project. At the time I spoke with her (on 20 September 2012), she was conducting her Ph.D research at the Aalto University School of Arts in Finland. The doctoral project is titled *Satirical Medical Advertising as a Tool for Political Dialogue*, https://reseda.taik.fi/Taik/jsp/taik/Research.jsp?lang_global=en&id=32961462, last accessed 26 June 2015.

³ This conversation took place on the day (20 September 2012) I visited the live commercial presentation. At that point, I did not know Lisa was the artist.

and are asked to pick out one of the pictures that shows how they feel about learning Finnish. It is mostly migrants who are learning or wish to learn Finnish who participate in the conversations. Many of the participants also express their suspicion of and curiosity about the medication Finnexia. In spite of their mixed feelings towards Finnexia and its claimed “all-in-one” effect, participants seem to be comfortable, and even seem keen to share their experiences of learning the Finnish language with the organisers and other participants. The organisers are also interested in whether the participants would actually consider taking the medications.

During my visit to the campaign that day, I speak with two other participants regarding Finnish language learning and their perception of the medication. Both of them express disappointment that they cannot speak Finnish fluently despite their various attempts to learn the language. However, neither of them considers taking a medication, such as Finnexia, for learning Finnish. One of the participants is still optimistic about the possibility of learning the Finnish language, just as he would learn any other foreign language. While he does not seem to doubt the claimed efficacy of the drug, he would rather learn Finnish the hard way than take a shortcut enabled by the medication. For him, learning Finnish, though difficult, remains an individual undertaking. Interestingly, there are others who are eager to purchase the medicine at the event at which the product is launched.⁴

As an immigrant language learner and as a researcher on issues related to language learning and integration, I feel at once curious, suspicious, and critical about the actual workings of the drug, especially its claimed efficacy. Despite my mixed feeling towards the advertised medicine, the event is surprisingly pleasant, and makes one feel somewhat hopeful.⁵ In the busy central station of Helsinki, many passers-by stop to speculate on the product exhibit booth. Some of them express concerns about Finnexia, others curiously observe the unfolding event, and still others participate in the discussion mediated by the event organisers. In a sense then, the installation provides the space for sharing experiences of learning the

⁴ I spoke with the artist Lisa Erdman again on 12.10.2012 at Aalto University, Helsinki. She told me that there were some people who saw the live commercial at the Helsinki railway station, and went to the local pharmacy to purchase Finnexia.

⁵ An observer of the event comments that it makes one feel hopeful. <http://newshub.fi/archives/919>, last accessed on 20 September 2012.

Finnish language.

What interests me most is the ways in which the advertisement for Finnexia succinctly captures the ways in which the lack of Finnish language skills is considered to lie at the root of all integration problems, such as difficulties in bonding with family, making friends or finding a job. Although the claimed effect of Finnexia seems to be primarily biological, that is to “activate specific neuroreceptors involved with the acquisition of Finno-Ugric languages”, thus (“reducing classroom hours from 200 to 25, an 88% reduction of effort”),⁶ the advertisement accentuates its potential social impact. That is, it seems to say that *as soon as* the Finnish language is learned, other issues such as familial and social relations, claims to certain rights and to citizenship, as well as financial stability are readily resolved.

Inadequate Finnish language proficiency is often presented as the major hindrance for the path to integration, especially in terms of cultural and labour market integration. For example, in their study which focuses on labour market integration in Finland, Elli Heikkilä and Selene Peltonen point out that “For the employment authorities, prejudices among employers are the major impediment to the recruitment of immigrants. ... [T]he prejudices are caused by fears, language problems and different customs, whereas the attitudes are not affected by religion, colour of skin or the need for supervision” (2002, 6). This observation also sheds light on the ways in which levels of language proficiency can be used to justify labour market discrimination. In other words, insofar as the issue of language skills seems to be a practical and neutral one, the structure of the labour market as well as employment practices are not considered to be racialised and racialising.

One can glean from the remedy of Finnexia three discrete but interrelated components of the capacity of Finnish language learning. The description reads: “The Finnexia formula offers a unique combination of cognitive enhancement, anxiety reduction and speech therapy, all in one medication”.⁷ The first aspect hints at an ability to learn language efficiently, understood as for example the cognitive skills required for

⁶ Finnexia homepage, last accessed 28 June 2015, <http://www.finnexia.fi/how-finnexia-works.html>.

⁷ Finnexia homepage, <http://www.finnexia.fi/how-finnexia-works.html>, last accessed 28 June 2015.

memorizing vocabularies (memory), understanding grammar (comprehension skills) and making sense of others' speech (listening skills). As is made explicit in the product website, the cognitive enhancement is achieved through stimulating "the neural pathways that aid in cognitive processes, memory, and speech comprehension".⁸ The second component is an affective one. Anxiety is depicted as pathological, a bad feeling that impedes the language learning process. Thus, language learners should manage and convert bad feelings such as anxiety and disease into good ones. The last component concerns speech production. Intelligible utterance is often considered as crucial for a meaningful communication. The capacity for Finnish language therefore (though not exclusively) ideally entails native-like pronunciation. The formula of Finnexia also echoes the common perception that the process of learning the Finnish language ultimately comes down to individual language learners' will to learn. In other words, an individual's ability to learn efficiently, to speak native-like Finnish and to manage anxiety is the prime indicator for her or his capacity for integration.

"Finnexia – Linguocitine 40mg, Fast-acting Finnish Language Enhancer"

The 40mg linguocitine is said to effectively enhance Finnish learning practices. Just as the advertising campaign repeatedly emphasises, Finnexia claims to be an "all in one medication". The linguocitine is said to be primarily composed of an Alpha-7 nicotine acetylcholine receptor agonist that modulates post-tic Alpha-7 receptors in the prefrontal cortex thus stimulating the exchange of calcium ions (ca+) across neuron membranes – in other words, it accelerates the traffic of the synaptic communication between two neurons or between a neuron and a muscle. The artist Lisa Erdman has worked as a graphic designer in the pharmaceutical industry and is familiar with the ways in which the structure, function and operation of neurobiology is visually presented to lay viewers. The Finnexia commercial played during the advertising campaign visualises – through mapping, localizing and identifying – the *place* of Finnish language acquisition.⁹ And yet, as Rose and Abi-Rached

⁸ Finnexia homepage, <http://www.finnexia.fi/how-finnexia-works.html>, last accessed 28 June 2015.

⁹ The ways in which neurobiology has shifted from its association with science fiction to

remind us, the possibility of rendering something visible, such as the neurobiological workings of language acquisition, is conditioned upon “the whole configuration by means of which a certain way of seeing becomes possible and can be articulated” (2013, 55). Such a configuration is the epistemological framework that provides “bands of visibility and fields of readability” (Deleuze [1986] 2006, 41). Presenting the fictitious drug Finnexia as the remedy for inefficient Finnish language acquisition that is localizable and identifiable in individual bodies, is not only conditioned upon the visualization of neurobiology in academic and popular presentations of neuroscience, as well as the development of, and investment in, neurotechnologies, but also on the ways in which deficient Finnish language skills of individual migrants is depicted as pathological and causes trouble for the welfare state, for education policy, as well as for the labour market. Importantly, the live commercial of Finnexia performatively enacts the visual imagery of a form of sociality (in the form of neurobiological communication) under the skin. In so doing, it also renders the supposedly isolated individual language learning process identifiable as a shared social-neurobiological experience. In view of this, the live commercial presentation of the fictitious drug Finnexia effectively confounds the distinction between individual and social, fact and fiction.

In an attempt to explore the relation between cultural integration through language learning in Finnish society and contemporary pill-popping culture, the artist Lisa Erdman (unpublished manuscript) stages a series of product launching events through the utilization of visual apparatuses such as an animated 3D image, a live commercial performance (featuring both salespersons and a product display booth) and other online advertising strategies (an official product website, a Youtube video, and a product Facebook page). The public space for the product launching theatrical performance includes the central train station in Helsinki and the city library conference room for the

the real-ization of the “economies of the brain” (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013,16) in the management of everyday life is highly interesting and could be read in line with the more broader question of the how of realization, and the process of visualizing as localizing. For example, Rose and Abi-Rached notes, “visual imaginary provided by various technologies has been one pathway along which neuroscience has been able to move out of the laboratory and into the territory of everyday life, and to play in the role in the management of normal and problematic conduct” (2013, 55).

subsequent individual and group interviews. Together, these two spaces compose what Erdman refers to as the discursive and reflective place, in which we function as both actors and audiences of the performance. Moreover, this space also operates as a discursive space from which ensues “dialogue concerning cultural integration ... stories and experiences as a foreigner living in Finland (through) displaying anxiety towards the political policies that affect our lives” (Erdman unpublished manuscript).

Erdman states that her aim with the art work is two-fold. On the one hand, in borrowing medical vocabularies and crafting a facade through for example specifying “the drug’s mechanism of action developing an animated visualization” (Erdman unpublished manuscript), the project stages a simulacrum that infiltrates the current over-medicalised social norms, thus enabling reflexivity and “questioning the validity of knowledge and authority of our situation and in doing so, questioning the validity of knowledge and authority presented to us through advertising and medicine” (Erdman unpublished manuscript). On the other hand, the public spaces used for the marketing and launch of the product enable public conversations on issues related to Finnish language learning, cultural integration and immigration in Finland.

It is the second aim of the artistic project that is of particular relevance to my concerns here. The enticement in the advertisement for “Finnexia” lies in its suggestion that there is a correlation between efficiency in learning Finnish (read as a capacity) and one’s well-being in private and public sphere. Implicitly, one’s insufficient skill in the Finnish language is configured as the crux of “migration problems” either in the form of communication breakdowns that threaten both intimate and social bonds, or of linguistic incompetence that makes unattainable financial stability or claims to citizenship. Moreover, this advertisement gains resonance through the citation of some well-rehearsed discourses regarding the (in)capacity of language learners to use the host country language in public and political debates, policy making, academic writing or among language learning and education practitioners.

As the Finnish Immigration Service (“Muuttovirasto” in Finnish; Migrationsverket” in Swedish)¹⁰ clearly states, language skills in Finnish

¹⁰ Among the Nordic countries, Sweden and Iceland are the only two countries that do not have requirements for the language skills for application of Swedish and Icelandic

or Finland Swedish is one of the major requirements for Finnish citizenship application. One of the most common ways for one to prove one's language skill is to complete the National Certificate of Language Proficiency at skill level 3 of any of the following subtests: (1) speaking and writing; (2) listening comprehension and writing; (3) reading comprehension and speaking. One cannot choose any other combinations than these three subsets; for example, one could not combine speaking and listening or writing and reading comprehension. If one has achieved skill level 3 on any other combinations than the three mentioned here, the certificate "is not acceptable for proving language skill".¹¹

The focus on language training in Finnish integration law is also embedded in the European framework of integration, wherein each European member state is subjected to a general benchmarking (Sergio 2006). That is to say the integration programs in most European member states have in common the focus on language training and labour market oriented practices. Although the actual planning and implementation varies from country to country, we see the ways in which European member states compare with and take cues from each other's integration policies and practices. For example, the Finnish integration law enacted on 01.09.2011 drew inspiration from Sweden's 2009 Labor Market Act. The "Nuvia Manifest" proposal put forth in 2010 by True Finns party explicitly advocates the shift away from Swedish influenced integration and immigration policy to a Danish model, which involves for example a points-based system for family reunion, in which explicitly high and unrealistic language requirements are set on the part of the family reunion sponsor.¹² It should be noted here in the passing, as this relates to the ways in which the question of language is central to the Finnish political landscape and is relevant to the general discussion here, that in the case of the Finland Swedish language, the other official language in Finland, in their manifesto the True Finns party propose to end the compulsory tuition of Swedish and to cut down the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle's (YLE) broadcasts in Swedish.¹³ Given

citizenship respectively.

¹¹ http://www.migri.fi/finnish_citizenship/applying_for_citizenship/requirements/language_skills/national_foreign_language_certificate, last accessed 20 January 2015.

¹² <http://www.mipex.eu/blog/finland-studies-neighbours-policies-to-limit-familyreunions>, last accessed 28 June 2015.

¹³ http://yle.fi/uutiset/true_finns_publish_election_manifesto/5087425, last accessed 28

the limited space and the particular focus of the dissertation, although I cannot provide a thorough analysis of the evolving Finnish and EU political debates around language policy in relation to the problematics of integration, I want to underscore the pivotal relevance of the current political and economic climate in Europe, such as the EU's austerity measures and discourse on security, as the wider backdrop against which this project takes place.

"To speak is never neutral", as feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (2002) reminds us. Language acquisition, and especially in this case, host country language acquisition, is a phenomenon embedded in and constitutes the racialised political economy of the postcolonial and "global divisions of labour (economic, intellectual, and cultural representational)" (Chow 2014, 17). An example is useful here. In Sally Boyd's and Leena Huss' (2004) study on the history of national language policy in Sweden, they point out the ways in which the mother tongue is constructed in relation to the policy on home language education, the economic climate, and the ultimate goal of reproducing Swedish-speaking-abled bodies (even though this is not exactly the phrase they used). Boyd's and Huss' observation is worth citing at length here.

The decision to provide home language instruction was based on the belief, supported by research, that children who had a firm grounding in their mother tongue were more successful in learning a second language. The home language was mainly viewed as a means to an end, the end being successful learning of Swedish as a second language. ... At the beginning of the 1990's, when there was a severe economic downturn for Sweden, and the municipalities no longer received special funds for home language instruction or for instruction in Swedish as a second language, there was a general shift in emphasis from the "home languages" to Swedish as a second language. There seemed to be a general feeling that Sweden no longer could afford to support both. The earlier argument of the mother tongue as a means to successful bilingualism was no longer repeated. ... In the late 1990's, home language instruction was renamed "mother tongue instruction", but this name change was accompanied by a further deterioration of the condition of provision of the instruction: now the pupils had to choose one mother tongue: Swedish or another language. (2004, 844-845)

In the Finnish context, the integration training program, which provides financial assistance to immigrants who are admitted to the program of an equivalent value to the labour market subsidy for unemployed workers,¹⁴ organises language training courses primarily if not exclusively in Finnish.¹⁵ Another specificity of the Finnish context in terms of the requirement for Finnish language skill is the emphasis on its urgency for integration. For example, in Yle's report in 2011 on the then coming-into-force of the law on the integration training program, the enactment of the new integration law is said to assist to "integrate immigrants *more quickly* into Finnish society". And the report quotes Finnish Minister of Labour Lauri Ihalainen's comment: "It's time to aim for a future in which immigrants who have lived in Finland *for a long time* can show off their skills and contribute to the common good".¹⁶ The emphasis here is on the need for immigrants to find directions and modes of living in Finland. Related to this assertion, Minister Lauri Ihalainen also laid specific emphasis on the need to focus on language training as follows: "many immigrants have been caught in a vicious circle where poor language skills have become an obstacle for gaining a foothold in the job market. But the workplace is where such new language skills are put to use."¹⁷ It follows then that the lack of Finnish skill is conceived of as the major hindrance that prevents (certain rather than other) immigrants from contributing to the host society through participation in, and thus integration into, the labour market in particular. And yet, engaging in Finnish conversations at a workplace or working in Finnish is

¹⁴ <http://www.amiedu.fi/english/individual-customers/immigrant-integration-training>, last accessed 10 January 2015.

¹⁵ For example, in a recent news report in Huvudstadsbladet, a major Swedish language newspaper in Finland, the issue regarding the difficulty in learning Swedish for integration training in the capital region was highlighted. It was said that in the capital region not only is it difficult to acquire information regarding the integration program in Swedish, but when a few immigrants' request to study Swedish rather than Finnish as part of their integration training this was directly rejected. Through As a result of media exposure, it seems like as if their request to study Swedish for the integration program has finally been met. However, we should note the political economy of Finnish and Swedish, two official languages of Finland. See the report in Swedish also at <http://www.abounderrattelser.fi/news/2014/09/hbl-invandrare-far-inte-lara-sig-svenska.html>, last accessed 28 June 2015.

¹⁶ http://yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/09/law_enacted_to_improve_immigrant_integration_2838631.html, last accessed 28 June 2015.

¹⁷ http://yle.fi/uutiset/law_enacted_to_improve_immigrant_integration/5416694, last accessed 28 June 2015.

among the most efficient ways to practice the Finnish language. In view of this, it seems that many migrants are caught within the vicious circle of poor language skills and unemployment. The link between language skills and employment opportunities seems to comfortably elide other issues at stake. Salla Tuori (2009) has also observed a similar circuitous pattern in her study on the empowerment and integration project for immigrant women in Finland. Tuori suggests that in the Finnish public discussion, the language skill of migrants is addressed as both a problem of, and a solution to integration. As such, it disguises the racialised and gendered structuring of the Finnish labour market, "as if other issues only become relevant once everybody who has migrated to Finland speaks Finnish fluently" (2009, 106).

The dissertation project at hand, titled "'Trilling Race: The Political Economy of Racialised Visual-Aural Encounters'", performs onto-epistemological explorations of race and investigates the matter of race (i.e. how race matters) in the context of Finnish language acquisition among adult migrants in Finland. Before proceeding, a brief clarification of what I mean by onto-epistemology is in order. Typically, ontology is understood as the study of what is, whereas epistemology refers to how it is known, that is a question of knowledge. By the term onto-epistemology I mean to challenge the separation of ontology from epistemology. I follow Vicki Kirby's conceptualization that "Perception is ... likened to an ontological organ of *conception*. ... The doubled sense of conception that couples knowledge with birth, epistemology emerging as the entanglement of ontology" (2011, 120, emphasis in original).

Having clarified this, I will proceed to lay bare the context of the investigation at hand. Host country language acquisition is a highly charged issue in debates on integration and immigration policy in Finland in particular, and in Europe in general. For example, in October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the attempt to build a multicultural society in Germany had *utterly* failed. The German multicultural approach, according to Merkel, was to live side by side and be happy about each other. But that ideal was based on an expectation that "they" (the migrant workers) would one day leave. "We lied to ourselves", said Merkel, "immigrants should be integrated rather than accommodated and must learn German".¹⁸ Two layers of meaning are

¹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany->

embedded in the adverb “utterly”. On the one hand, “utterly” means absolutely, and completely, stressing the unhappy and hopeless future of multiculturalism, and thus the unthinkable and uninhabitable multicultural society. On the other hand, the word “utterly” hints that language deficiency is at the crux of immigration problems, due to the insufficient requirements for immigrants to learn (“good enough”) German.¹⁹ This declaration has been described as a “crisis” in happiness through a narrative of disappointment (cf. Ahmed 2010), which was evident in Merkel’s statement that “we lied to ourselves”. As an alternative, the integration approach was hailed as the only promising path to a harmonious society. The lack of language proficiency on the part of the immigrants was interpreted as an unwillingness to adapt to the host society. The capacity to learn the host country language is often conceived of in terms of linguistic capital that functions as criteria for integration. The heightened saliency of language acquisition in the integration and immigration context not only provides the backdrop against which my meditation on the question of race is set, but also sheds light on the transmogrified re-appearance and re-ascendancy of whiteness understood as “capacity for capacity” (cf. Puar 2007, 199).

For Puar (2009), as for Chow (2006), the term “capacity for capacity” hints at the regeneration of whiteness, or what Chow terms as “the ascendancy of whiteness” (2002, 3). Here whiteness is not simply the visible phenotypical identifications such as skin colour, but morphs into a capacity, an exceptional condition that is capable of regeneration or reproduction; it is “the capacity to give life, sustain life, promote life – the registers of fertility, health, environmental sustainability, and the capacity to risk” (Puar 2009, 200). In other words, whiteness is the hierarchical power relations, a patternment, that is capable of maintaining and reproducing itself. In light of this, we could consider that for example the ways in which Finnish language acquisition among would-be integrated migrants is institutionally supported and required as opposed to its Swedish counterpart is not only to generate certain language-abled bodies and speaking subjects over others, but also to sustain the asymmetrical power dynamics within the linguistic landscape of the

multiculturalism-failures, last accessed 28 June 2015.

¹⁹ The news is available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451>, last accessed 19 July 2015.

nation. Foregrounding the mechanism through which the capacity for capacity is produced is the distinction drawn between life and death, between continuity and discontinuity, wherein the future is understood as an extension of the present (cf. Glezos 2012) that is a pre-emptive paranoid futurity embedded in the risk economy (Puar 2007, xx).

The distinction between continuity and discontinuity is a question that will be examined from various perspectives throughout the whole dissertation, because it informs the very question of race and the political economy through which it takes shape. It suffices here to note that the phrase in the title of the dissertation “trilling race” hints at the problematic of the dis/continuity of race becoming (its other). The trill, and more specifically, the alveolar trill of the Finnish rolling r, is a pronunciation that consists “a series of very rapid tap-like closures” (Ashby and Maidment 2007, 59) between active articulators such as the tongue and passive articulators such as the throat. The tapping of the tongue tip, and closure between the active and the passive articulators, also enables the vocal folds to vibrate, a phenomenon called voiced articulation in phonetic terms. According to Ashby and Maidment, in voiced articulation such as the alveolar trill, “[t]he rapid vibration of the folds can be felt with fingertips to the neck on the outside of the larynx” (2007, 23). In passing, it would be helpful to take a brief look at the workings of the trill, with a particular focus on the closure between the active and the passive articulators.

In phonetic studies, the closure is considered to be enabled by the coordination of the two vocal folds. The vocal folds are placed in the cartilages and adjacent to each other. Constituted of epithelial tissues with a few thyroartenoid muscles (that relaxes the vocal fold), they have the appearance of the lips. When the vocal folds are open, which is necessary for our breathing, a gap appears between the folds, called the glottis. In order for the vocal folds to vibrate, the vocal folds are closed together, and the gap/glottis disappears. Ashby’s and Maidment’s description of such an operation provides a vivid illustration of the operation of the vocal folds:

The series of events for one complete cycle of vibration of the vocal folds is as follows: First the vocal folds are together, and stop the airflow; air from beneath pushes up between the folds, forcing them apart near the middle; a burst of air flows through, but this begins to be

cut off as the folds recoil back to the closed position; as the opening gets smaller, the rapid airflow through the narrowing gap leads to suction which helps to complete the closure rapidly and effectively; once the folds are closed completely, the cycle of vibration begins again, and the folds are once again forced open. (2007, 24)

The pronunciation of the alveolar trill is thus the process of closure that blocks the air flow, of active tapping of the tongue tip and of making the vocal folds vibrate, that is also the vibration of air. This blockage of air probably explains the breathless feeling I get every time when I try to pronounce the rolling r. Interestingly, the continuity of the pronunciation of the trill, integral to the pronunciation of a word, a sentence, entails the disruption of the smooth air flow, because of blockage and vibration. It should be noted that this disruption of air flow and breathing does not mean that breathing is simply originally continuous, that then becomes disturbed and made discontinuous. This is because the air flow, essential for the breathing practices, is generated through the complex network of openings and closures in the process of inhaling and exhaling. Furthermore, the continuity of a trill itself, that is, the complete circle of the vibration of the vocal folds, consists of discontinuous taps of the tongue, however minimal the interval of each tap and the vibration of the vocal folds. It is in this sense that trilling is a phenomenon of dis/continuity, in which not only the discontinuous vibration and tapping are intrinsic to the continuity of the entirety of the trilling pronunciation itself, but also the closure of vocal folds marks the cutting, discontinuity at and of its inception.

In view of this, I want to explain that the phrase “trilling race” is not meant to simply join together the question of race and a study of the phenomenon of host country language acquisition. The link between these two concerns is not as obvious as it might seem. One might ask whether trilling race is another way of saying the ways in which the process of language learning is racialised. Although this certainly could be one of my arguments, with the term trilling race, I mean to suggest a dis/continuous rethinking – a trilling – of what one means by the notion that the process of language learning is racialised. This has been a question that has troubled me since the start of my dissertation project. Does it mean that race, seen as a process of racialisation, involves a power dynamic that exerts force from the outside on an otherwise neutral

process of learning the host country language? Or does it mean that race, as an identity category, presents as among the analytical perspectives, along with gender and class for example, of the phenomenon of host country language acquisition? If one concedes to the view that race is a representation, a discursive effect, then does it mean that the language learning process is itself the process through which race becomes? Whereas the first two questions assume that race and language learning are two separate processes, affected by or analysed through each other, the last question starts to muddle this separation and forge an emphasis on and an investigation of the nature of language learning and race. And yet, the phrase *trilling race* means to open up these concerns even more, so much so that it might be possible to say yes to all these concerns at the same time as their underlying premises are interrogated and destabilised .

Rather than simply asking how host country language acquisition is racialised, I begin by rethinking the questions of race and ethnicity which are often approached in terms of terminological or contextual appropriateness, as in, for example, the European versus the American context (cf. El-Tayeb 2011). The task in the first part of chapter two is thus to examine and to linger over the ambiguities and contradictions of these terms, in order to tease out the question of language (acquisition) that plays a pivotal role in the debate about race and ethnicity. It begins with an examination of Ferdinand de Saussure's conceptualisation of *ethnisme/ethnicity* in postcoloniality. In lingering over the tensions in Saussure's account of *ethnisme/ethnicity*, understood as linguistic communities that are not determined by racial or biological differences, this chapter sheds light on the complexity of the question of identity/difference as well as the nature/culture conundrum. It thus paves the way for the exploration of human race and racial differences in the rest of the chapter. My main arguments in this chapter are the following. First, the dis/continuity of race suggests that the view of race as an essence is not simply opposed to, because fundamentally different from a performative account of race. Rather, these propositions are more paradoxical and complicitous than straightforwardly exclusive or oppositional. Second, and consistent with the first proposition, the dis/continuity of race requires a reconsideration, rather than a simple refutation or affirmation of the question of the human. Following Kirby's

(2011) theorisation of “originary humanicity”, I argue for a conception of race that acknowledges the co-implicated and co-distinguished specificity and universality, discontinuity and continuity, difference and identity.

Chapter three extends the meditation on the dis/continuity of race to consider its methodological implications. Two issues have often been raised and discussed in research concerned with race and ethnicity. First, where and when should the investigation begin, so that certain forms of “racial thinking” (Gunaratnam 2003, 5) are not reproduced, and that new modalities of subjection and transformation could be opened up and improvised (Moten 2003; Weheliye 2014), rather than decided in advance, and henceforth fixed and reified. Second, how to reconcile the tension between poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches that understand race as a discursive effect and the need for the analysis to be “grounded” (Gunaratnam 2003) and to acquire “weight” (Wright 2015) so that it accounts for the ways in which social categories such as race are experienced as lived realities. Chapter three attends to these concerns through explicating the ways in which the conception of the onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race informs the auto/ethno/graphic (see Ahmed 1998) writing of the thesis, as well as how difference and identity categories are conceived of and engaged with in this dissertation.

Closely tied to discussions in part one, part two turns the focus to the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters. It is generally conceded that in everyday encounters, race is predominantly “translated into visual phenomena” (Weheliye 2014, 5) enabled but constrained by “historical-racial schema” (Fanon [1952]2008, 84). In this line of thinking, the modalities of the visual perception of race is always and already a mediated effect, embedded in the chain of signification. Puzzled over the *how* of visual perception as racial signification, chapter four examines the question of the visual within the parameters of the Saussurean sign. Following from this, chapter five situates the discussion in the context of host country language acquisition with a particular focus on the means of breaking open and moving beyond the confinement of the racialised visual episteme in critical engagements with the question of race. Drawing on and honing in on the practices of learning the Finnish trill, chapter six is focused on the psychic life of the trilling tongue. Taken together, part two argues for a notion of trilling race, that witnesses a “corporeography” (Kirby 1997) wherein visibility as aurality as tactility is

“utterly referential” (Kirby 2011, 124). In view of this, I argue that we should not, and in fact cannot simply move beyond the visual, invested in the hope of breaking the confinement of signification or racialised epistemological knowing. Furthermore, the analysis of tonguing tongued encounters and the psychic life of the trilling tongue suggests that bodies racialise themselves, or that racialisation only happens by and through the body. Such a “bodily complicity” (Hinton 2007, 225) as the general process of valuation and weighing also means that difference is intrinsic and change is constant.

Part three continues the engagement with the problematic of racial transformation from two different, but inter-related themes. In chapter seven, the transformative potential of polyglots’ accents and cyborgs’ noises are reconsidered, whereas in chapter eight, the setting of the discussion shifts slightly from the bodily practices of speaking to singing the Finnish national anthem in the host country languages – Finnish and Swedish. Taken together, in accordance with the notion of onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race, both chapters attend to different aspects of the conundrum of identity/difference, whole/part, universality/specificity and the issue of normative anticipation and transgression. The major arguments of this part are the following. First, the apparent division between identity and difference, universality and specificity is not an inevitable impasse, but is symptomatic of the complex nature of difference that incessantly punctuates itself *despite and because of* its own breaking apart.²⁰ This means that the polyvocalities and multiplicities of polyglots’ accents and cyborgs’ noises need not, and cannot, dispense with the wholeness of mother tongue, because each is constituted through, with and as the other. This reconfiguration assists to navigate through some of dilemmas in critical engagements with for example issues of identity politics. Second, and in a sense connected to all

²⁰ Here I use the term “punctuate” deliberately, for it relates to a form of spacing and cutting that is featured in various parts of the thesis. I take cues from Jacques Derrida’s contemplation on the word “punctuation”. For example, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes “The relationship between passivity and difference cannot be distinguished from the relationship between the fundamental *unconsciousness* of language (as rootedness within the language) and the *spacing* (pause, blank, punctuation, interval in general, etc.) which constitutes the origin of signification. ... *Spacing* (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space) is always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious” ([1976] 1997, 68, emphasis in original).

the arguments in the thesis, I suggest that the radical political and ethical implications of the account of onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race is that in the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters, any critical engagements and contestations, necessarily reinstall the hierarchical racial positionings even as they bring forth the most vehement assault. In other words, there is no simple overturning of and moving beyond the problematics of race. Instead, taking into account and giving an account of the how, where and when of the location of race is the most pressing concern for a responsible feminist political and ethical practice of knowledge production.

Much of my discussion in the thesis concerns the question of stereotypes as expressions of racial prejudice (see Appiah 1990). Following Chow, I understand a stereotype “as a representational device ... [a] normative practice” (2002, 54). For Chow, approaching stereotypes in terms of social and political norms that manifest as aesthetic representations opens up the possibility to consider the ways in which they fix racialised bodies in place, and to examine “the assumptions that support such attributions” (2002, 67). Importantly however, Chow also reminds us that stereotypes are inevitable. This is because any counter argument that aims to correct or eliminate stereotypes, must make recourse to, and thus re-substantiate, the very stereotypes one repudiates. This attests to a “performative contradiction” (Butler 1999, 116) that operates in modalities of racial formation that will be engaged with further at a later point in the thesis. Following a notion of power as productive, Chow notes that instead of being simply false, exaggerated and reductive representations, stereotypes are also enabling. My engagement with stereotypes here, especially with the question of accents, focuses on the problematics of how to break through and transform the racialising epistemological confinement. Put simply, I am interested in how to think about the question of race differently.

This thesis joins forces with postcolonial critiques of difference and feminist (new) materialist framing of the nature/culture question. I am aware of current discussions regarding the discrepancies, tensions, and power dynamics between the two fields of study (it is in fact difficult to pin down clear-cut theoretical paradigms, but it should be mentioned that the debates on the relation between feminist post-structuralism and postcolonial theory as well as feminist post-structuralism and feminist

(new) materialisms are integral to the discussions at hand).²¹ I want to clarify here that the thesis does not simply add a postcolonial framework to that of feminist (new) materialisms. Rather, I hope to contribute to this debate by way of the specific engagement with the matter of race through an analysis of the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters.

²¹ For an interesting reading of the relation between poststructuralism and postcoloniality, see Jane Hiddleston's (2010) analysis. In particular, I find Hiddleston's reading regarding ethics and the anxiety of theory rather most informative. According to Hiddleston, "The interaction between poststructuralism and postcoloniality has at its core the impetus to conceptualise the other of the West, to understand oppressed cultural differences as they manifest themselves at the waning of old forms of empire and as neo-imperialist discourses, structures and activities are nevertheless perpetuated. Poststructuralism theorises the discursive traps and lures of Western philosophy, and its development in the postcolonial arena leads to a questioning of our understanding of alterity and of the representation of subaltern subjects dominated not only by Western discourse but also by associated material forces of subjugation. ... Poststructuralist postcolonial thinkers combine a reflection on cultural difference in the postcolonial era ... with the self-consciousness of deconstructive practice, and as a result they perform the tense and irresolute dynamic between postcolonial ethics and necessary introspection or anxiety" (2010, 17). Needless to say, this anxiety between various theoretical paradigms are these anxieties about various theoretical paradigms are an integral part of the discussion at hand. But I would also argue that rather than considering the anxiety as positing "an ambivalence that rocks the foundation of theory" (Hiddleston 2010, 17) and thus is in needs to be resolved, these ambiguities, which are even perhaps even a form of neurosis, could and should also be considered as what animates theories.

Chapter Two

Situating the Subject: The Matter of Race

Race and Ethnicity

In his essay “The Conservation of Races”, published in 1897, W. E. B. Du Bois writes that race is “a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses” (Du Bois [1897] 2014, 285). Interestingly, this formulation of race encapsulates the nature/culture connotations found in current theorisations of race and ethnicity. At a general level, the notion of race is often associated with systems of human classification foregrounded in biological features that are “present in every human being at birth and in virtue of which groups of humans are distinguishable from one another” (Spelman 1999, 202). Moreover, racial identifications are said to determine “the expectations of fixed social roles” (Osborne and Sandford 2002, 3) as well as hierarchical subject positions.

By comparison, the term ethnicity underscores the socially and culturally constructed nature of race. As Peter Osborne and Stella Sandford note, “the contemporary articulation of ethnicity – or ethnicities – is coincident with a shift in attention from the ‘in-itself’ of the object of study to the domain of representation, such that the construction of ethnicities is encountered as an epistemological, rather than an anthropological problem” (2002, 5). Based in the increasing emphasis on the “broadly cultural (historico-political) and existential determinants of identities and subjectivities” (Osborne and Sandford 2002, 5), the concept of ethnicity has been used as a means to avoid the risk of “replicating the residue biologism”, by placing the interrogation squarely “within culture and representation” (Chow 2002, 24). This move is understandable, given that the use of the term race often seems to evoke considerable anxiety. As Linda Martín Alcoff points out, by virtue of “the practices of racialising identity developed within the greatest period of colonialism and genocide the world has ever known, anti-racists have been understandably sceptical about the possibility of racial identity co-

existing alongside equality and justice" (2002, 20).

Nevertheless, the distinction between race and ethnicity is not as straightforward as it might seem. Étienne Balibar, for one, argues that while it may appear to be "the most natural of origins" (1991, 96), ethnicity is just as fictive as the notion of race, and is produced or made possible through "two great competing routes" (96), these being "language acquisition (an open, inclusive process) and racial grouping (a closed, exclusive process)" (Chow 2002, 24). Indeed, as many commentators have pointed out, the relationship between race and ethnicity is less a matter of terminological shift than of mutual supplementation and complication. For example, following a Marxian configuration of ethnicity (Chow 2002), Fatima El-Tayeb observes that in the context of post-war labour migration in continental Europe, ethnicity – a process of ethnicisation – does not displace race with "a neutral, precise, and nonbinary terminology of largely objectifiable regional difference" (2011, xiii), but rather "closely interact[s] and overlap[s] with longer-term, in part precapitalist processes of racialization" (xiv). In other words, race morphs into ethnicity (see Koshy 2011; Chow 2002), understood as "racialised culture difference" (El-Tayeb 2011, xv). As El-Tayeb notes, it is through racialised cultural essence or difference that "minority populations often originating in migrations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East continue to be differentiated from 'real' Europeans", a process which in turn "reference[s] supposedly innate, visible, unchangeable differences from what the popular imagination considers to be European" (2011, xv). Through such a morphing process, whiteness as the norm transforms and (re)ascends (see Puar 2007; Chow 2006). For El-Tayeb, then, the term ethnicity, defined against whiteness, comes to stand both for and as (racial) difference, which functions to separate insiders from outsiders within the European context.²²

²² It is interesting that Rey Chow also observes a shift in the deployment of the term "ethnic" in its modern usage - from "boundary setting purposes" (2002, viii) to the "universalist and inclusionary" (viii) terms. This means, as Chow makes clear, everyone is now considered to be ethnic in the sense of belonging to one or another grouping (viii). This universalist and inclusionist framing that Chow diagnoses is also discernible in arguments of whiteness as a race. What interests me here is not so much the use and abuse of terms and their underpinning of political investments, but the historicity or arrival of concepts such as ethnicity and race and the ambiguities they manifest. Such ambiguities are telling of the problematics of difference, a central

Given the inherent ambiguity of these terms, the study at hand does not attempt to provide more accurate definitions or to map better genealogies. As Osborne and Sandford assert, “there is no *one* conceptual genealogy of ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’” (2002, 6, emphasis in original). Instead, my intention is to linger on these ambiguities and contradictions, through an exploration of the phenomenon of host country language acquisition among adult immigrants in Finland. Conjoining the post-colonial critiques of identity / difference with new materialist onto-epistemological accounts of matter, this thesis closely engages with the political economy of racialised visual-aural encounters instantiated in the process of Finnish language learning. In refusing to simply negate the questions of biology, nature and essence, found in the notion of race, this study asks how race arrives and *what race will(can)/not be*.

The framing of this question is inspired by the questions put forth by Fred Moten (2003) and Arun Saldanha (2006). While Moten asks, “What will blackness be?” (2003, 22), Saldanha encourages us to look at “what race *can be*” (2006, 21, emphasis in original). As their questions make clear, common to their projects is the insistence upon the inherent dynamism of the materiality (of race) that is arrested by representation – what Moten discusses in terms of improvisation, and Saldanha argues in terms of viscosity – as well as a gesture of affirmation and radical transformation. While my work on race echoes many aspects of their theorisations, I want to complicate this gesture of affirmation by contemplating the conditions of possibility *and* impossibility of racial becomings by adding a “/” (solidus) and the word “not” to the question.

It is interesting here to note that, for Ruth Benedict, “The first necessity in discussing race is to outline what race is *not*” (1943; 2000, 113, emphasis in original).²³ In clearly distinguishing race from language and culture, Benedict argues for the specificity of race, understood as “classification based on hereditary traits” (2000, 115); thus, as historical and biological, as opposed to as a universalist conception that “account[s] for all human

theme of this entire dissertation.

²³ The original text was published in 1943 as a chapter in Benedict’s book *Race: Science and Politics*.

achievements" (118).²⁴ Benedict's argument could be read as suggesting that racial differences, as relatively constant biological facts, do not correspond to, or provide justification for, the fixity of racial hierarchies, based on values of cultural achievements.

While we may differ, most notably on the idea of "cultural-racial separateness" (Benedict 2000, 117), I find Benedict's interrogation of the specificity of race through a chain of differentiation (for example, race is not language, race is not culture) to be an interesting dialogue with the question of what race will/can be. This is because the latter question leads to a theorisation of being/becoming that may often be associated with the problematic of universality. In the question "what race will (can)/not be?", the slash between "will", "(can)", and not "represents the constitutive inclusions as well as exclusions that cannot be subtracted from the process of" (Hinton forthcoming; see also Barad 2012) race's arrival. Such a complication is also in accordance with my general contemplation of the ascendancy of whiteness, which pivots on questions of capacity, ability, and generativity, central to the discourse of host country language acquisition.

My aim in the following pages of the introduction is to examine the question of race and ethnicity through two interrelated aspects: first, the relation between the conception of language (acquisition) and race/ethnisme (or what Chow calls "postcolonized race and ethnicity" [2002, vii]); and second, the conundrum of human race and racial differences. I will argue that the problematics of the nature/culture question is what lies at the crux of the question of race.

Ethnisme/Ethnicity

This meditation begins with an examination of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of ethnisme. Saussure's seminal work on *langue*,²⁵ a system of difference that functions without positive

²⁴ For "human achievements" read language and culture.

²⁵ Saussure distinguishes *langue* from *parole*, or the system of language from speech. As Vicki Kirby observes, "Saussure considered speech to be the executive side of language where meanings are actively designed and negotiated by an individual will. ... *Parole* is therefore the instantiation of *langue* as individual selection. However

terms, has been central to anti-essentialist and anti-biologist theorisations of race and gender. The unit of the sign – the essential unit of the system of langue – consists of signifier and signified. Whereas the signifier is the sound-image, the signified refers to a more abstract form, what Saussure refers to as concept. The term “sound-image” indicates a psychological imprint/representation, a “patternment”, as opposed to “the material sound, a purely physical thing” (Saussure quoted in Kirby 1997, 54–55). Saussure’s following clarification of physiological phonetics patently demonstrates this point:

It is true that if no language existed the movements of the vocal apparatus would be pointless. None the less, these movements are not part of any language, and an exhaustive analysis of the process of phonation required to produce every auditory impression tells us nothing about what a language is. A language is a system based upon psychological contrasts between these auditory impressions, just as a tapestry is a work of art based upon the visual contrast between strands of different colours. What is important for an analysis is the effect of these contrasts, and not the process by which the colours were obtained in the first place. ([1983] 2013, 56)

Saussure distinguishes between the linguistic structure and speech. Whereas the former is understood as social and essential, the latter is individual, “ancillary and more or less accidental” (Saussure [1983] 2013, 30). For Saussure, the linguistic faculty of man is psychological in essence, and is characterised by the capacity to divide – cut and differentiate – “the chain of speech into syllables” ([1983] 2013, 26) or “the chain of meanings into meaningful units” (26). While linguistic structure is considered a part of language, rather than language in its entirety, it determines “over and above the functioning of the various organs” ([1983] 2013, 27). As Kirby observes, “Saussure’s active repression of the body of the signifier reiterates the somatophobia (phallocentrism) of Western metaphysics” (1997, 54–55). That is, the mind/body split that excludes the feminine, the bodily and the material from the scene of

Saussure regarded the heterogenous and contingent nature of speech acts and their contextual realization as far too messy for linguistics” (1997, 40-41).

production. This informs and is articulated by the *langue* (linguistic system) and *parole* (speech) distinction in Saussurean framework. In the *Course in General Linguistics*,²⁶ not only does the linguistic system provide the structuring principle of the entirety of language, but it also renders exterior and redundant the materiality of phonation and sound. Related to the configuration of signifier as immaterial, the referent is for Saussure something of a theoretical abstraction that is mediated and engendered in language *a posteriori*.²⁷ Put differently, within the parameters of Saussurean framework, the referent is not the real object that pre-exists its perception/representation/interpretation. Rather, the real object is rendered inaccessible. Clearly, this configuration foreshadows the logic of performativity, and affords a critical manoeuvre against essentialism and biological determinism.

For example, Judith Butler's formulation of the nature/culture question takes leverage from the Saussurean conception of the sign. We see this manifested in her following assertion regarding the relationship between gender and sex: "[G]ender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts" (1999, 11,

²⁶ Interestingly, according to Roy Harris (2013), in Saussure's notes published in 2002, the autonomy and invariability of the linguistic system is called into question. In these notes, Saussure observes the constant and perpetual recontextualisation of words in everyday exchanges between speakers. In light of this, it seems the the structuring dominance of the linguistic system (*langue*) proposed in the *Course* is qualified. Instead, speech (*parole*) takes on a pivotal role.

²⁷ Where and how to locate the referent has been a major problematic in discussions of the sign. See, for example, Kirby's reading of the objection posed to Saussurean linguistics by Marie-Laure Ryan and Vincent Descombes. As Kirby writes, "Their respective arguments, however different, both focus on the way that Saussure dispenses with reality/the referent. For Ryan, Saussure willfully abandons the world for language. For Descombes, the opposite is the case. Despite Saussure's claims that reality's substantive presence does not witness the truth or distortion of the sign's representation, Descombes argues that referent is nevertheless ubiquitous: it is an unacknowledged third term that is merely disavowed by Saussure's misguided disclaimer" (1997, 14). I want to suggest that the dilemma of the referent has profound implications for the analysis of the materiality of race, and the question of transformation vis-à-vis the political economy of racialised visual-aural encounters.

emphasis in original). In other words, what is understood as nature – the substance of reality – is in fact a cultural inscription.

In a similar vein, important critical interventions into the question of race and racism have led to the argument that race is constructed, or that it is a discursive effect or an illusion, given that there are no positive terms of reference for race as such. Within this line of thought, the presumed biological determinants of racial differences – be they genotypes or phenotypes – are always already mediated and enacted by discourses of biology (or biology as a discourse), which means that racial hierarchies or divisions cannot be justified by, or anchored in, any natural facts, but are instead arbitrary. I want to quote, here, two of Donna Haraway's meditations on the question of biology and matter, as they speak to the attempt to denaturalise nature and to "undo the political knot of the nature/culture opposition" (Kirby 1997, 147):

[B]iology is not the body itself, but a discourse. When you say that my biology is such-and-such – or, I am a biological female and so therefore I have the following physiological structure – it sounds like you're talking about the thing itself. But, if we are committed to remembering that biology is a logos, is literally a gathering into knowledge, we are not fooled into giving up the contestation for the discourse. (1990, 5)

I am using "matter" in the way suggested by Judith Butler in ... *Bodies That Matter*. ... The marked bodies and subjects theorized by Trinh, Butler, and Wittig evacuate precisely the heterosexist and racist idealism-materialism binary that has ruled in the generic Western philosophical tradition. (2004, 61)

While both Butler's and Haraway's respective projects will be engaged in a more detailed fashion in relation to the question of the visual and the aural of the political economy of race, they are briefly mentioned here to underscore the profound implications of the Saussurean conception of the sign for the examination of the matter of race.

Butler's and Haraway's above assertions help to demonstrate why Saussure's non-essentialist account of language, race, and ethnisme, so tightly bound up with and informed by the nature/culture conundrum and the question of essence, is of particular interest to the discussion at

hand. So what does Saussure actually mean by the term *ethnisme*? And why is it important for Saussure to introduce this neologism? Using Robert J. C. Young's reading of the two Saussure brothers' – Ferdinand de Saussure and Léopold de Saussure – differing understanding of race and language as our guide, we will see the ways in which Saussure's study of the system of semiology/*langue* is embedded in, and informs, the politics of language and race in the context of coloniality.²⁸ While many commentators have found critical purchase in precisely the ways in which Saussure deliberately distances himself from the messiness of *parole*, of speech and the material substance of sound (cf. Moten 2003; Cavarero 2005), I want to stay with the contradictions and dilemmas that appear in the exclusion of materiality present in Saussure's attempt to distinguish language and race and in his account of *ethnisme*. I am particularly inspired by Kirby's critical yet patient engagement with Saussure's work in an endeavour to explore "how the question of language can render substance and corporeality entirely problematic" (1997, 4).

Ethnisme/Ethnicity and the Linguistic Community

The last two chapters of part five of the book *Course in General Linguistics*, "Questions of Retrospectives of Diachronic Linguistics", often attributed to Saussure,²⁹ deals with questions of language, race and ethnicity. At the

²⁸ Throughout my dissertation, I emphasise the importance of attending to the historicity of concepts, that is the how of the arrival, which I argue is a shared critical rigour of both postcolonial and new materialist theorisations. For related discussions on the politics of concepts see for example Ahmed (2008), van der Tuin (2009), Hemmings (2011), Irni (2013), and Sullivan (2012).

²⁹ An important detail to be noted here: the *Course*, first published in 1916, was actually not written by Saussure. As Vicki Kirby says of this, "the *Course* ... was a compilation of students' notes that was posthumously conceived – born from the efforts of two colleagues who had not themselves attended Saussure's classes. ... Even though some brief preparatory jottings and other desultory fragments of writing provided evidence of the general direction of Saussure's endeavours, the editors were mainly left to rely on a few student records, gleaned from three quite separate courses spanning a period of six years" (1997, 7–8). This is not a trivial matter, however, but one that makes manifest the problematic of writing and difference itself. As Kirby writes, "there is something curiously fitting about this equivocal beginning that sees the Master animated by the ventriloquism of his disciples For the question of how to secure a

outset of chapter four, “Linguistic Evidence in Anthropology, and Prehistory”, Saussure firmly refutes the possibility of language to reveal or provide evidence of the nature of the people or the communities of peoples who speak them – “their race, their social structure, their customs, their institutions, etc.” ([1983] 2013, 304). As Saussure makes clear:

It would be a mistake to believe that one can argue from a common language to consanguinity, or equate linguistic families with anthropological families. ... There is, for example, a Germanic race with very distinct anthropological features: fair hair, elongated skull, tall stature, etc. ... But it is far from being the case that every population speaking one of the Germanic languages answers to this description. ... [C]onsanguinity and common language appear to have no necessary connexion. It is impossible to argue from one to the other. ([1983] 2013, 304-305)

The use of the word “consanguinity”, meaning “of the same blood”, clearly echoes Du Bois’s description of race quoted earlier.³⁰ Within this line of thinking, race is understood as a biological fact that is somehow carried in blood, suggesting generational *continuity* and coherence. Moreover, this signature or mark of racial identity and difference encrypted in, and carried by, blood is understood to take visible expressions in phenotypical differences, or what Saussure calls “anthropological features”, such as “fair hair, elongated skull, tall stature”. As is made clear from above quote, Saussure is not against the biological and physiological conception of race, *as such*. In fact, as Young

beginning, an origin or entity that will guarantee the proper point of departure for interpretation, is the essential problematic that Saussure’s work explores and that its difficulties enact” (1997, 8). The questions of origin, authenticity, and where and how to begin have significant implications for the study at hand, as will become clear.

³⁰ The association of blood and race will be elaborated on in later chapters. However, it is important to note here that whereas blood, as carrier of racial identity, designates patrilineal inheritance, the tongue (read language) symbolises maternal, feminine continuity. Furthermore, as commentators have pointed out, blood, or the quality of the blood that defined race, was not only a theological concept (cf. Feerick 2010), but also one tightly bounded up with notions of kinship (cf. Franklin and Mckinnon 2001; Feeley-Harnik 2001).

also points out, Saussure “fully subscribes” (2002, 63) to the concept of race, “on exclusively scientific physiological grounds” (66), that is, “the findings of physiognomy with respect to corporeal differences” (74).

What Saussure is adamantly rejecting is the association of language with race and nation in the nineteenth century. This particular backdrop needs to be attended to as, to a certain degree, it not only provides a better picture of the ways in which Saussure strived to formulate an independent system of language but also contextualises it. In so doing, terms such as signifier and signified, difference, arbitrariness, and value can be broached through (re)contextualisation and the mapping of their routes of arrival, that is, the coloniality in which they are embedded.³¹ In addition to his work as a semiologist, Saussure was also a scholar of Sanskrit and an Indo-European philologist. According to Young, in a sense the colonial encounter with Sanskrit enabled and strengthened the idea of an Indo-European language family as well as that of Indo-Europeans as a superior race. The linguistic metaphors of family³² and “tree” that connote kinship, reproduction, generation and lineage are telling of the association of racial and linguistic identity.³³ One of

³¹ I want to note here briefly that, in their different field of investigations, Saussure and his some of his contemporaries – Marx, Nietzsche, Freud – all strived to set into motion “the revaluation of value” (Moten 2003, 7). As Moten observes, “they open the possibility of a critique of the valuation of meaning over content and the reduction of phonic matter and syntactic ‘degeneracy’ in the early modern search for a universal language and the late modern search for a universal science of language. This disruption of the Enlightenment linguistic project is of fundamental importance since it allows a rearrangement of the relationship between notions of human freedom and notions of human essence” (2003, 7). Saussure’s introduction of the term “valeur” – value, weight – into the system of the sign is a significant endeavour in this regard. The notion of value, the process of re-/trans-/valuation will be engaged with in different parts of the thesis.

³² Regarding the term “family”, Donna Haraway provides an important summation of the question of lineage and kinship that is central to discourses of race. As Haraway notes, “Four major discursive streams poured into the cauldron in which racial discourse simmered well into the early decades of the twentieth century, including the ethnological, Lamarckian, polygenist, and evolutionist traditions. For each approach, the essential idea was the linkages of lineage and kinship. *No great distinction could be maintained between linguistic, national, familial and physical resonances implied by the term kinship and race*” (2004, 251, my emphasis).

³³ Throughout the thesis, I argue for the need to read sexuality and race not as two

Saussure's contemporaries, the philologist Friedrich Max Müller, was among the most vocal advocates of the race, language and nation affiliation, and "used language to reconstruct a whole racial history" (Young 2002, 68).

For Saussure, however, such an association is a mistake, because race, understood in biological terms, is conceived of as extra-linguistic reality, that is, radically distinct from language proper. In other words, the identity of the sign and the linguistic system is not anchored in a self-present biological, racial essence. Commenting on the diversity of languages, Saussure notes that if approached in terms of social convention, a language could be said to evince the individual characteristic of a community, as the notion "idiom" implies. However, Saussure firmly states that such a notion "easily turns into error when it is taken so far that a language is seen as the attribute not of a nation but of a race, on a par with the colour of the skin or the shape of the head" ([1983] 2013, 261). Rather, the development of a linguistic system is driven by the "systematicity" of language itself. The term "systematicity" normally gives the impression of the consistent operation of a system, as a self-contained unity, that unfailingly sustains itself and maintains its boundary. This seems to illustrate Saussure's conception of the linguistic system. And yet, the question arises as to how the linguistic system that functions through pure difference – the nature of arbitrariness – is also governed by a seemingly self-same systematicity. What does it mean if the law and method of the system – its systematicity – is arbitrary?³⁴

separate grids of intelligibility, or fields of analysis that somehow intersect or add together, but in terms of copulation or sexual/racial diffraction. Many commentators have emphasised the importance of such a reading, though not always within the same terms of debate. For this note, it suffices to mention Chow's argument that "[r]ace and ethnicity are ... coterminous with sexuality, just as sexuality is implicated in race and ethnicity. To that extent, any analytical effort to keep these categories apart from one another may turn out to be counterproductive, for it is their categorical enmeshment – their categorical miscegenation, so to speak – that needs to be foregrounded" (2002, 7).

³⁴ For an excellent reading of systematicity that brings into dialogue Jacques Derrida's and Niklas Luhmann's theorisations, see Wolfe (2009). The upshot of Cary Wolfe's observation is that both Derrida's conception of writing in general and Luhmann's formulation of systems theory are concerned with the problematic of difference.

In fact, in advocating the science of language – a “resolutely anti-biological, anti-historical, anti-psychological” (Young 2002, 69) account of a homogenous linguistic system, that is, *la langue*, Saussure goes so far as to argue that as a self-enclosed institution, the system of language operates radically independent of its environments. This is a direct response to nineteenth-century claims of psychological and physical racial determinants, such as those of his brother Léopold de Saussure, who argues that “the physical construction of the throat and larynx of the different races determined their ability to speak in certain ways” and puts forward the idea of “different mental capacities of different races for different levels of linguistic development” (Young 2002, 74). As Saussure³⁵ argues:

It is said that racial predisposition determines the direction of sound changes. There is a question of comparative anthropology involved. But does the vocal apparatus vary from one race to another? No. Hardly more than from one individual to another. A negro brought to France at birth speaks French as well as any Frenchman. Furthermore, to speak of “the Italian vocal apparatus” or to say “the German mouth does not allow this” is to risk presenting as a permanent characteristic what is merely a historical fact. ... [T]here is no question of any physiological incapacity, but simply of a change of articulatory habits. ... It is indeed possible to recognise a general tendency in phonetic changes at a given period in a given community. ... But one could find similar general movements in political history, without being led on that account to question their purely historical nature or to suspect the operation of some underlying racial factor. ([1983] 2013, 202–203)

I want to consider here what is actually at stake in Saussure’s engagement with the race and language question. What seems to lie at the core of Saussure’s argument, its inherent conundrum, is a question of distinction (difference as opposition: A is A because it is not B) (read racial differences) and (human and linguistic) unity/identity. In order to lay bare these conundrums, we need to go back a bit over the ground covered thus far.

³⁵ In this discussion “Saussure” will refer specifically to Ferdinand de Saussure.

First, Saussure's rejection of the equation between race and language, and his advocacy of the linguistic system are consistent with his general emphasis on difference as performative and his theorisation of the arbitrary. The arbitrariness of the sign means that change in the linguistic system *just happens*, and is not based on any stable extra-linguistic referent or historical facts. As Young makes clear, this account of randomness (chance as opposed to necessity) "demonstrates the influences of a Darwinist evolutionary perspective: language is a self-enclosed institution, whose processes involve arbitrary, not organic, changes and in which characteristics endure by 'sheer luck'" (2002, 66).³⁶ Indeed, nineteenth-century developments in racial science, corporeal ethnology and comparative anatomy (cf. Anderson 2014), coupled with the rise of Darwinism have contributed to the debate between monogenist and polygenist accounts of race that have rendered increasingly problematic the philologist argument for the kinship of language, race and nation. Seeing as both the nineteenth-century turn to racial science and Darwinism's challenge of human uniqueness will feature prominently in the following section on racial differences and the dis/continuity of the human race(s), I will briefly outline a non/linear transition of these positions to support the present discussion.

The "biologisation" of race supports the view that "the relations of superiority/inferiority between western and non-western people were based not on culture or religion but were physical: that difference was fixed in the bodies of individuals and their member races, as was hierarchy among the races" (Anderson 2007, 23). This biological turn thus witnessed and intensified the shift from the Enlightenment monogenist model of race as kin, "characterised by a notion of shared human origins in the creation of Adam and Eve and a human unity in which *apparent*

³⁶ In her book *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*, Elizabeth Grosz also comments on the connection between Saussure's model of linguistic systems and Darwin's evolutionist theorisations. She writes, "The link with Saussure's work is closer than it may seem; indeed, it would be surprising if Saussure wasn't in some way affected by the transformation in scientific models Darwin's work accomplished. In particular, at the origin or heart of both biological and linguistic models is pure difference, a difference without positive terms, an indeterminacy that replaces origin and that substitutes for the only identity of the units analyzed" (Grosz 2004, 29).

(rather than fundamental) differences were thought to distinguish human groups” to “a ‘polygenist’ notion of separately constituted and biologically determined race” (Anderson 2007, 23, emphasis in original). And yet, Darwinism’s emphasis on the human-nature continuity through the discourse of evolution brought not only radical challenge to the polygenist notion of absolute separation of races, but also mounting anxiety to humanism itself.

This anxiety seems to also inform Saussure’s dilemma discussed here. As noted earlier, Saussure accepts racial differences understood as corporeal differences. Interestingly, this notion of difference measured by purportedly unchanging and fixed biological facts clearly contradicts Saussure’s conceptualisation of the arbitrariness of the linguistic system. What is it about corporeality that makes it indicative of the fixation and the separation of races? What is assumed of and invested in the racialised bodies’ empirical obviousness? Related to his rejection of Müller’s idea of the universal family or kinship of language – that is, racial and linguistic identification, Saussure perceives race as a biological fact that is present to itself, thus radically distinct, because it is separate from the realm of the linguistic system. Such a configuration of race echoes Saussure’s exclusion of the materiality of phonation and speech sound, as well as the referent in his study of language.

Nevertheless, Saussure’s notion of difference and arbitrariness does not resolve the vexed issue here. We are yet to witness the third dilemma of Saussure’s thinking, that is, his assimilationist politics of language in the context of colonialism. Given his argument regarding the arbitrary nature of the sign, it is not difficult to comprehend his vehement contestation of the colonial language policy that foregrounds the fixation of innate differences between races, as the psychological and physical determinants of linguistic differences. As discussed earlier, this is a major subject of contention between Saussure and his brother, Léopold. Young’s reading of the paradox within French colonial language policy is instructive for understanding the brothers’ opposing stances and could further assist in interrogating the dilemmas in Saussure’s thinking. As Young makes explicit,

[O]n the one hand, it was the most progressive, to the extent that it assumed the fundamental equality of all human beings, their common humanity as part of a single species, and assumed that however 'natural' or 'backward' their state, all native peoples could immediately benefit from the uniform imposition of French culture in its most advanced contemporary manifestation. On the other hand, such an assumption meant that this model had the least respect and sympathy for the culture, language and institutions of the people being colonised – it saw difference, and sought to make it the same – what we might call the paradox of ethnocentric egalitarianism. (2002, 70–71)

For Léopold de Saussure, however, the hierarchical differences among races and languages are unbridgeable. The postulation of absolute difference foreshadows a model of colonial policy, which, for Young, anticipates current multiculturalist assumptions. Young notes that Léopold de Saussure, “an officer in the French navy who by then had taken on French nationality,” was the person who had a major impact on and shifted French colonial policy to a model of association, driven by calculations of what was most profitable in managing the colonised, that is, “to leave as much their native culture intact as possible” (Young 2002, 72). Léopold de Saussure’s theories of language and race are predicated on the view of the determination of anatomical structures as well as the hierarchical differences in racial mentalities. In other words, racial differences are conceived of as proportional to, and as determining, differences in linguistic capacity and the hierarchies among languages. Furthermore, mental and physical propensities orient the direction of linguistic development. For example, Léopold de Saussure argues that

[T]he different linguistic forms of agglutination and inflexion correspond to a hierarchy that reflects the increasing mental powers and subtlety of reasoning of the people whose language it is. The imposition of French on a native people whose own language, and therefore mental capacity, has not developed further than, say, analogy will cause French to degenerate and regress into a bastardised creole, rather than develop the mental capacities of the natives to the level of the Aryan French. (Saussure quoted in Young 2002, 71).

The founding gesture of Léopold de Saussure's theoretical argumentations and political propositions is in stark contrast to that of Saussure's. For Léopold de Saussure, the identity of languages, and the differences between them, is predicated on extra-linguistic positive factors, be they biological or psychological. By comparison, Ferdinand de Saussure's thesis of difference without positive terms argues that corporeal and psychological racial differences are radically distinct from, and in opposition to, the system of *langue*. He argues that there is an in-between – the arbitrary – which separates, perhaps engulfs, these two realms. This is what Saussure means by his claim that there are only differences in the linguistic system.³⁷ Saussure's argument supports the assimilationist policy of language, in which the colonised are forced to learn the language of the coloniser, in this case French, and to subordinate their native languages. Nevertheless, he encounters the following two problematics. First, Saussure needs to be able to account for variations within, and the over-time stability of linguistic communities, vis-à-vis their geographical locations and demographical compositions, all the while contesting the notion of race and language affiliation. Second, and related to the first question, the discrepancies between racial distinctions and the notion of the continuity of the human race which foregrounds assimilationist policy needs to be negotiated.

The difficulty faced by Saussure is palpable. How could he navigate through the knotted problematics within the terms of the debate? Seeing as he holds a firm position vis-à-vis language as an independent system and the immutable facts of racial differences, as well as their opposition, it seems that Saussure would perhaps have to take sides. Or would he? It is here that he introduces the third term – *ethnisme* – variously translated, according to Young, as “ethnic” or “ethnic community”. With this concept, which connotes in general terms a linguistic community that is

³⁷ This question of the arbitrary is crucial for setting into motion the chain of signification, the play of signifier, and the revaluation of value as form, which both enables and traps critical endeavour for transformation. In fact, as I see it, the question of the arbitrary, together with Saussure's engagement with the dynamism of *valeur*/value, proves central to, and indeed animates, the scene of debate among poststructuralist, postcolonial and (new) materialist paradigms.

not grounded in racial identities or differences, Saussure is able to shift the debate from a biological discussion of race (because he concedes to its *de facto* status) to one involving questions of culture and “the social bond” (Young 2002, 68). To highlight what is at stake here, then, with the notion of *ethnisme*, the question of race – its natural status both conceded and elided – is now one of social, cultural, and political form, that subscribes to the human subject and becomes a concern for the linguist (Saussure himself) or the linguistic system. This shift from nature to culture, enabled by the theorisation of *ethnisme*, once again makes visible the logic of mind/body split that informs Saussure's framework.

However, before moving on to an examination of *ethnisme*, I want to pause and carefully unpack some important details regarding Saussure's manoeuvre. The first detail that needs to be reiterated is that even when Saussure carefully and deliberately excludes racial corporeal differences from the study of the linguistic system, he entirely acknowledges their existence as racial markers manifested on the body. This is the same logic through which Saussure relegates dialects, accents, or the sound of speech itself to a position outside of linguistic system, that is, rendering them inaccessible for the human subject who is always already confined within the structure of the sign.

Secondly, in Saussure's assimilationist framework, both the human, now rendered cultural through the notion *ethnisme*, and the language system acquire an organism-like character, becoming like species that evolve, which is clearly a Darwinian gesture. Yet, already here we witness the nature/culture conundrum. If, as Saussure's first move – the repression of the material body/sound – makes clear, the term of the debate has shifted from the relationship between race (understood in biological and natural terms) and language (understood as radically distinct from nature, as a system with only difference without positive terms), to the question of the social, the cultural and the political, then the second manoeuvre, with its clear Darwinian references to natural selection leaves us in something of a quandary. To lay bare the nature/culture issue, here, I will quickly turn to Ruth Benedict's reading of the language and race question.

Benedict's argument is precisely that race is not language. This is the first distinction she makes in responding to her own question: "what race is not". In arguing for the radical distinction between race and language, Benedict stresses the necessity of "culture-racial separateness" (2000, 117). For Benedict, race, understood as "biologically transmitted" (2000, 115) "is not a touchstone by which civilized people can be separated from uncivilized" (117). By comparison, language, as "learned behaviour" (Benedict 2000, 115) signifies the capacity for civilisation, because "This non-biological transmission is a great advantage in that it allows for much greater adaptability to circumstances but it progressively lessens the importance of biologically transmitted behaviour" (115). To explicate, Benedict supports her argument with reference to the following example:

"[T]he leopard cannot change his spots" means that the leopard, because he belongs to a certain species, will always be found stalking the jungle for his prey. But in man the great aggressors of yesterday become the mild peace-lovers of today. In the ninth century Scandinavians were the feared aggressive Vikings of the sea; in the present generations they are the peaceful non-aggressive exponents of co-operatives and the "middle way". (2000, 115)

Even though it is clear that Benedict's intention is to contest racial prejudice, by arguing that race, as a biological given, has nothing to do with civilisation itself, her above chosen example inadvertently recuperates a racist logic that also characterises the exceptionalist status of the human condition. I will engage with this point in the next part of this chapter. For my examination of Saussure's notion of *ethnisme*, I am interested in the Darwinian framework that both Benedict and Saussure clearly follow, as well as the nature/culture separation that can be found echoing in their respective projects.

Despite their similarities, I would like to draw attention to an interesting and important difference between their arguments. While, for Benedict, language is a cultural process and remains a human endeavour, for Saussure, the linguistic system occupies an almost ontological status, in that the study of semiology is generalised and generalisable to the question of being. The latter is something that Jacques Derrida's

reformulation of *grammatology*, which extends from Saussure's work, attests to. As Saussure mediates on the scope and content of semiology,

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable ... I shall call it semiology. ... Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the law discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics. (Saussure quoted in Kirby 1997, 53, emphasis in original)

The question is whether Saussure's second move – his assimilationist politics of language, which contests the essentialist assertions of racial differences as deterministic of linguistic capacities as well as his elevation of the linguistic system resembling the evolutionary dynamism of the organisms (perhaps it should be highlighted here that these include the human species) – actually undoes his first move, by returning to a more generalised discussion of Nature and being, reconceived in terms of systematicity. I will further suggest that perhaps both nature and culture are reconceived in the systematicity of language.³⁸ Keeping this in mind, I want to return to the question of ethnisme. It might be more informative to try and approach ethnisme in terms of the Saussurean notion of difference. Having justified the exclusion of the racial differences for the study of language, and henceforth their dissociation, Saussure could now engage with the variations within a linguistic community. The problematics of homogeneity and heterogeneity, whole and part, are central to my exploration in part three, but for now it is important for me to underscore the ways in which Saussure's deployment of the term ethnisme enables both the proposition of homogeneity of a linguistic community and its internal diversity, in a relation of non/contradiction. As Kirby remarks on Saussure's conundrums with respect to the question of noncontradiction:

[S]uch is the complexity of his thesis that we can interpret this same contradiction as faithfully consistent with the very paradox he sought to explore and articulate. According to the principle of

³⁸ My examination of the question of race/ethnisme in Saussure is greatly inspired by Kirby's reading of "the matter of the sign" (1997, 7) in *Telling Flesh*.

noncontradiction that underpins Western metaphysics, Saussure is unable both to refute and to embrace the tenets of nomenclaturism: he must come down on either one side or the other. (1997, 19)

I want to emphasise here that by proposing the term non/contradiction, I mean to further complicate the performative contradictions at the heart of any essence and identity. I argue that, inasmuch as performative contradictions mean that for example in order for a racialised subject to assert claims and negotiate conditions of rights, he or she must submit and conform to the norms and normative practices that he or she is denied access to and ownership of, and which operate by excluding racialised bodies in the first place, then it should be possible to imagine that such a contradiction (one that substantiates, even as it challenges, oppositional terms), must also contradict itself, even as it never contradicts itself. This is the self-encounter, the onto-epistemological dis/continuity that I put forth throughout my thesis. Further discussions on performative contradictions in relation to the question of norms are detailed in the chapter eight.

While the term *ethnisme* seems to be sufficient in accounting for the multiplicities (communities of language) within a unity (linguistic system), the question remains as to how to account for the changes and variations within a linguistic community? As we have seen, within the linguistic system, differentiation as a chain of signification is set in motion by the exclusion of the actual object, the reality. However, this repression of the materiality needs to be supplemented by another important factor – that is, Saussure's notion of *valeur*/value. Kirby's meditation on the workings of value is instructive here:

Value is produced along two interconnecting axes of equivalence. One axis involves a relationship of dissimilarity and contrast, while the other expresses similarity through comparison and association. ... But what exactly is being compared and contrasted within this system of exchange? Does this model quietly return us to the comfortable wisdom of nomenclaturism in a different guise? (1997, 28)

Nomenclaturism is a form of essentialism that Saussure's

conceptualisation of the system of the sign is set to contest. In a nomenclatural account of language, the sign functions “as a surrogate for something else, a name that represents the meaning of the thing for which it ‘stands in’” (Kirby 1997, 10). It follows, then, that if the value is actually the comparison between, and measurement of, the sign or the language system with its external referent, then we will, as Kirby’s last question indicates, return to the conventional notion of representation in which the referent, the glassy Nature, is mirrored by the sign. Clearly, Saussure would want to avoid such an understanding. As he explains, value, and the process of measurement, “is actually generated from within the system of language itself (*langue*)” (Kirby 1997, 28).

Nevertheless, in Saussure’s elaboration on the changes of sound and the diversities within the linguistic community, his struggle with the anchorage point for valuation is discernible. That is, the how and what are being compared in order to measure difference and change. For example, while Saussure “denies that linguistic changes have any relation to other historical events,” he “allows that the effects of discontinuity produced by historical acts such as colonisation can play a role in accounting for linguistic differences” (Young 2002, 66). Saussure himself acknowledges the complexity and difficulties involved in engaging with the assumption and perception of linguistic differences, such as accents and dialects, as marking racial and geographical differences (see Young 2006, 67). At a certain point in his discussion regarding the differing relation between language and race, and between language and ethnisme, he seems to relax his guard against the messiness of the biological and the racial, and to acknowledge a certain connection between language and race, even in terms of the limits of such an association, which obviously contradicts his thesis of difference as founded on absence and opposition. For example, although Saussure argues against the affiliation of consanguinity and common language, he acknowledges that “Racial unity in itself can only be a secondary factor and not a necessary condition where community of language is concerned” ([1983] 2013, 305). As Young observes, for Saussure, “Language only operates as a characteristic of race ... when it persists through time. It is the condition

of variation or non-variation through time that Saussure identifies with an 'ethnic' identity" (2002, 67–68). Of course, the question that might immediately follow, and for which Saussure would probably have to scratch his head and make another revaluation, is then how to measure time. Such a measurement might prove difficult, especially given Saussure's earlier rejection of historical events as determinants of linguistic change, because the claim of historical events as such is also a form of essentialising.

It seems, then, that the question of essence, the outside of the langue, continues to haunt, and is perhaps reproduced in, the seemingly endless chain of valuation and signification. Even the notion of *ethnisme* itself, a term introduced to exclude the essence of race, is rendered problematic in the dynamism of valuation. Young makes a similar point:

The linguistic community first of all can be multi-racial, and can occur in the absence of any political bond: what is significant is that it should have a common civilisation and religion. However, the word civilisation begs a lot of questions – what defines a civilisation has never been easy to specify. The requirement of a common religion also seems problematic – does this exclude the French Protestants from the French linguistic community? And if '*ethnisme*' requires a common defence, this sounds like a version of a nation, but the possibility of the absence of any political bond also makes this equation unlikely. ... Saussure's arguments about language and ethnicity, however, are equally based on an assumption of ethnic and cultural uniformity that leads them back to the "positive fact" of the communal bonds of the social – on which Saussure's logic ultimately depends even though his fundamental argument consists of the attempt to exclude it. (2002, 68–78)

Whereas Young argues for an even more generalised notion of difference to unsettle the boundaries of ethnicity, I want instead to consider Saussure's dilemma regarding how to identify or mark the contours of language as a system, and where to anchor the arbitrary in terms of the problematics of essentialism. Interestingly, although generally considered as designating the idea of the existence of fixed

attributes as unchanging truth, the term essentialism itself, as Grosz notes, is “rarely defined or explained explicitly in feminist contexts” (2002, 334). According to Grosz, the term essentialism is often associated, or used interchangeably, with terms such as biologism, naturalism and universalism. Upon closer inspection, however, the essence of essence itself becomes difficult to pin down. That is, it becomes unclear, if not impossible, as to how, where and when to locate essence. Is the essence of essence biological, natural or cultural?

In her discussion of the writing of the body in terms of corporeal habits, Kirby draws on Grosz’s description of the four categories – essentialism, biologism, naturalism and universalism – to shed light on the ambiguities of the nature/culture division:

Biologism—women’s essence is defined in terms of their biological capacities. ... In so far as biology is assumed to constitute an unalterable bedrock of identity, the attribution of biologicistic characteristics amounts to a permanent form of social containment for women.

Naturalism—may be asserted on theological or on ontological rather than biological grounds ... it may be claimed that women’s nature is derived from God-given attributes which are not explicable or observable simply in biological terms. ... More commonly however, naturalism presumes the equivalence of biological and natural properties.

Universalism—the attributions of invariant social categories, functions and activities to which all women in all cultures are assigned. (Grosz quoted in Kirby 1997, 171)

As is made clear in above excerpt, the location of essence confounds and defies the nature/culture division, for the “nature of things” (Kirby 1997, 69) could also be found in what is understood as cultural, often considered as fluid and plastic

For example, as Kirby writes, “cross-cultural data that show women consigned to invariant social categories and roles in the sexual division of

labour can be offered as proof of essential and therefore unarguable human requirements” (1997, 69). Although Grosz’s and Kirby’s discussions of essentialism concern mainly the question of woman, it is highly relevant for the question of race. It echoes something of the elusive nature of essence betrayed by Saussure’s struggle to distance *la langue* from materiality and the problematics of race, while defining the identity of linguistic communities and their developments. As having been noted, Saussure’s argument of the contingency (of the sign), the difference, arbitrariness and operation of value inadvertently, and perhaps necessarily, recuperates a point of anchorage and entails a return to forms of essence as positive facts. Even the purportedly and radically distinct and separate systems – race and language – acquire certain connections with the measurement of time. However, the self-contradiction or perhaps non-contradiction found in Saussure’s thesis complicates the very notion of measurement that conventionally underpins critical engagements. What I find fascinating in addressing Saussure’s engagement with race and language is that it opens up the possibility of rethinking the questions of essence and nature that are crucial to the understanding of language (acquisition policy) and the dis/continuities of the human race(s), as detailed below.

Dis/Continuities of Human Race(s)

‘Race’ meant the ‘accumulated cultural differences carried somehow in the blood’ (Stocking 1993: 6). *The emphasis was on ‘somehow,’* for blood proved a very expansible and inclusive fluid. (Haraway 2004, 251, my emphasis)

The above definition opens Donna Haraway’s story of race, “Universal Donors in a Vampire Culture. It’s All in the Family: Biological Kinship Categories in the Twentieth-Century United States”, and is consistent with her configuration of fact and fiction as cohabiting and “made in world-changing technoscientific practices by particular collective actors in particular times and spaces” (2004, 65). It should be noted that the term “vampire culture” in the title of Haraway’s story is not only an

indication of her focus on blood as emblematic of the nature/culture continuum, but is also a reference to the Human Genome Diversity project, which was dubbed the “Vampire Project” by some indigenous organisations (2004, 272). I want to underscore here the arrival of the term “Vampire Project”. In her book *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in an Age of Genomics*, Jenny Reardon (2005) notes that the name “Vampire Project” was given to the 1992 initiative of the Human Genome Diversity Project by the World Congress of Indigenous Peoples. According to Reardon, the central motivation of and the urgency for the Human Genome Diversity Project resides in the idea that “Social changes that facilitated the mixing of populations ... threatened the identity of groups of greatest importance for understanding human evolutionary history – ‘isolated indigenous populations’ ... To unravel the mysteries of human origins and migrations, these valuable gene pools would need to be sampled before they ‘vanished’” (2005, 1). At its outset, the Diversity project was criticised for having colonialist and racist tendencies. For example, as Reardon notes: “In May 1993 some physical anthropologists accused the initiative of using twenty-first-century technology to propagate the concepts of nineteenth-century racist biology” (2005, 2). What I find particularly inspiring about Reardon’s account of the Human Genome Diversity initiative is that it reveals a narrative that is not simply about the condemnation of the powerful Western and Scientific communities who exploit and render powerless racialised others. Rather, Reardon argues that what is needed is a rethinking of the nature of power and knowledge production through an excavation of the history of race, against the oppositional conception of power and knowledge, truth and ideology. For Reardon then, “Claims that the Project would lead to the end of racism by producing reliable scientific knowledge were just as unconvincing as some of the critics’ claims that the Project would propagate racism and colonialism by exploiting the genes of indigenous peoples” (2005, 3). Whereas Reardon urges for a probing of the “conceptual order” and “social interests” (2005, 7) as two symmetrical and inseparable domains, the study at hand pushes still further the questions of perception and conception, epistemology and ontology,

identity categories and questions of being, through the notion of onto-epistemological dis/continuity.

Returning to the opening quote of this section, I recall that when reading Haraway's emphasis on the word "somehow", I was drawn to the sense of intrigue and wonder it evoked. How do cultural differences get carried in blood? Somehow. The word somehow, provides an answer that is affirmative (yes, blood does carry cultural difference), yet strangely indeterminate (some ... how?) – it is differing, questioning and threatening to annihilate its own affirmation and promise. How? Somehow! Some ... how?³⁹

The idea that racial identity – a signature that marks culturally and/or biologically distinguished features – is transmitted and reproduced through kinship relations, persists despite the changing discourses of race. As Balibar puts it, "The symbolic kernel of the idea of race ... is the schema of genealogy, that is, quite simply the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community known as 'kinship'" (1991, 100). It needs to be mentioned here that it can already be gleaned from Balibar's description that the idea of race involves the question of part (read filiation of individuals) and whole (read filiation of race), which will be discussed at length in chapter eight.

Pondering over the condition of possibility of transmission and reproduction, Haraway draws attention to the inherent ambiguity of the carrier blood. As she writes, "Blood ties were the proteinaceous threads *extruded* by the physical and historical passage of substance from one generation to the next, forming the great nested organic collectives of the human family" (2004, 251, my emphasis). It follows, then, that although the fluidity of blood⁴⁰ seems to support its function as a medium of a

³⁹ Here we could add the question of *where*. As the following discussion shows, the location of racial difference animates and articulates the question of race itself.

⁴⁰ The racial discourse of blood is interesting, in that its seemingly arbitrary representation of kinship and race is strangely ubiquitous and "shared" across various cultures, and persistent (I'm thinking here, for example, of the Chinese tradition of *di xue ren qin*, which is an ancient model of parental testing, with the understanding that relations of filiation could be proved in seeing two drops of blood from the child and

“diachronic identity” (Kirby 1997, 16), in flowing from one individual to the next in a relation of genesis, it is also “expansive and inclusive” (Haraway 2004, 251), thus potentially compromising the integrity of race. It may be worth highlighting here that the etymology of blood connotes swelling (gestation), springing forth (both *in to* and *out from*) in the form of a stream, as well as the action of bursting open.⁴¹ In other words, bloodlines both promise and threaten the lineage and reproduction of race. Given this, as an opening process of genesis, the (re)production of race through blood ties – relations of filiation – necessitates containment in order to secure its integrity against contamination from its outside/other.

Continuity and Discontinuity

To underscore what is at stake here, we can come at the problem by

one parent respectively conglomerate in a bowl of water). Though the study at hand does not provide a thorough analysis of the genealogy of blood and race, I want to mention here the idea of the “one-drop rule” in the American context. As I have tried to elaborate in the main text, what is at stake in the various depictions of blood ties and racial identities is the question of (dis)continuity. And with the following description of the one-drop rule, I want to emphasise that the question of continuity is in noway neutral. Rather, the conception of continuity is informed by and materialises power, as well as politics of difference. But in my thesis, the identity of power, following Vicki Kirby’s theorisations is itself called into question. That is, it is not simply understood in terms of repression and domination. Jared Sexton provides an instructive reading of the one-drop rule. He writes: “The one-drop rule or hypodescent rule refers to the (sometimes codified) convention of defining a person as racially black if he or she has any known African ancestry or at least ‘one-drop of black blood.’ Under this rule, people of mixed race with some discernible African ancestry would thereby be designated as black. As Daniel (2001) notes, ‘Most people are unaware that one-drop rule is unique to the United States and applies specifically to Americans of African descent’(xi). ... I hasten to add, again, that hypodescent is not reducible to the one-drop rule (not even for the definition of racial blackness in the historic instance), since one can be defined by hypodescent according to proportionally higher minimum criteria (‘one quarter’ or ‘one half’ rather than ‘one drop’). That multiracialism takes aim at the one-drop rule in particular – the only form of hypodescent applied exclusively to racial blackness – is further evidence that it is singularly interested in contesting the terms of black identity as they have developed under the regimes of racial slavery and Jim Crow segregation” (2008, 272).

⁴¹ See, for example, the etymological definition of the word provided by www.etymonline.com.

beginning with the question of continuity (of race). The term continuity is often understood as a lineal transition of a “substance” (a term both Haraway and Balibar deploy in their respective quoted assertion) – as the figure of bloodline vividly demonstrates - deriving from an origin and transmitted through the passage of time. Before proceeding to the question of continuity and discontinuity, I want to hasten to clarify that my interest in discussions related to bloodline is more about its function as the medium of carrying (more discussion on this question vis-à-vis signifier/signified in chapter four).

In relation to this, and in accordance with my emphasis on the need to read sexual difference and racial difference, not as two separate grids of intelligibility, or fields of analysis that somehow intersect or add together, but in terms of copulation, sexual/racial diffraction. I want to note in passing here the masculine and paternal connotation of the word filiation, exemplified in its root *fili* (us) son.⁴² And yet, rather than rejecting the idea of filiation and blood, I suggest to stay longer and mull over the ways in which such conceptions may be reconfigured so that questions of the maternal and femininity are not cast the oppositional or simply excluded. For example, even if we concede to the paternal connotations of the concept of filiation, we could consider that the father-son lineage must nevertheless pass through the mother – through linking of the blood of the maternal and the child’s bodies through the umbilical cord. We can think with Luce Irigaray’s reading of divinity and the patriarchal Christian tradition. As Irigaray notes, the idea of divinity lays accent on “the conditions of engendering, by the masculine gender, of the divine child as son” (2004, 162). And yet, Irigaray importantly argues that such a divinity, however masculine in its designations, *necessitates*, and one may say, is *dependant upon* “two women, a mother and a daughter ... in order to bring a divine child into the world” (2004, 162). It follows then, that for Irigaray “a woman is divine from birth” (2004, 162). As Irigaray continues:

For the woman, it is thus a question of not losing the divinity received with life. But it is further a question, for her, of making this divinity of

⁴² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/filiate>, last accessed 14 July 2015.

her own, of accepting the responsibility for it, of incarnating actively in herself the divinity received at birth. ... To remain faithful to herself, to turn back to herself, within herself, to be born again free ... And to speak of woman's liberation, without such a course, such an autonomy, is not possible. (2004, 166)

I am particularly inspired by Peta Hinton's reading of Irigaray's notion of "Divine Women". She explores this idea in order to rethink the tension between the specificity of embodied and situated feminine subjects on the one hand, and a universal identity of the feminine required for a feminist politics of difference on the other. Rethinking the nature of specificity and universality with and through Irigaray's reading of the divine, and especially of the role of the mother as both "a threshold" (2013, 442) and an opening, who is thus "always and already inhabited by the divine" (442), Hinton argues that feminist political community does not imply a suppression of embodied and situated feminine subjectivities and differences. As Hinton makes clear, "Instead, in the same moment that she invokes women's need to 'share a little,' Irigaray points to the inherent complexity of what it means to *be* woman in the first place, a move that both enables and complicates political community, and a feminist politics of difference more generally" (2013, 450, emphasis in original). Having said this, I want to return to my major focus on the question of race. My discussion of the figuring of blood here is primarily concerned with the notion of dis/continuity. The enduring substance of racial identity is understood as an object or an attribute that presents itself to and is perceived by, a subject. The temporal and spatial configuration requires some elaboration here. The continuous temporal succession – past, present, future – is organised by as well as takes the shape of the unfolding of historical events, as discrete moments *in* time. Given that each moment *derives from the origin* – one that could presumably be retrieved or traced back in time – *and reproduces the origin's substance*, a notion of continuity underpins this deterministic model of causality, and the primacy of the human calculus. Karen Barad's reading is instructive here:

Prediction and retrodiction are Man's for the asking, the price is but a

slim investment in what is happening in an instant, any instant. Each bit of matter, whether the size of a planet or an atom, traces out its designated trajectory specified at the beginning of time. Effects follow their causes end on end and each particle takes its preordained place with each tick of the clock. The world unfolds without a hitch. Strict determinism operates like a well-oiled machine. Nature is clockwork, a windup toy the Omniscient One started up at time $t=0$ and then even He lost interest in the abandoned (or perhaps remembers now and again and drops in to do a little tuning up). ... The presumed radical disjuncture between continuity and discontinuity was the gateway to Man's stewardship, giving him full knowability and control over nature. ... Individuals with inherent properties there for the knowing, there for the taking. Matter is discrete but time is continuous. Nature and culture are split by this continuity and objectivity is secured as externality. (2007, 233)

Barad's account subjects the humanist trope of continuity to scrutiny. Both time and space are rendered as exterior referents for the human subject, who is capable of anticipation and calculation – that is intellection and reason – based on these locatable relations of causality and essence, as well as their determining and continuous operations.

Such a conception of continuity is illustrated in Léopold de Saussure's association theory. Recall that Léopold de Saussure argues against French colonial policies of assimilation, hinged upon the idea that the racially inferior others may resolve their racial differences through education and become *evolué*. Opposing and judging as futile assimilationist doctrine, he argues for absolute hierarchical racial differences especially in terms of "innate intellectual competence and achievement" (Young 2002, 14). In line with polygenist postulations, Léopold de Saussure's associationist model conceives of different races as different species, thus radically discontinuous. It follows then that native others' inferiority – such as the purported lack of mental power evidenced in the lack of abstraction or analogy in the language of the colonised for which Léopold de Saussure argues – functions as both the cause and effect of their subordination.

Importantly, Barad's reading sheds light on the ambiguous relation between continuity and discontinuity, as well as its implications for the

nature/culture problem that exercises my attention throughout the thesis. On a closer examination, continuity or succession (through time) is identified through spatial markers of change from one distinct moment/event to the next, from here to there, from now to then. This means that the subjective perception of time's passing *depends* on the recognition of different moments that take, to quote Barad, "preordained space" (2007, 234) *in* time. Likewise, the discontinuous spaces and moments could be read as what constitute time, understood as "a succession of evenly spaced intervals" (Barad 2007, 234), and condition subjectivity. In other words, the process of subjectification is the process of spacing and temporalising. The relation between subjectivity and objectivity will be developed further later in the thesis. But for now, I want to underscore the implicated, co-dependant and co-distinguished relationality⁴³ (or what Elizabeth A. Wilson [2004, 22] calls the relation of "obligation")⁴⁴ of continuity and discontinuity that is, dis/continuity. Its vexed nature compromises any simple discrimination of space from time, nature from culture, and by extension identity from difference,⁴⁵ hence

⁴³ For an excellent examination of the question of time and spatiality, see Johncock (2014).

⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. Wilson (2004, 22) draws on Freud's deployment of the term obligation in his argument that 'neurons are "obliged" by the psyche to give up their excitation' to discuss the relation between soma and psyche. The obligatory/obliged nature of relationality Wilson describes echoes the sense of dependancy I am trying to elaborate on here, as it also displaces the self-present subjects as the centre of intentionality. As Wilson writes, "Freud's use of the term here implies no such human or conscious action. This is not a metaphorical use of obligation, if metaphorical is taken in the narrow sense of bringing the meaning of obligation to bear on psychosomatic action when it is properly applicable to another domain (social relations). Freud's use of obligation at the level of neuropsychic interchange denatures the human- and conscious-centric sense with which obligation is used elsewhere. The effect is not to render neurological action knowable via obligation, but to make obligation curious via its association with the microbiological" (2004, 22).

⁴⁵ Throughout the thesis, the notion of difference as a gap separating two entities is contested. Instead, difference is itself a "torsional becoming" other (cf. Kirby 2006). The identity of race, its measurement and scaling, is itself a manifestation of difference that exemplifies identity itself. For example, the relation between differences in colour and bloodlines – both as taxonomic orderings of race – is interesting in this regard. In her book *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance*, Jean E. Feerick reads plays like "Othello, Titus Andronicus ... Lust's Domination ... The Lascivious Queen"

unsettles the exceptional status of the human condition.

Dis/Continuity of Race

Having briefly laid out the relation between continuity and discontinuity, we can turn to the question of human race and racial differences. According to Kay Anderson (2007, 22), the use of the term “race” referred to similarities rather than differences in physical traits since the 1600s. This model proposes the community of human race in terms of tribe and kinship. “Humanity has constituted itself as a race” (Colebrook 2013, 35), with the white man of right and reason as *the* figure of and for “life in general” (36). As mentioned in the previous section, this is a monogenist account of the single human species, evinced in the conception of the “Chain of Being” (Anderson 2007; Livingstone 2008). The idea of the great chain of being, often attributed to Plato and Aristotle,⁴⁶ posits that all living beings – including animals and plants – are connected together in a vertical and hierarchical form. What interests me here is the logic of the chain that entails continuity and hierarchy and implies a comprehensive system that orders the whole of being into fixed places within a common measure or scale. It consists of three elements. First, systems of taxonomic

and notes that “differences of colour emerge, as it were, in dialectical relations to social rank, allowing social tensions originating with the difference of rank to be resolved, mitigated, or exploited with reference to colour. As such, they expose with uncanny similarities of representational strategy, the social dynamics that enable colour to accrue value as a cultural marker of difference, revealing how its emergence is predicated on and entangled with the decline of a deeply established system of difference that places the metaphysical value on bloodline independent of colour, complexion, or culture. As such, these plays depict the processes that enable disparities of social power to be actively rechannelled into the emerging modes of difference. They dramatize the collision of competing systems of difference and suggest that need for thicker accounts of race for this period – studies, that is, that will question not only the singular attachment of this category to taxonomies of colour but its axiomatic connections to *ethnos* as well” (2010, 4-5).

⁴⁶ Interestingly, as Anderson notes, though already articulated in Plato and Aristotle, the idea of chain of being gained its “belated fruition” in the eighteenth century, paradoxically when “faith in speculative a priori metaphysics was waning ... and a spirit of patient empirical enquiry continued its triumphant march in science” (2007, 37). I find this highly relevant for the two culture problems, the question of ontology and epistemology as discussed in chapter two.

classification makes intelligible – with presumed accessibility and knowability – the nature of and relations among species. Second, teleological ordering explains the hierarchical positioning of different species. Last but not least, it specifies the bridges between groups of species that will secure the continuity of the chain. These elements taken together form the vertical imagery of the chain and position the human above all other beings. In its Christian articulations, the chain of being is embedded in the idea of biblical time.⁴⁷ According to Anderson, “the idea of biblical time ... assumed a 6000 year time span for the rise and spread of human life over the globe” (2007, 113). It posits the human as the descendant of Adam created (one day) *after* animals by God, and thus bridging the gap between the angels and beasts (Anderson 2007). In this account, all humans are of the same origin and family. It should be noted here in passing that the question of the origin of language is tightly bound up with the nature of the human race (cf. Frank 2008; Livingstone 2002). For example, in the monogenist account, human language (together with the use of tools and agriculture all of which are often seen to represent the uniqueness of the human) is said to be given by God to “man” kind, so that all languages, just as the diversities of humans, could be traced back to the same origin.⁴⁸ This question will be engaged further

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that in the notion of biblical times, the conception of the human as deriving from the original pair of Adam and Eve created by God is set against the naturalistic view proposed by the ancients such as Plato and Aristotle (the pioneer of natural philosophy), “the first humans had spontaneously generated from the natural world and early humans had existed as mere brutes” (Anderson 2007, 113). In so doing, as Anderson observes, the teleological conception of human (whose destiny is upward and onward toward salvation) and the affinity with God is secured.

⁴⁸ There is much variation in Christian interpretations of the human pre-history and of the origin of language merits some attention here. Moreover, as commentators have pointed, the distinction between monogenism and polygenism was not a simple one between Christian and non-Christian thought (cf. Frank 2008; Anderson 2007). As Anderson makes clear, “Such was the lively, and sometimes contradictory, mix of arguments in circulation regarding human diversity, that some polygenists in America attempted to defend the biblical account of origins by advocating that before Adam, who was the first Caucasian, the other races were already in place (Bernasconi 2002, 3). Other less literalist Christian polygenists maintained the role of Creator in the development of life on earth, regardless of the question of human origins” (2007, 137). In his book *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origin*, David Livingstone observes the lingering, if marginal, thought of pre-Adamites, which

in relation to the problem of origin/copy that is inherent to the phenomenon of host country language acquisition.

The idea of human race is foregrounded in “the universal unity to the human” as well as “human potentiality ... realised in a movement out of nature” (Anderson 2007, 35). Importantly, as Anderson points out, the *location* of nature is conceived of as both within and outside of the human. As she writes, “In humanist thought – and especially since its Christian strand became intricately intertwined with modernity during western Europe’s Enlightenment – humanness has been presumed to entail a transcendence of nature conceived as: first, a non-human sphere of animals and environment that is ‘external’ to people; and/or second, a corporeal nature that is thought of as animal-like which resides within human beings” (Anderson 2007, 8). At stake in this description of human transcendence of nature is the idea of discipline and improvement. In other words, the idea of the human separation from nature is validated through the injunction to cultivate and improve upon the state of nature

provided “an alternative world chronology”. The basic premise of pre-Adamites is the existence of human beings before Adam. For my purpose here, I want to draw attention to the ways in which pre-Adamite premises pose a *challenge* to the conception of the origin of language, which also flags the complexity of the nature of origin itself. As already mentioned, in marking the origin of human kind as the creation of Adam, the affinity between human and God is secured, henceforth the upward and onward destiny of human in the chain of being. And yet, in this strand of thought, the genesis of the human is in fact a form of degeneration, because it is conditioned upon the Fall, the corruption of the pure, and the shameful and disobedient act of intercourse. In other words, the affinity of man with God that secures human exceptionalism is paradoxically conditioned upon the degenerated and corrupted essence of man’s genesis. In naturalistic world views, however, the origin is understood as something more primitive. Livingstone’s reading of pre-Adamite theory sheds light on the origin of language. As Livingstone writes, “The pre-Adamite theory ... was also profoundly implicated in speculations about the origins and development of language and whether human speech had generated from a pristine past or progressed from primitive antecedents. By proposing the existence of humans, and therefore language, before Adam, it was profoundly troubling to those for whom Adam’s speech was the foundation of all human speech. ... The ‘search for the perfect language,’ ... was a long obsession with language thinkers. The passion to recover the lost perfection of speech in paradise, where there was ... a ‘primordial affinity between words and objects,’ took many forms” (2008, 48).

that is situated both outside of, and within and as the human body.⁴⁹ This is understood as a capacity *of* and *for* capacity, which constitutes and articulates the essence of *culture rather than the nature* of human. The etymological connotations of culture (*cultura*) illustrates this point. It means cultivation, agriculture, as well as care and honour. It should be noted that it shares with the word “colony” the same stem *colere* meaning “to inhabit, cultivate, frequent, practice, tend, guard, respect”.⁵⁰ The dialectic of passivity and activity is evident here in the distinction between nature and culture. Whereas nature is configured as waiting to be tended and cultivated, culture, as the agency of human intention (in – *tendere*, a stretching out, extending toward) acts upon and functions as the steward of nature. As Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha write in their discussion of the biopolitics and geographies of race and food, agriculture, as the most systematic strategy to “gain energy from the earth more efficiently and abundantly”, has “not only turned our ancestors into humans” (2012, 1), but also has profound implication for all of life.

Central to the conception of the human race as a unity in a continuous teleological chain of being – in either naturalist or Christian theological monogenism – is thus the capacity for culture to draw upon, regulate and ultimately transcend nature within (in other words, embodied in the flesh and animality of Man) and without (which refers to the environment that

⁴⁹ The notion of cultivation merits more attention. Some critics have taken up with the discussion of race and cultivation in John Locke and Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy (cf. Uzgalis 2002; Conway 2002). For example, Daniel W. Conway observes the association of “racial cultivation” and “animal husbandry” in Nietzsche’s thinking. Observing “Nietzsche’s habit of referring to the process of cultural advancement as a series of exercises in *breeding*” (2002, 180), Conway writes “Although it may be tempting to treat ‘breeding’ as merely a careless synonym for ‘cultivation’ or ‘acculturation,’ there are larger problems with this terminology” (108). And Conway continues to make clear, “If races are fashioned through the implementation of techniques borrowed from the practice of animal husbandry, then it becomes all-too-easy to view (and to treat) the recipients of cultivation as mere animals” (2002, 108). Conway’s assertion certainly calls into question the line drawing practices that distinguish human from the racialised as well as non-human others. On a slightly different register, and for an interesting reading of the problematics of the simple association of racialised others with animals, see Weheliye (2014).

⁵⁰ See etymonline.com.

surrounds the body). Through the cultivation of reason and speech, human beings are said to finally transcend discontinuous, and thus finite nature, as well as to move upward and onward toward salvation and spirituality that is immortal and infinite. Recall that in our earlier discussion of dis/continuity, we noted the relation of obligation and the involved complexity of space and time, nature and culture. Such is the complexity inherent in the logic of the vertical chain. Commenting on the ambiguity of the Chain-of-being concept, Anderson contends, “on the one hand, the Chain implied there were no breaks with each species moving *imperceptibly* into the next. On the other hand, it postulated a *clear* hierarchy of creation with the human well above all other animals” (2007, 37, my emphasis). Curiously then, the transcendence of the human race is at once enabled by the preordained and hierarchical locations – thus discontinuously – occupied by inorganic and organic life forms with attributed essence, and threatened by the linkages implicated in the very continuity and unity of the Chain structured by the “divine workings of a universe” (that is, a naturalistic conception) or by “God’s design” (that is, theological belief) (Anderson 2007, 38).

Furthermore, we could consider the ambiguity of the transcendence of the human race through the transitive and intransitive connotations of the verb “transcend” itself. In its transitive form, transcendence necessitates an object, which would be nature in this case, which is acted upon and from which the subject is then released. In the light of this, the transcendence of the human race, defined by the subjective capacity for agency, intention and calculus, cannot take place without its objects – namely external nature and internal animality and corporeality. Intransitively, the transcendence of the human race has no object, but is itself the outcome, or what Kirby describes as a form of “self-possession” (2006, 125). It follows then that the human race that transcends, and distinguishes itself from non-human others, is itself the object of transcendence, whose identity can never be finally achieved, but only, we would venture to argue, materialise performatively, but yet, objectively.

The puzzle of the human is further evidenced in the turn to innatism or the biologisation of race in the nineteenth century as well as the

lingering dispute between the monogenist and polygenist conception of race (and language); that is between the postulation of race as human unity, or race as racial differences among humans. Whereas the monogenist account of race conceives of the unity of the human race in cultural terms – reason, speech, intention, agency – the polygenists argue that racial differences are originary and permanent, and the hierarchies among races are determined primarily by physiological features. Nevertheless, despite its contestation of the idea of the shared origin of human beings, polygenism is similarly conditioned upon and driven by the idea of the exceptional status of the human condition.

This is clearly attested to in the effort to locate the innate capacity of races for civilisation as a distinct human condition in the practices of craniology and phrenology. For example, Robert Knox, who presents as amongst the most influential secular polygenists (cf. Livingstone 2002; Anderson 2007; Anderson and Perrin 2008), drew largely on the studies of the skull by craniologists and phrenologists to explain “the unimproved and unimprovable condition of certain peoples....” He argued that “the size and the shape of their skull” should be taken “to reflect on the capacity of the mind in its power of reasoning or ‘ideality’” (Anderson and Perrin 2008, 17). Importantly, as Anderson stresses, the practices of craniology did not simply provide measurements supportive of a belief in racial hierarchies, but also set these against the inferior status of the animal. Although specifically indexing racial differences in terms of capacity for cultivation, culture, or civilisation, the racist practices of “head readings” (Anderson 2007, 140) were ultimately served an interest in the nature of nature and of the human. Related to this, in her reading of French zoologist Georges Cuvier’s work on comparative anatomy, Anderson observes that:

Cuvier was not ... just claiming that those groups of people with “a depressed forehead and prominent jaws” are inferior. In the disparaging terms of colonial stereotypes they were already “known” to be inferior. It is, rather, the supposed fact of this inferiority that Cuvier is mobilizing in order to try to demonstrate a general *anatomical* link between head shape and intelligence – one that, taken from race,

could be generalized across human and ape. (2014, 10, emphasis in original)

The significance of the visual for this turn towards the biologisation of race should be noted in passing. For example, visual imagery, supported by and coupled with “statistical measurement” and “moral cartography” (Livingstone 2002, 173), is featured prominently in the field of American polygenist anthropology, which marked a departure from theology and the beginning of scientific polygenism. David Livingstone observes two forms of the visual representation. The first is the “illustration of head forms and crania ... that performed the rhetorical task of essentialising race images in the minds of readers and of conveying a sense of the empirical seriousness of their enlightened inquiry by deploying the techniques of the scientific illustrator” (2002, 176). The second form is a racial mapping, which according to Livingstone is also a moral one.⁵¹ Livingstone’s observation of George Gliddon’s (an English-Born American Egyptologist, who followed Samuel George Morton’s craniometry and polygenist theory) construction of a racial chart, is telling in this regard:

His self-named “monkey chart” of the “Geographical Distribution of the Simiæ in Relation to That of Some Inferior Types of Men” sprang from his interest in the zoo-geography of Louis Agassiz, who had remarked in several places on the parallels between the distributions of black Orangutans and black humans. Gliddon’s aim was to translate the polygenist theory of centres of zoological creation into the visual language of cartography. Encompassing fifty-four monkeys and six humans, the map’s purpose was crystal clear: to provide a visual display of the claim that “within the black circumvallating line which surrounds the zone occupied by the *simiæ*, no ‘civilization’ ... has ever been spontaneously developed since historical times” and, second, that “the most superior of Monkeys are found to be indigenous exactly where we encounter races of some of the most inferior types of Men”. (2002, 176-177)

⁵¹ Related to my earlier discussion of bloodlines, it is important to note that, according to Livingstone (2002), the concerns regarding the purity of racial lineage informs racial mapping.

Interestingly, the above account shows that even in the polygenist attempt to map, and thus to locate, the radically separate and hierarchically fixed races among human,⁵² the parallel between human and animal necessitated in this visual cartography reinstalls the unity and identity of Man. Moreover, linked to our earlier discussion of the identification of nature and culture in various configurations of essentialism, biologism and universalism, we could further note the intricacy of the nature/culture question manifested in the monogenist and polygenist accounts of human and racial differences. For even though scientific polygenism is a biologism that essentialises racial differences, the practices of craniology and phrenology sought to locate the quality of mind, intelligence, and culture through the visual techniques of the measurement of skull. In light of this, the biologisation of race is not set against the cultural definition of the human race. Rather, as Anderson's study on the colonial encounter with the indigenous population (and environment) cogently shows, it is precisely in the context of a certain crisis in the definition and location of the human in the context of British colonialism that the conception of race took a radical turn in nineteenth century. Given that the monogenist account of human unity relies on the clearly marked locations of and distinctions between inorganic and organic forms, as well as the general capacity of the human race to improve and cultivate, and thus separate from and rise above nature, the encounter with the New World's indigenous people troubled the place of the human.

Importantly, we should note that the argument here is not a matter of conventional causality which presumes the self-presence of subjectivity and identity, in which the encounter with indigenous people is considered to be the cause of the problem of the human. Rather, as I have already discussed through the reading of the idea of transcendence itself, the identity and unity of the human race is only performatively

⁵² In her study on the process of racialisation and speciation in the thought of human evolution, Megan Glick makes a similar argument for a double movement, through which not only "race became a mitigating force in the taxonomic ordering of species, so too did the speciation of higher-order primates provide a framework for reimagining the contours of race" (2012, 99).

manifested and is internally incoherent. Further to this, we could note that the idea of savagery (represented in how New World's indigenous people are figured) has always and already been integral to the conception of the human. As Anderson notes, "savagery has been conceived in western myth and commentary running back many centuries as a mode of life that exists 'closer to nature'.... The enlightenment/colonial idea of the New World's indigenous people reiterated these diverse constructs of savagery that we have seen attached themselves to the figuration of civilisation's counter-condition. Such people, as 'savages', were either virtuous 'children of nature' or bestial subhumans" (2007, 13).

Returning to the question of the biologisation of race, it is interesting that corporeality, understood in terms of interior nature or animality, is reconceived in the turn to innatism or scientific polygenism. Instead of simply referring to the organic matter in which animals are trapped, but which is transcended by a separate quality called human mind, it is now bound up with a certain conception of intelligence and culture itself. As Anderson notes, "it was in the attempt to correlate supposed knowledge about the inferiority of certain peoples with their physical – and, above all, cranial – features, that an anatomical notion of intelligence came to displace an earlier, immaterialist, conception of mind" (2014, 13). We could follow Anderson's argument and consider the corporealised or materialised mind in terms of embodied subjectivity. And, from a different perspective, we might also elicit a notion of nature (as well as its associated terms such as corporeality and animality) that is itself intelligent and cultural. Interestingly, the attempt to fix racial hierarchies through locating mind in the body actually brings biological determinism the most significant assault. For if corporeality – the nature within – is cultural, which reads, writes, articulates, and produces, then it is subject to and *of* constant rewriting and rearticulation. Anti-essentialist and anti-racist scholars have taken up with and forcefully argued against the biological determinism of racial differences. For example, it has been argued that the visual representations and measurements are always and already informed by certain racialising conception of intelligence, so that

the observed anatomical features are not self-present natural truths that determine racial superiority/inferiority, but are in fact the representation and discourse of biology. This line of argumentation will be engaged in detail in the following chapter on the racialised political economy of the visual.

It needs to be emphasised that my intention here is by no means to dispute the implications that the biologisation of race or the turn to innatism has for the politics of slavery and colonialism. Rather, my argument is that the understanding that the identity of the human, the natural, and the cultural is never self-present or finally achieved. At stake then, is the how of essence. That is, how do certain features of the anatomy, such as the shape of the skull, come to define the essence, the “as such” of racial superiority? Moreover, as Anderson (2014, 3) queries, how it was the essence of race that came to foreground a specific modern strand of humanism, and in turn, how it congealed into a corporeal reality (Kirby 1997, 72). Kirby’s assertion of essentialism is instructive, as she writes:

We may assume that when we locate essentialism we identify it and corral its dangers, thereby securing the virtue of our own practice. But we have merely embraced another essentialism’s many mutations and one that finds us right inside the belly of the beast. The stuff of essentialism is not an entity that can be identified and dissolved by merely saying yes or no to it. ... [I]f we grant that essentialism is unarguably wrong – morally, politically, and even logically – we still haven’t addressed the ways in which its errors work; that is, how essentialism’s scriptures “come to matter,” how they come to write/right themselves. (1997, 72)

As we have seen, the slippery nature of essentialism and the instability of the nature/culture division confounds the very identity of human race and racial differences. The turn to innatism cannot, as is often thought, easily divide culture from nature, but dis/continuously reconceives and rewrites the nature of nature and culture itself. In historicising and interrogating the dis/continuity of the notion of race and nature, we could gain a glimpse of the condition of possibility of “human nature”

(Kirby 1999) and its becoming (other).

Keeping in mind the dis/continuity of the notion of race, I want to briefly return to Saussure's conception of ethnisme/ethnicity. As noted, with the notion of ethnisme, understood in terms of social bond/force that provides the most and "only essential" (Saussure [1983] 2013, 306) condition of a community of language, Saussure forwards an account of linguistic and social continuity that is not based on racial unity or an essentialist conception of linguistic origin that is coupled with a causal, teleologic notion of development. As Saussure writes, "within limits indicated, a language can be considered a piece of historical documentation. For example, the fact that the Indo-European languages constitute a family forces us to infer an *original* ethnicity, of which all the nations speaking those languages today are, by *social descent*, the more or less direct heirs" ([1983] 2013, 306, my emphasis).

For Saussure, the weight of the linguistic collectivity through time, intrinsic to the formation of ethnisme, provides the qualification for the radical arbitrariness and "blind evolution" (Saussure [1983] 2013, 316) of language on the one hand, and the "quasi-immutability" (316) of features in "language families" (313) on the other. In other words, the insight that language is an expression of social convention and constraint, rather than of a determined organic being with a fixed essence, paradoxically reveals and explains its arbitrary nature. And yet it seems that Saussure tries to avoid essentialising the social convention as the influence that determines change. In his conclusion to the *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure points out that the idea of an essentialist and deterministic notion of organic language persists in different guises, "inasmuch as the genius of a race or ethnic group tends constantly to direct its language along certain fixed paths" ([1983] 2013, 317). Though considering both the weight of collectivity and time as two inseparable factors that contribute to the arbitrary and systematic, mutable and immutable, discontinuous and continuous nature of language, it seems that Saussure ultimately privileges the force of random change in time over necessity as social determination. For as Saussure asserts, "To proclaim the immutability of roots is to say they have undergone no phonetic changes, nothing more:

and there is no guarantee that such changes will never occur. In general, anything time can do, time can also undo or change" ([1983] 2013, 316–317).

The relevance of this to the discussion here lies in the intricate nature of dis/continuity and the question of essence, origin and nature pivotal to our earlier discussion of human race and racial differences. More specifically, we should note that the most radical purchase of Saussure's semiotics lies in its paradoxical nature, which blurs the difference between continuity and discontinuity that also troubles the self-presence of the speaking subject as the centre of intention.⁵³ In other words, a language "is not directly subject to the control of the minds of its speakers" (Saussure [1983] 2013, 313). Kirby's reading of Saussure's metaphor of a deck of cards elaborates this point:

Within the random play of possibilities that the card presents, Saussure discovers the play of language and the infinite potential of its expression. And yet, just as there are obvious restrictions – in the rules of a specific card game, the inevitable limitations in any one deal, the measured timing through which the play unfolds, and so on – we might assume that a similar field of constraints must also qualify the speaker's degree of agency. Saussure's point here is that although the speaking subject may feel entirely possessed of free and individual choice regarding language decisions, this apparent agency is the determined articulation of language itself. (1997, 37–38)

This has significant implications for the idea of language as human property and as an indicator of the capacity for civilisation. Two related conceptions of language are relevant here. First, it is understood as

⁵³ It needs to be noted however, that even though Saussure's analogy of the deck of card constrains individual agency because it is determined by the stacked cards and the rules of the game, "he retained an unqualified investment in agency and intention nevertheless" (Kirby 1997, 48). Saussure's desire to define and preserve the unity of language *for* the linguist and the discipline of linguistics, as Kirby contends, following Derrida, returns ultimately to the self-presence of identity. In extending Saussure's conception of the sign and the "force field of 'value'", Kirby provocatively asks, "how is the autonomy of the language system dissected out from the operations of other social systems? ... [H]ow does the unity of "the social," or "the cultural," secure its particular identity against "an outside," namely, the natural order?" (1997, 49)

distinguishing the human from the non-human others. Second, the valuation of certain languages as grammatically more superior to others is said to reflect the differential mental power of separate races (for example in Léopold de Saussure's language policy). In the place of a self-present human subject of language, Saussure's thesis presents a notion of a speaking subject that is called or interpellated into being, and is thus constrained by the force field of the game that also substantiates language itself. The idea of civilisation, understood as a specific type of labour in which interior and exterior nature is cultivated through the development of language and by the hand of man (cf. Derrida 2005b; Anderson 2008), is radically called into question.

Significantly, Saussure's anti-essentialist configuration of language that displaces any self-present unity also challenges a deterministic notion of civilisation. This is all the more conspicuous in Saussure's specific engagement with the study of "linguistic paleontology". This strand of work postulates that language evidences the determining features of "Aryan" civilisation.⁵⁴ For example, Saussure ([1983] 2013, 307) reads the work of Adolphe Pictet, an influential Celtic studies scholar and pioneer in the field of "linguistic paleontology". It is said that language provides evidence for the determining features of civilisation – "its material equipment (tools, arms, domestic animals), social life (nomadic or agricultural?), family structure, and government" ([1983] 2013, 306). This understanding of civilisation as a development that continues in time and space is most tellingly manifested in the attempt to locate the bacterial – the flora and fauna populations in a specific area – as the

⁵⁴ Instead of providing a general account of civilisation whose meaning is vague (see Young), I follow Kay Anderson's argument which contextualises the interpretation of civilisation. As Anderson notes, "the interpretation of civilisation as a condition existing in opposition to savagery, grew in interaction with European exploration and, in particular, contact with the Americas in the 1600s. This was when plural forms of human association had to be seriously acknowledged. 'Discovery' forced an acute tension internal to the concept of civilisation between on the one hand, a tendency to offer universalistic trajectories of the human race as a whole, and the recognition of alternative societies and cultures" (2007, 69).

origin of the civilisation (Saussure [1983] 2013, 306). Such an investigation not only calls into question the exceptional status of the human as the producer of civilisation, but more specifically to Saussure's concern, it also threatens the integrity of linguistics as an independent unity in the argument of the continuity and natural connections of various spheres of life.

Given Saussure's insistence on the unity of the linguistic system and his vehement refutation of the affiliation between race and language, it should not be surprising that Saussure counters the claim of the apparently deterministic and comparative approach to language and civilisation of linguistic paleontology on the following two grounds: the first is that of "the uncertainty of etymologies" ([1983] 2013, 307); and the second, that of "the possibility of borrowing words" (308). Saussure rejects the theory that words have definite and traceable origin, which reflects and is manifested in the reality of a civilisation. For example, Saussure argues that "Asiatic languages have no verb for 'to plough', but this does not prove that ploughing was originally unknown there. It may have been abandoned or replaced by other techniques, called by other terms" ([1983] 2013, 208). Likewise, the possibility of borrowing words, for example in the case where a word is introduced into a language later on, defies the genetic theory of language wherein a comparative conclusion, such as social traditions and material, geo-ecological conditions as the origin of civilisation can be drawn from the presence of a word in several languages. As Saussure explicitly states, such an impossibility is by virtue of the "lack of extralinguistic evidence" ([1983] 2013, 308).

Saussure's rejection is in line with his conception of difference as well as his deliberate exclusion of the biological, the natural, and hence the originary. The earlier quote on ethnisme and social descent shows that even though Saussure is "forced to infer an original ethnicity", this original ethnicity is however not grounded in any origin, but is contingent. Interestingly, in his contestation against the essentialist account of language that is equated with and grounded in extralinguistic facts, such as social or cultural factors, or those to do with the level of

civilisation, the question of essence surreptitiously reinstates itself. That is, although Saussure asserts that there is no extralinguistic fact, the basis of his counter-argument about the absence of the word “plough” and the phenomenon of borrowing words is unclear. This is also a problem of translation. Words from different languages can, for example, indicate the same object, such as hemp. In fact, both the essentialist postulations of linguistic paleontology and Saussure’s anti-essentialist endeavours situate their evidence in “something” that is either present or absent. As Kirby contends, “Surely the ‘place’ from which both essentialism and anti-essentialism make their claims is ‘something’ of a ‘shared accommodation,’ a strange abode which their contradictions cohabit” (1997, 72).

This could be further read in relation to the problem of the referent and Saussure’s dilemma in accounting for the identity and continuity of linguistic unities. That is, how to reject any sense of origin, be it natural, material, historical or psychological, that can be said to ground the identity of linguistic unity, all the while making sense of the apparent generational and familial continuity of a linguistic community. What does Saussure mean by “social descent” if there is absolutely no origin to begin with? Moreover, as we recall, for Saussure language is founded negatively, and thus it is contingent and arbitrary. As Saussure notes, “to postulate permanent features unaffected by time or space is to run counter to the basic principles of evolutionary linguistics. No feature is permanent as of right: it survives only by chance” ([1983] 2013, 313). Given this arbitrary rather than causal configuration of the linguistic system, what can notions of inheritance which presume the origin and continuity of a substance mean?

This set of questions all point to the problematic of continuity and discontinuity, which is central to conceptions of the politics of racial subjectivities, identities, and their corollary notions such as kinship and generation. Understandably, given the anti-essentialist theorisation of race that subjects any recourse to biological determinism to scrutiny, the association of race with the question of continuity and its attendant questions such as kinship, reproduction and inheritance, is considered

somewhat counter-intuitive, if not an essentialist manoeuvre. For example, commenting on the reproduction of whiteness that is attributed as if it were a property of bodies, Sara Ahmed gives the following explanatory caveat: "It should, of course, be difficult to think of race and inheritance together, partly because the concept of inheritance has been so central to biological models of race, where racial hierarchy is seen as a natural product of a difference in kind" (2006, 121). For Ahmed, the question of inheritance should be detached from the "race/reproduction" (2006, 121) bind. Instead, racial inheritance and the reproduction of whiteness are rendered performative. That is, what is inherited is the contingency (read as the possibility of contact, or touch) and historicity that conditions the arrival of race and man. And yet, in her book *Culture and Performance – The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory*, Vikki Bell voices her misgivings about such a performative approach, especially in relation to identity politics:

In many ways the concept of performativity is set, in principle, against a conception of lineage or generational connection. ... For the notion of performativity insists that any apparent continuity across time and space be treated suspiciously, that it be, analytically speaking, punctuated and fragmented, understood as a fragile accomplishment achieved through processes of citation and repetition. ... To seek to comprehend the subject as genealogically delivered, therefore, is seemingly to revert to a mode of thinking cast off by this understanding, one akin to the assertion of interiority: apolitical, naturalistic, naive and ultimately dangerous. The historical association of such modes of thought with racist, xenophobic and fascistic enterprise stands as stark warning. ... [However], there might be a danger of moving too quickly to a position whereby the desire to refigure identity politics in non-essentialist ways means a refusal or denial of the connectedness, the multiplicity of existing, that is generational or genealogical attachment...[or] carnal connection. (2007, 29-37)

Formulated in terms of the performative/emergent/fragmented and the generational/genealogical, Bell's description above captures what is at stake in thinking about continuity and discontinuity in political and

ethical considerations of race. For Bell, it is politically urgent and ethically salient to consider the possibility of a thesis of performativity that does not exclude a conception of generation. That is, a configuration of discontinuity that is not opposed to but has a space for accounting for the multiplicity of embodied attachments.

To further underscore this disconcerting complicity of continuity and discontinuity, we could pose the following paradox: if we concede that events are only discontinuous and performative, such an affirmation is itself strangely continuous. If we argue for a continuous event or substance that derives from an origin, such a continuity is nevertheless measured against the discontinuous moments with clearly marked beginning and endings. As Karen Barad provocatively asks, “What is a discontinuous discontinuity? – should we understand this discontinuity to contain the trace of its own disruption/undoing? In a sense the troubled naming seems quiet [sic] apt since a discontinuity that queers our presumptions of continuity cannot be the opposite of the continuous, nor continuous with it” (2007, 182). Our reading of Saussure’s meditation of ethnisme and his struggle with arbitrariness and systematicity, with mutability and immutability, also illustrates this conundrum. That is, the relation between continuity and discontinuity, and their associated terms such as “original” and “performative”, “multiplicities” and “partialities” (cf. Bell 2007), is more paradoxical and complicitous than straightforwardly exclusive or oppositional.

This is what I mean by the notion dis/continuity. In our discussions of the dis/continuity of race, we see that human separateness and human unity are not two separate levels of analysis. But the complexity of the relation between these terms is itself a site of dispute in the genealogy of race,⁵⁵ and has posed considerable challenges to humanism as well as to the Eurocentric and Anthropocentric ideals in which it is embedded. The

⁵⁵ In Anderson’s work, the term genealogy refers “to an interest in the discursive conditions that make possible the intelligibility of the *idea* of racial difference and hierarchy” (2007, 22, emphasis in original). In many ways, my analysis of the question of race could be said to be in line with the method that conjoins phenomenological and genealogical approaches developed in Sara Ahmed’s work (2006, 2014). Central to this method is the attention to the temporality and spatiality – the how – of “conjuring of a behind” (Ahmed 2014, 25).

tension between human race and racial differences, and more importantly, the question as to how and where to place the human in relation to its others, is not only discernible in, but also animates the transition from the theorisation of race “as tribe-nation-kin to race as innate – immutable – biological” (Anderson 2007, 191).

Although biological essentialism is condemned for providing the ground for racism and sexism, and rightly so, the dis/continuities within the thought about race itself bear further consideration as they reveal the performative arrival of race–*the internal incoherence that race is*.⁵⁶ As Anderson argues, “There is no straight line back ... through the Nazis and the eugenics movement of the twentieth century, to the racial scientists of the nineteenth century, to the theoreticians of stadial human development and hierarchy of the eighteenth century, to the associations of blackness with the devil and dangers and sexuality of night in the sixteenth century” (2007, 191). For Anderson, such a linear and generalised account of race, even in the context of an anti-racist argument, runs the risk of recuperating the separation of nature from culture that undergirds various forms of racism in the first place.

Importantly, in historicising the question of race and the human that neither begins with an a priori separation of nature and culture, nor presumes a naturalisation of human race (cf. Colebrook 2012), we see that, with Anderson, the turn to innatism or biologism in the nineteenth

⁵⁶ Indeed, as my thesis shows, the performative approach to race needs not separate nature from culture. Both Reardon (2005) and Anderson (2007) provide important readings of the arrival of the concept of race. Related to my discussion here of the nineteenth century turn to biologic essentialism, Reardon provides a convincing argument for the need to critically engage with scientific discourse about race. As Reardon writes, “Although adept at bringing to light the constructed character of claims about race when they perceive them to have social origins, critical theorists of race to date have not called into question the constructed nature of claims about race when they deem them the product of legitimate science. Perhaps the most striking and important case of this oversight is their embrace of the claim that gained media prominence in the mid-1990s: ‘scientists say race has no biological basis’ (Hotz 1995, Flint 1995, Alvarado 1995). Rather than interrogating how such claims about the biological meaninglessness of race are made, and how they shape and are shaped by broader social, political, and technical contexts, many critical race theorists draw upon these claims to bolster their argument that race is mere ideology (Gates 1986, Appiah 1992; Higginbotham 1992; Fields 1990; Gilroy 2000)” (2005,18).

century should be read as not simply in the service of colonialism and the politics of slavery, but also and crucially, as the expression of the crisis and anxiety of the fragile condition of the human and of humanism itself.⁵⁷ Moreover, in contrast to the commonly held view of the determination of nature over culture in the biologisation of race, our reading of the debate between monogenism and polygenism makes visible the slippery nature of essentialism and the dynamic involvement/entanglement of the nature/culture question.

As is captured by Haraway's emphasis of the "somehow" of the transmission and reproduction of the signature of racial identity as a set of inherited properties that set a race apart from others, the anxiety and crisis of humanism is also an im/possible separation of the human from its others. Whereas for Anderson the colonial encounters with non-/human others present the limit of and evoke a crisis for the exceptional status of the human condition, Jacques Derrida broaches such an anxiety in terms of the decentering of the human subject, understood as a sequence of traumas, in the following aspects:

[T]he *psychological* trauma (the power of the unconscious over the conscious ego, discovered by psychoanalysis), after the *biological* trauma (the animal descent of man discovered by Darwin ...), after the *cosmological* trauma (the Copernican Earth is no longer the centre of the universe, and this is more and more the case one could say so as to draw from it many consequences concerning the limits of geopolitics). ([1994]2006, 122, emphasis in original)

The decentering and displacement of the location of the anthropos is

⁵⁷ Similarly, drawing on Foucault's theorisation of the Western systems of organising knowledge since the Renaissance, Robyn Wiegman contends that there was "no single route to the emergence" (1998, 27) of what she considered as the "most damaging racial question" (27), i.e. "How many species comprised the field generally known as 'man'?" (27). Importantly, as Wiegman reminds us the emergence of such forms of question that (hierarchically) differentiates among human beings "seems to demand (and has elicited) deeply racist answers, we would be wrong to assume that the motivating force of natural history was to establish scientific proof for white supremacy in a theory of multiple creations" (1998, 27). Both Anderson's and Wiegman's arguments could be read as articulating a form of power/knowledge that is not straightforwardly oppressive. This will be expanded on in following chapters.

central to anti-humanist and post-humanist endeavours to question “what counts as human” (Braidotti 2013, 16). Importantly, in calling into question humanism, conceived of “as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress” (Braidotti 2013, 13), anti-humanist and post-humanist projects also challenge the ideal of Europe as the exemplary/exceptional with universalising powers (see also Derrida 1992). And yet, as we have seen, an anti-essentialist project such as Saussure’s thesis of language and ethnisme must also rely upon and recuperate a positive fact, an essence. Derrida broaches this problematic in terms of the work of mourning of the human. As Derrida writes, “Mourning always follows a trauma. ... This trauma is endlessly denied by the very movement through which one tries to cushion it, to assimilate it, to interiorize and incorporate it. In this mourning work in process, in this interminable task, the ghost remains that which gives one the most to think out – and to do” ([1994]2006, 121–122). Worded differently, the decentering of the human subject is never simply the absolute loss of centre, just as anti-essentialism cannot exclude or finally sever itself from its avowed opposite – the positive fact of reality. Instead, the centre is always and already dispersed, disseminated, and yet objectively manifested. In the following chapters, the question of the human is approached in terms of an “originary humanicity” – through, as and with the trilling tongue and the idea of a dis/continuous race – that will “affirm anthropomorphism, refute anthropomorphism, and entirely redefine what we mean by ‘anthropomorphism’” (Kirby 2011, 20). This is, following Kirby, to acknowledge the co-implicated and co-distinguished specificity and universality, discontinuity and continuity, difference and identity, that opens up the question of the human race and racial differences “as if for the first time” (2011, 21).

Chapter Three

Auto/Ethno/Graphy as Onto-Epistemology

Readers have noted that my dissertation work presents a tension between the ways in which my theoretical framework takes shape on the one hand, and the place of the empirical analysis on the other. Two alternatives structures were proposed: (1) Given that the thesis is theory driven, the empirical data could be used to support my theoretical ambitions and arguments; (2) The empirical analysis uses theories, because theoretical tools are needed to make sense of the empirical data. The concern is that the thesis seems to run on two different levels. It seems implausible that these levels could be bridged, by any means other than incorporating one into the other – that is to say, the thesis would be either a theoretical work *or* an empirical study. I open this methodology chapter with this dilemma because I think the importance of these concerns is not limited to the structure of the dissertation, but is related to some of the central issues I am trying to address through a notion of an onto-epistemological dis/continuity.

In fact, it is not until recently, while I am completing the dissertation, that I have started to realise the questions which underpin these concerns. The first of these concerns the relation between feminist theoretical and empirical studies, in which the latter are considered to be attentive to and foregrounded in lived realities and every day practicalities. In the second place, and tightly bound to the first question, is the risk that my work will make universalizing and generalizing gestures. That is, my engagement with the nature of race is nevertheless grounded in the context of Finnish language acquisition among adult immigrants in Finland, as well as in my participation in the process of learning Finnish language as an immigrant woman. How then is it possible to provide a general theory of race that is obviously embedded in a specific context? Surely the experiences of language learning among immigrants might be radically

different in Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, China etc? Haraway's theorisation of situated knowledge would, perhaps, enable me to mitigate the generalizing gesture in my theoretical arguments by noting from the start the locatedness of my engagement. But this was not a satisfying solution to me, for this manoeuvre appears to be a confession of sort. It acknowledges a certain violence of the universalizing and generalizing gesture of theory, and concedes to the specificities of its own identity, only to move over and beyond it quickly.

The relation between theoretical work and empirical study, and the conundrum of universality and specificity have been continuously debated within feminist theory and have profound political and ethical implications. These tensions are productive in that they enable the field of feminist theory to transform itself. Consistent with my proposed concept of an onto-epistemological dis/continuity as a way forward, rather than accepting a choice between the suggested two structures – theoretical or empirical, I think it is methodologically and ethically salient to open up these questions further. In her book *Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism*, Sara Ahmed draws attention to the question of theory at the outset. As Ahmed writes, “a feminist response to the relation between theory and authorisation need not be a suspicion of theory as such, but rather a sustained reflection of the institutional politics of ‘doing theory’, and a sensitive articulation of the complexities of the relation between theory and practice” (1998, 18). Agreeing with Ahmed's suggestion, I want to make recourse to Haraway's discussion of situated knowledge mentioned earlier. For Haraway, the conception of situatedness means that the embodied and material specificities are inherent in any knowledge production and abstraction practices. Importantly, not only does this notion destabilise the boundary that separates subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the subject and the object of study, but also, and particularly relevant for my following discussions, the situated nature of any knowledge production/abstraction practices means that the problem with the ways in which a general conclusion about race is achieved through the specific engagement in the Finnish context is not about its purported failure to account for, or violently elides

its difference from other particular contexts (I am thinking here of the question that language learning practices among adult migrants in other countries could be totally different from the context that informs the study at hand). Is not the assumption that there are differences among these *locations*, itself a form of making sense, a form of theorisation and abstraction? In other words, is there a certain commitment to and investment in what constitutes the identities of embodied subjectivities, the contextual specificities, and their effect on theoretical readings and writings? And what theorisation of “difference” underpins such a reading? In my understanding, situated knowledge production is not about humbling theoretical manoeuvres based on the truth of our embodied being and existential experiences. Rather, it radically opens up the question of subject formation, as well as, and importantly, “the apparatus of bodily production” (Haraway 1988, 591). As Haraway writes,

Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of “objective” knowledge. ... I wish to translate the ideological dimensions of “facticity” and “the organic” into a cumbersome entity called a “material-semiotic actor.” This unwieldy term is intended to portray the object of knowledge as an active, meaning-generating part of apparatus of bodily production, without *ever* implying the immediate presence of such objects or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge at a particular historical juncture. (1988, 592-594)

Significantly, through the “cumbersome” combination, and true to her insistent linking and blurring of fact and fiction, as well as the practice of irony that is attentive to partiality without forfeiting the possibility for collective political practices, Haraway encourages us to consider the contingency and the conditions through which both the theorising subject and the context or its object of study co-emerge. It follows then, that not only the question of agency – the knowing, intending, calculating subject

who produces knowledge – is reconfigured as material-semiotic, but also, the facticity, or the truth of contextual differences or our embodied specificities as well as the premises of what theoretical work consists of are rendered not readily available. But this does not mean the validity and objectivity of our engagement is made impossible, or that our political interventions would be paralysed due to such an impossibility. Rather, this is a productive tension that lies at the core of feminist ethical and political practices. As Vicki Kirby writes, the contingency and the always problematic emergence of any identity – be it the identity of the subject or object of research – “does not mean that we can remove ourselves from the politics of identifying processes” (1997, 172; see also Hinton 2014, 110). The dis/continuity of trilling race proposed here echoes precisely such a feminist ethical and political engagement, for it insistently poses as a question the nature of race, even while such a necessarily delimited, because identified, perception and conception of race re-emerges.

The aim of thesis is not simply to provide a reading of the different theoretical approaches to the question of race; even though certain scholars’ work will be featured and engaged with more extensively than others, it is their commonly shared logic of argumentation, a strand of thought that is at stake here. In terms of the role of my auto/ethno/graphic (Ahmed 1998, 134) account, it is not analysed by *applying* theories of race, because in so doing, my auto/ethno/graphic discussions about the Finnish for foreigner classes and my encounters with the art installations is configured as exemplar of, and the analytical fodder for, this or that conceptual framework. Neither is my aim to reverse the direction of the analysis/explanation/insertion, by deploying the empirical material, understood as lived and embodied experiences, as corrective to theorisations of race. Both of these positions are enabled by the very same logic that presumes initial separation of the theory engaged with and the facticity of reality discussed. My position however is a more involved and implicated one, and it is best captured by the term auto/ethno/graphic method.

The specific engagement taking shape in the thesis is itself an

entangled phenomenon emerged through “webs of differential positioning” (Haraway 1985, 590). My reading of theoretical discussions is *articulated through* my auto/ethno/graphic account, which includes my reading/encountering of for example the art pieces and online discussions. The term auto/ethno/graphy takes cues from Ahmed’s formulation of women’s writing that both affirms the identity of the author, and at the same time displaces the notions of “authorial and sexual identity” (1998, 134). For Ahmed auto-biography is the process of “individuation [which] never quite takes place” (1998, 135), for it is a movement “outward and across from any individuated fantasy ... that traces how a writing of the self cannot simply exist as such, how the self is always implicated in relations with other” (136). It follows then, that auto-biography and ethnography are never separated or separable realms of writing, where the former engages with the self, and the latter concerns the other. Instead, each marks the limits of, thus inhabits with and in the other. Such is the entangled phenomena which echoes the work of Vicki Kirby and Karen Barad, who present as key voices in feminist inter-/trans-disciplinary preoccupation with materiality.

I want to stress here that in my reading, Kirby’s and Barad’s formulation of onto-epistemology does not radically depart from, nor is defined against, but is consistent with and furthers the implications of feminist theorizations of embodied subjectivity as specificity as well as processes of differentiation as a political economy (see Kirby 1997). I am thinking here of for example Haraway’s nature/culture approach to situated knowledge production, Chandra Mohanty’s (2003) and Rosi Braidotti’s (2011) call for a politics of location that reconfigures differences in positive terms, Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) corporeal feminism that renders knowledge production as always already embodied and corporeal and Judith Butler’s (1993a) analytical rigour applied to the process of materialization, to name but a few.

Onto-epistemological entanglements conceived in Kirby’s and Barad’s work extend further the aforementioned lines of theorization with the view that, as Florence Chiew puts it in her reading of Barad’s work, “there is no reason why the view that knowledge is a product of socio-

historical construction is incommensurable with the view that knowledge claims are natural expressions of the world" (2012, 168). Despite their differences, one may risk adding, with a somewhat generalizing gesture, that there is a discernible alignment of spirit in these feminist scholarly works. That is, they are all invested in rendering visible and calling into question the workings of economies of hierarchisation that justify modalities of exclusion and denigration, with the hope that in so doing "life can be lived more robustly, more equitably" (Kirby 2006, 107).

Such a conviction that drives these intellectual endeavours has been a formative influence for my engagement in this thesis, which is itself understood as an onto-epistemologically entangled phenomenon. Kirby's reading of the notion "phenomena" is instructive here. As she notes, the term phenomena "equates with ontological entanglement" (Kirby 2011, 149) and "is preferable to particularism – 'the view that the world is composed of individuals and that each individual has its own roster of non-relational properties'" (149). Moreover, the assertion that phenomena as onto-epistemological entanglements "suggests that the very ontology of the entities emerges *through* relationality: the entities do not preexist their involvement" (Kirby 2011, 76, emphasis in original). Such an onto-epistemologically entangled phenomenon may appear to be more fitting with quantum mechanics than with race. Let me explain why, and specify why the phenomenon also finds resonance in the study of host country language acquisition by migrants.

The "double slit experiment" and "which-slit experiment" (Barad 2007, 2013) clearly show that the ontology of the electron (i.e., what the electron is), is inseparable from how it is measured (i.e., how an electron is known). Given the centrality of the perplexing two-slit experiment and the which-slit experiment for Barad's thesis on onto-epistemological entanglements (as well as Kirby's reading of it in *Quantum Anthropologies*), I now briefly turn to Barad's interpretation of the wave-particle duality paradox.

Electrons are usually considered as particles, which are fundamentally different from waves. This is because particles are "localized entities that occupy a particular place in space and time" (Barad 2013, 60), which

waves by definition cannot. However, when tested with a two-slit apparatus, which is originally devised to understand the nature of light, that is whether it is a wave or particle, electrons exhibit wave pattern/diffraction pattern. How is this possible?

Things get even more interesting in the which-slit experiment. In this experiment, the two-slit apparatus is modified so that the top slit is replaced with a slit on a spring. The amount of displacement of the slit, by dint of the forward momentum of a beam of rubidium atoms, is set to test whether the atoms pass through the top slit. Here, electrons in the inner orbit of rubidium atoms get charged from a laser beam, and reaches what Barad describes as an “excited state” (Barad 2013, 64). The atom then passes through the which-slit detector, which is constituted of micromaster cavities. Meanwhile the charged/excited electron in the atom emits a photon, as its energy drops back down from its charged state, and leaves a telltale/trace that can be detected by the micromaster cavities. Then the atoms would go through the two slits.

This experiment shows that the tested entity, such as the rubidium atom in this case, is not disturbed, as Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle would have it. As Barad explains, “because you can show that by getting the rubidium atom into an excited state and having it come back down, it does nothing to affect the atom’s forward momentum” (2013, 64). Still more intriguingly, when involving measuring apparatus such as the laser beam and micromaster cavities intended to examine which slit the electron goes through, the resulting scatter pattern illustrates that the electrons exhibit particle-like behaviour.

The nature of an electron *is* how it is measured. Kirby’s usage of the word “quantum ‘weirdness’” (2011, 76) that depicts quantum mechanics succinctly captures the confounded onto-epistemological entanglements. But what exactly does this quantum expression say (if anything) about auto/ethno/graphic discussions, about the context of Finnish language learning among adult migrants in this thesis that at first glance seems to be *all too human*? Surely, to answer this question is no easy task. The relation between the field of study of the humanities and the sciences – whether they are radically incommensurable with an insurmountable gap

between them – has spurred much heated debates. Charles Percy Snow's 1959 acclaimed essay *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* has informed and marked the beginning of the debate revolving around "the impasse between constructionist arguments that underline the cultural value of knowledge vs scientific research that requires objectivity and proof" (Kirby 2008, 14).

The reservations and received misgivings about quantum theory's relevance and implications for the humanities is a good example. As Kirby's gloss on the relation between quantum theory and deconstructive criticism in the humanities makes clear:

Although we may believe, as quantum science indicates, that the nature of physical reality exceeds our everyday perceptions in quite fantastic ways, we tend to rationalise the discrepancy by attributing complexity to a particular arena of research and scholarship, as if the arcane nature of these findings is quite irrelevant to the stuff of the quotidian. ... Another argument that discourages curiosity about the possible relationship between everyday life and quantum relations is the received wisdom that the minute scale of quantum behaviour can have no application in the macro-scopic world of human affairs. ... Given an apparent need to quarantine the ordinary fabric of life, and importantly, how we think about it, from any troublesome complication, it is not surprising that the compass of deconstructive criticism is also quite small, confined to only a few disciplinary locations within the humanities and even there, appearing more like a historical curiosity than a viable contemporary challenge. (2011, 4)

Recent debates in feminist theory regarding the nature of matter and the matter of nature (cf. Kirby and Wilson 2011; Hird and Roberts 2011; Hird 2004; Ahmed 2008; Irni 2013), and in particular feminist post-/in-/non-human inter-/trans-disciplinary studies (cf. Åsberg and Lykke 2010) can be seen as in line with the "two cultures problem" (Kirby 2008). Not only has the most enduring theme of feminist theory – the nature/culture division – and its corollaries undergone sustained investigation in these debates, but the specific focus on the human, is brought to the forefront of these exuberant reconsiderations. At the centre

of contention in writings about the posthuman condition (cf. Braidotti 2013; Hayles 1999; 2005; Haraway 1988, 2004, 2008), and inhuman epistemology (cf. Hird and Roberts 2011; Hird and Giffney 2008; Hird 2009, 2012), is how the line is drawn that materialises and distinguishes the human from its others, such as the nonhuman or animals or the environment. Related to this, another heated strand of debate in these discussions has to do with whether the issues of power inequalities and social and political injustices that have been so central to critical engagements with questions of race, gender and class for example have become redundant in the current turn to affect and matter (cf. Hemmings 2005; Leys 2011).

My arguments in this thesis are situated within this nature/culture debate. I engage with the question of the human squarely, without evading it. Following Kirby's reworking of anthropocentrism in terms of "originary humanicity" (2011, 20), which is aligned with onto-epistemological views, I will show that the question of the human lies at the heart of the onto-epistemology of race. But this is not simply to refute the human, or to expand its scope, leaving intact the process of its materialisation. Rather, posing anew the question of the human in terms of originary humanicity entails "unsettling sedimented wisdoms about location, about what constitutes embodiment, and asking why a single perspective might prove more comprehensive and entangled than seems possible" (Kirby 2011, 20).

Quantum Implications for the Question of Race and Research Methods

To be more explicit, my task in the following pages is to dilate on the ways in which aforementioned contemplations both shape the overall organisation of the thesis and necessitate a particular methodology. At stake here is the quantum implications for the question of race materialised in the political economy of racialised visual-aural encounters in the context of Finnish language learning among adult migrants. The question of race here is understood as an onto-epistemologically entangled phenomenon. It is emergent and (re)articulated in its

differential reconfigurations and becomings. To put it differently, rather than applying the category of race to the auto/ethno/graphic account of Finnish language learning practices, presuming that it has a set of fixed attributes, race is kept as an open question throughout the thesis.

In a similar vein, the starting point of the analysis in the thesis also shifts from a presumed set of categories, such as the classic triad or “triple oppression” – race, class and gender.⁵⁸ Linking to my earlier meditation on the relation between Kirby’s and Barad’s assertion of onto-epistemology and feminist theorizations of embodied subjectivity as specificity as well as the process of differentiation as a political economy, I want to further this reading here through the question of race.

An onto-epistemological view of race resonates with scholarly work that explores the materialisation of race as an entangled phenomenon. For example, situated in the debate about intersectionality, Nira Yuval-Davis (2012) argues against the well-rehearsed triple oppression – gender, race and class – because such an additive intersectional model remains on the level of the experiential, and risks leaving intact the ways in which social categories co-constitute one another. Instead, Yuval-Davis (2012) proposes an intersectional approach that combines intra-categorical and inter-categorical analysis.

Importantly, Yuval-Davis points out what she sees as different levels of intersectional analysis. The conflation of different analytical levels, according to Yuval-Davis, lies at the heart of the debate between an additive and a constitutive intersectional approach. As Yuval-Davis dilates on this detail,

Social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms ... [and] they are expressed in specific institutions and organizations, such as state laws and state agencies, trade unions, voluntary organizations and the family. In addition, they involve specific power and affective relationships between actual people, acting informally and/or in their roles as agents of specific social institutions and organizations. (2006, 6)

⁵⁸ See the discussion on this issue in relation to the usage of intersectionality in, for example, Lykke (2012) and Yuval-Davis (2006).

Yuval-Davis' assertion about the different analytical levels and the relations between and within social categories such as race can be linked with a performative rendering of the materialization – meaning both to matter and to real-ise – of social categories. Until its recent appearance in the work of Nina Lykke (2012), for example, or in Evelien Geerts's and Iris van der Tuin's (2013) review of the debate on intersectionality, Judith Butler's (1993b) conceptualization of social categories has rarely been engaged with in intersectional terms. Given the focus of the thesis on the question of race, I want to quote a passage at length where Butler teases out the convoluted workings of the social categories of race, sexual difference, and sexuality in *Bodies that Matter*:

[H]ow might we understand homosexuality and miscegenation to converge at and as the constitutive outside of a normative heterosexuality that is at once the regulation of a racially pure reproduction? ... Let us remember that the reproduction of the species will be articulated as the reproduction *of* relations of reproduction, that is, as the cathected site of a racialized version of the species in pursuit of hegemony through perpetuity, that requires and produces a normative heterosexuality in its service. Conversely, the reproduction of heterosexuality will take different forms depending on how race and the reproduction of race are understood. And though there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping "race" and "sexuality" and "sexual difference" as separate analytical spheres, there are also quite pressing and significant historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but the site at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other. This is something other than juxtaposing spheres of power, subordination, agency, historicity, and something other than a list of attributes separated by those proverbial commas (gender, sexuality, race, class), that usually mean we have not yet figured out how to think the relations we seek to mark. (1993b, 167-168, emphasis in original)

The gravity of Butler's point here has profound implications for thinking about the question of race. In this passage, Butler makes explicit the relational nature of difference – "the site at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other". If sexual difference is always already

racialised, and vice versa, Butler argues that it becomes untenable as the prioritization of gender (in others' and her own earlier work) or sexual difference in much feminist thinking.⁵⁹ For Butler, at issue is not only the prioritization, but also that it lends itself to and anchors itself in the assumption that sexual difference is radically separated from and unmarked by racial difference. This means, as Butler argues further, that sexual difference is implicitly (un)marked as white. Such a whiteness of sexual difference, by dint of its quarantined and privileged position amongst all differences, cannot then be a category of racial difference. Significantly, by showing how race, sexuality and sexual difference are inhabited within and constitute each other, Butler effectively casts doubt on both the privileging of certain difference and the simple juxtaposition and inclusion of differences in "romantic, insidious, and all-consuming humanism" (1993b, 116). This is because both positions must presume *a priori*, and reinstate and circumscribe, differences with fixed attributes, despite their intention to challenge the hierarchisation of differences in the first place.

Butler's meticulous analytical rigour on how differences are (re)produced and become intelligible is exemplary of one of the important political and analytical purchases of feminist theory, namely, the invested attention to the process of differentiation. This is also evident in metaphors deployed in feminist theory. One thinks here about for instance the diffraction pattern discussed in Haraway's (1997) and Barad's (2007) work, that is also attributed to feminist postcolonial theoretician and artist Trinh Minh-ha's stated hope "for a way to figure 'difference' as a 'critical difference within,' and not a special taxonomic mark grounding difference as apartheid" (Haraway quoted in Barad 2010, 147). For Haraway and Barad then "diffraction attends to the relational nature of difference; it does not figure difference as matter of essence or as inconsequential" (Barad 2007, 72). Stemming from the onto-

⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray's much quoted assertion "sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age" (1993, 5), at the very beginning of *An Ethics of Sexual dDifference*, could be seen as the commencing of "a generation of feminist thought interested to elaborate the nature of sexual difference and the political structures it reveals" (Hinton 2007, 1).

epistemological conceptual paradigm, Barad's formulation of "diffractive methodology" attends to boundary drawing practices that "illuminate differences as they emerge: how difference gets made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter" (2007, 29-30). The figure of skin in Ahmed's (2000) account is also in line with this way of thinking. Following Butler's theorisation of the logic of performativity, Ahmed directs our attention to the skin as the site of boundary-formation. For Ahmed, the skin is materialised in and materialises the difference between inside and outside. As such, it functions as a social mechanism of differentiation, which "guards" the integrity of both the individual and the collective social bodies.

Given their shared concern about the process of differentiation, feminist theorists who draw on the Deleuzian concept of difference and becoming (cf. Grosz 2010, 2011) propose to interrogate the "topological ontogenesis" (Puar 2007; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2013) that gives rise to the emergence of categorical differences. Despite their disparate conceptual lineages, these commentaries echo the advice to eschew the *a priori* invocation and fixation of differences, as the starting point of analysis. This is explicitly expressed in Elizabeth Grosz's assertion, "I believe that race, class, gender, and sexuality, although they appear static categories and are of course capable of conceptually freezing themselves through various definitions for various purpose, are precisely such differences that cannot be determined in advance" (2010, 107). Similarly, Jasbir Puar takes her inspiration from the Deleuzian notion of assemblage, and arguing for a moving away from taxonomical representations and towards a "dispersed but mutually implicated and messy network" (2007, 211).

Given the varying approaches in feminist theory that all have profound implications for how to understand race, I want to elaborate on how and why the onto-epistemological approach and the diffractive methodology is crucial for the study at hand. We can recall here that, according to the notion of quantum weirdness, the nature of an electron is how it is measured. Through the analysis of racialised visual-aural economy, this thesis will argue that the consubstantiality means that the

matter of race is not circumscribed by either the epistemological (for example in Butlerian interpretation) or the ontological (for example in Deleuzian argumentations) sphere. Nor is it simply a way of adding these two realms together, as different levels of analysis of race and racialisation – such as those of the lived embodied experience and the macro axes of power – featured in Yuval-Davis’ analysis.

At stake here is more than a simple refutation of the negation of matter in certain analytical paradigms (cf. Puar 2007; Saldanha 2006), or the need to diagnose and overcome the exclusion of animal others (cf. Deckha 2008) or other exclusivism in debates on intersectionality (cf. van der Tuin and Geerts 2013). Such an oppositional logic, or as Butler reminds us, the logic of non-contradiction, often serves to achieve cultural viability (violently, because of the erasure and negation), “by which one identification is always and only purchased at the expense of another” (1993b, 118). This logic of opposition/noncontradiction, exercised in claiming identity, or better, in assertions of specificity, informs much feminist theory. The opposing of the specificity of embodied subjectivity against the transcendent masculine universalism forwarded by most sexual difference feminist scholars, or of the specificity of racialised and sexualised others against the unmarked whiteness that occupies a privileged position, would be examples of this type of thinking. Nevertheless, such a logic must necessarily set into motion an economy of difference, as Butler (1993b) cautions, where the postulation of any identity and specificity must involve a reiterative process that simultaneously (re)installs and (re)repudiates its constitutive exclusions.

Butler’s point is that since it is incumbent to politically mobilise and to insist upon those specificities to reveal the workings of “the fictions of an imperialist humanism” (1993b, 118), the oppositional logic is inevitable, because it enables “the exclusions that each articulation is forced to make in order to proceed” (118). Can we then readily assume that opposition finally rests on repression, prohibition and exclusion? To answer this question, I want to briefly consider the dialectic that underpins the logic of negation and opposition. As Butler makes clear, negation in the dialectic does not mean “nothingness”(1987, 41), but “as a differentiating

relation that mediates the terms that initially counter each other, negation, understood in the sense of *Aufhebung*, cancels, preserves, and transcends the transparent and apparent differences it interrelates. ... [N]egation is a principle of absolute mediation, an infinite capable subject that is its interrelations with all apparently different phenomena" (41, emphasis in original; see also Kirby 2006). And yet, its very logical purchase, that is the consistency of opposition's operation, faces a radical assault, just as its inevitability is conceded. Kirby observes this as the convoluted and vexed working of negation, and argues "Instead of two separate forces then, each one pitted against the other, the dialectic is perhaps better understood as the torsional energies within a system that makes it 'work' or move" (2006, 10). This is an important observation, because the logic of opposition/non-contradiction also lies at the root of styles of critique,⁶⁰ a problem that must be fleshed out and addressed here as it informs the overarching style of engagement in the thesis.

Given the import of Butler's and Kirby's reading, I want to reconsider the possibility that a critique does not present as a corrective that is defined against another argument. Could we consider the possibility of holding seemingly contradictory arguments together in order to draw leverage from such a tension (Puar 2007)? Or, could we perhaps push go further, and to draw inspiration from the insistent feminist engagement with the question of difference, and to open up the presumed identity of *difference* between the specific and the unmarked universal and transcendent? Can we entertain the possibility that a critique is "a labour of love" (2008: 30), as Ahmed encourages us to do? Can we learn from Luce Irigaray's fundamental contribution to feminist theory, in which she challenges the phallic economy of the subject from within, to reconfigure "the critical tools of psychoanalysis in an enabling way" (Hinton 2007, 168)? That is, Irigaray's reading is situated within "the very contours of

⁶⁰ See Bruno Latour's (2004) discussion of social critique in "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern". Latour explicitly expresses his concern about the "knee-jerk disbelief, punctilious demands for proofs" (2004, 230) of a style of "sore-scratching" (232) social critique. Instead, Latour urges to shift attention from "matters of fact" (2004, 232) to "matters of concern" (232) and in so doing cultivating a more generous form of critique that does not serve to "debunk but ... to protect and ... to care" (232).

philosophy's phallogocentric self-definition" (Kirby quoted in Hinton 2007, 168-169).

Diffraction Methodology

With these considerations in mind, I again turn to the "diffractive methodology" to further explicate on my reading here. A good example of this type of reading is Barad's development of the notion "posthumanist performativity". As Barad notes, the deployment of diffractive methodology means her reading does not pit "physics and poststructuralist theory against each other, positioning one in a static geometrical relation to the other, or setting one up as the other's unmovable and unyielding foil" (2007, 92). The notion "posthumanist performativity" is itself an entangled phenomenon that is enabled by a diffractive reading "of the insights of Bohr and Butler and Foucault through one another" (2007, 442). This will be important for the engagement in my thesis, because the "diffractive methodology", embedded in an onto-epistemological framework, affords an entangled reading that gleans critical insights from and reconfigures argumentations circumscribed in the seemingly incommensurable realms of "those called 'technoscientific', those identified as 'social', and those identified as 'natural'" (Barad 2007, 442). Henceforth, onto-epistemology "reframes questions of ontology, epistemology, ethics, and science by radically recasting the anthropological" (Kirby 2011, 136).

In light of this, my auto/ethno/graphic account may be better described as "anecdotalization" (Michael 2012). As Mike Michael suggests, though akin to auto-ethnography, anecdote sheds light on "how the auto-ethnographic moment is itself performative of researcher and researched" (2012, 26). Anecdotalization is "a form of telling that gathers into itself previous tellings and performs critical reflections upon the mutualities of such tellings and retellings and the analytical resources that made such tellings tellable" (Michael 2012, 33). At a general level, the notion of anecdotalization accords with conceptual frameworks that conceive research methods as enacting and performative (see for example Barad 2007; Kirby 2011; Law and Urry 2004; Mol, 2002). The questions

raised in the thesis are informed by both my participation in the “Finnish for foreigners” classes, my reading of the online discussions, my encounter with the art pieces, as well as a range of scholarly works in the field of feminist theory, critical race theory, feminist science studies, phonetic science, sound studies, sociological writings on issues of migration and multiculturalism, and second language acquisition studies etc. In what follows, I will detail the empirical data.

The data in this dissertation consists of the following sets of materials: (1) auto/ethno/graphic accounts of speaking and learning to speaking the Finnish language. These mostly involve participant-observation in Finnish classes held for foreigners during 2011-2012 in the cities of Turku and Espoo; (2) discussions on learning the Finnish language on the online community kina.cc, which is widely used among Chinese who live or plan to move to Finland; (3) two pieces of art work – a. Finnexia, the fictitious drug for more efficient Finnish language acquisition; b. Mamme/Vårt land, a video installation featuring non-native Finnish citizens singing the Finnish national anthem in Finnish and in Swedish. The choice of these sets of materials, especially the ways in which they are discussed and analysed, is consistent with my concern with the question of fact and fiction. In studies on the questions of race and ethnicity, the fact/fiction divide informs much of disputation on the tension between, and the often hierarchised positioning of, abstract theoretical investigations on the one hand, and empirical studies that acquire weight in foregrounding in every day lived realities, on the other hand. I am inspired by the ways in which Frantz Fanon navigates the question of fact and fiction, the specific and the universal. In his foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Homi Bhabha remarks on this point:

There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provide a background for social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. ... The colonial subject is always “overdetermined from without,” Fanon writes. It is through image and fantasy – those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious – that Fanon most profoundly evokes the colonial condition. ([1952] 2008, xxiv - xxvi)

The foregoing discussion of auto/ethno/graphy is an endeavour to problematise the clear distinction between fact and fiction in suggesting that the authority of voice, the sovereign subject, is not readily available. In addition, in beginning and ending with discussions of art installations and weaving together auto/ethno/graphic account with readings of anecdotes, poems and online forum discussions, the thesis troubles the clear definition of what counts as solid ground/proof/truth for representation and argumentation.

The fieldwork was carried out at Finnish for foreigner classes during two periods – from January to April 2011 and from November 2011 to March 2012 in the cities of Turku and Espoo. I wrote my field diary (amounting to around 100 pages field notes consisting of both notes from the course content and observation of conversations and other happenings) during and after most of the classes I took part in. Auto/ethno/graphy in the field of Finnish for foreigner classes is messy. I came to understand things about learning Finnish while doing it. Though I did not use a checklist for the data collection at the ethnographic field, most of the notes could be sorted under the rubric of: conversations in Finnish among students, conversations in English among students, conversations in Finnish between teacher(s) and students, conversations in Finnish among students, silent awkward periods, funny or embarrassing moments etc. In the courses I took part in during the initial period of the study, I first went to talk with the course supervisor about my dissertation project and my interest in doing participant observation at their class. With their permission, I then presented myself and briefly my research topic in front of the whole class. During the second fieldwork period, I discussed my research interests with the course convenor over the phone, and asked for permission to do participant observation in the class before actually enrolling in the Finnish for immigrant women class. However, I did not, as I did with the earlier courses, present myself in front of the whole class, but only to a few students whom I studied with closely in group work. This was suggested by the course supervisor. Unlike the classes in which I participated during the first period of the study, which only had one

teacher in each class, this Finnish for immigrant women class normally had four teachers in each lesson. This was an interesting and important detail that affected my decision about how to present myself.

In the classes in which I participated, the initial number of students in each class was almost double that of the Finnish for immigrant women course. Thus, these classes resembled formal lectures with the teacher lecturing in front of the whole class and at times arranging group work. By comparison, due to the smaller amount of students and better teaching resources, the Finnish for immigrant women class consisted mostly of group works. Students were divided into small groups based on their Finnish level. In some cases, the respective teacher's level of English was also taken into consideration when they were designated to particular groups, for example, in cases where students in the group had only a basic level of Finnish but were capable of speaking English. In this course, I was mostly sitting with a few other fellow participants who were also beginners in Finnish, and had very few direct contacts and conversations with other participants.

The courses were organised for different purposes in mind, such as, in terms of intensity of the course, the goal of the course (if it aimed to quickly improve students' Finnish skills in order for students to pass the national Finnish exam for finding work in Finland or if it tried to assist the everyday practices that fit home staying mothers and elderly immigrants' needs), and the Finnish level of the students upon enrolment. Due to the various methods of organisation and the diverse teaching practices in these classes, the field work has been rather difficult.

During the first field work period (January to April 2011), I participated in two Finnish for foreigner classes in Turku. One was an intensive course (composed of two levels) organised by the adult education centre Työväenopisto (its Finnish name) or Arbis (its Swedish name). It took place on Wednesdays and Fridays between 12.30 pm to 14.30 pm. The other course was Finnish for foreigners class level 1 and 2, hosted by the evening school (this is a literal translation from its Finnish name) Turun Ilta lukio. This course took place every Tuesday and Thursday for one hour each time. During the second period of my field

work (November 2011 to April 2012), I participated in a Finnish for foreigners class specifically targeting immigrant women at the public library in the city of Espoo. This course was organised by a NGO group of retired female teachers. And it was the only class among those that I participated in that provided space for immigrant home staying mothers (i.e., mothers were encouraged to bring their children to the class). For this reason, the course supervisors always brought with them a box of toys for participants' children.

The two courses I participated in during the first field work period were both located in the city centre, and were thus relatively easy to access. Finnish for foreigners classes held in the adult education centre *Arbis/Työväenopisto* normally started at 12.30 pm. Most students in this class did not have full time jobs, with one exception who worked at night time. The Finnish for foreigners class at the evening school started at 19.00 pm, thus attracting students who needed to go to school or worked during the day time.

Practices for bettering Finnish pronunciation were the major components of all the Finnish courses that I attended. Through these practices I was afforded insights into the bodily and affective workings of Finnish language learning. The class dynamics, as a relevant issue is addressed in relation to the observed situations of speech production. This is not only because the classroom setting is to a certain extent a replica of the multicultural and multilingual Finnish context, but is also by virtue of my commitments to feminist postcolonial theory that attends to power dynamics, as well as of my understanding of the notion of context, in a new materialist framework, as a performative enactment. That is, it does not connote "separability as a starting point" (Barad 2007, 459) which "presumes there is an object that exists apart from its environment or surroundings and that this environmental context matters in some way" (459). Rather, context as contextuality is materialised in and materialises the "knowledge-making practices [that] are social-material enactments" (Barad 2007, 26).

During the course of the fieldwork, I have conducted two recorded interviews. One interview is with three classmates at a cafe after a Finnish

class; the other interview is with two other classmates, also at a cafe. Both interviews lasted for more than one hour, and both were conducted in the city centre of Turku. Since I was myself a migrant language learner in these classes, and had informed fellow classmates and teachers about my research plan and my participation in the courses as both a researcher and a student from the start (either during the first or the second session) of the course, I was personally quite involved with the topic of Finnish language learning and discussed this often with classmates.

I did not conduct further interviews for two reasons. First of all, I noticed that it was difficult, especially in the interview setting, for participants to describe how they practice Finnish pronunciations, which is crucial to my analysis of the matter of race, that is, the how of racialised and embodied differences materialised in the process of Finnish language learning. Second, my participant observation during the class and the discussions in online forums better supported my research interest in broaching the bodily and affective practices of Finnish language learning, especially the how of speech production. Even though my research questions are situated in and arise from the Finnish context of immigration and integration, they do not weigh heavily on the analysis of one's perception of what counts as successful integration, neither do they pose criteria or provide explanation for the failure or success of individual Finnish language learning practices.

The second set of materials includes discussions regarding Finnish language learning in online forums, especially from kina.cc. This forum is among the biggest virtual Chinese communities in Europe. It was established in 2000. I became a member of this virtual community already in 2004 when I was interested in pursuing studies in Europe. Most members of the forum are Chinese living in Europe, or are interested in moving to Europe for reasons such as studying or working. The section that I am most interested in for the purpose of this study is where members discuss issues related to Finnish language learning. The topics range from difficulties with pronunciations to issues in learning Finnish grammar. All the discussions are anonymous.

Two artworks function as supplementary materials. The first one is the

art installation project “Finnexia” by Lisa Erdman. As discussed in chapter one, the installation was about a fictitious drug, advertised as enhancing Finnish language learning process with “a unique combination of cognitive enhancement, anxiety reduction, and speech therapy” (Erdman, forthcoming dissertation). The second one is the art installation “Mamme/Vårt land”.⁶¹ In the Mamme video installation, artists Minna Rainio and Mark Robert presented the screening of non-native Finnish citizens singing the Finnish National Anthem. The gathering of various people that forms a united choir out of disparate parts, calls into question the identity of Finnishness. Whereas the first installation accentuates the implication of bodily practices of Finnish language learning against the backdrop of integration and immigration in the Finnish context, the latter encapsulates the political economy of racialised visual-aural encounters articulated through notions of national ownership as properties of belonging.

Conclusion: Part One

Opening with an analysis of the art installation Finnexia, the first chapter of this dissertation foregrounds the context of Finnish language acquisition among adult migrants in Finland. This is also meant to raise questions about the division between fact and fiction that informs much debates in critical engagements with questions of race and ethnicity. In lingering over Saussure’s dilemma in his theorisation of ethnisme/ethnicity, the second section of part one addresses the ways in which the phenomenon of host country language acquisition and the materialization of race are not two separate realms of studies that are somehow intertwined. Furthermore, in examining the tensions in the conception of human race and racial differences, I have argued for an account of the onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race, that does not shun away from questions of nature, essence, generation, but reconfigures them within the parameters of a notion of originary humanicity.

This reconsideration of race/ethnicity question through the lens of the

⁶¹ <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

nature/culture divide has significant methodological implications. For example, one of the major issues in research concerned with race is that it is as if we already know what race is even before a research question can be posed (cf. Gunaratnam 2003). Part of the concern is that the confinement of epistemological knowing – where race is understood as a grid of intelligibility – not only renders research results predictable, but also runs the risk of reproducing certain configurations of asymmetrical power relations. In the methodological chapter, which is the third section of part one, this problematic is addressed through the notion of onto-epistemological dis/continuity, with a focus on the question of difference. I argue that the convoluted nature of difference also means that theoretical engagements of and empirical studies on race should not be considered as two radically different and competing forms of studies. Following Haraway (1988) and Kirby (1997), I suggest that the contingency and the always problematic re-emergence of any identity – be it the identity of the subject or object of research – means that a feminist ethical and political engagement with race must insistently and repeatedly pose questions about the nature of race.

Part Two

Chapter Four

The Racialised Political Economy of Visual-Aural Encounters

An episode that took place during a Finnish for foreigners lecture may serve to illustrate the complexity of the racialised political economy of the visual. The teacher wrote the following words on the whiteboard:

A major task of today's lesson is learning Finnish words for different colours." She then pronounced them slowly, and occasionally pointed to objects in the classroom to give visual examples, such as projector's metal surface to show the colour grey (*harmaa*) and some other objects for colours like green (*vihreä*), red (*punainen*) and so on and so forth. After writing the word "musta" meaning "black" on the whiteboard, she turned around towards us, and pronounced it without providing any visual examples. Instead, she showed us how the word would be used in association with other words. For example, she notes that "musta" is used as the spoken version of the Finnish word "minusta", meaning "I", as in, for instance, the phrase "musta tuntuu" (I feel). Just as she was about to proceed to teach the names of other colours, a voice behind me announced, loudly and clearly, "musta mies", meaning "black man". The speaker laughed immediately after making this statement. The teacher moved the corners of her lips upwards slightly in an awkward smile as a response to this comment, and turned her back against the class to write down the names of the other colours. The rest of the class fell quiet. No one addressed the utterance. No one laughed. This silence expressed the uneasy atmosphere. Based on the proximity and the deepness of the voice, I could tell that the speaker was H, a male student from Ivory Coast, who was sitting right behind me. As if echoing the silence in the

classroom, my back felt stiff. H's laughter suggested that his remark was jocose. But the laughter did not change the sticky situation; if anything, it added further perplexity.⁶² The strangeness of the sound of the word m-u-s-t-a-m-i-e-s for my foreign ears seemed to contradict its weight. Disturbed by and wanting to think further about this event, I wrote it down in my field notes. The lecture continued. But H's voice, the laughter, the silence in the classroom, the teacher's awkward smile, and my stiff back all become condensed in and articulated through the utterance "musta mies".

At first glance, the scene above might not seem to fit the task of exploring the question of the visual-aural encounters which is the concern of this chapter as it appears to reflect a form of naming that is vocal rather than visual. That is, unlike the other colours that were demonstrated in visible objects in the classroom, H's utterance seems to be perceived solely in audible forms. And yet, the palpable weight of the signifier "musta mies" (black man), in a sound pattern that is still strange to my foreign ears begs the crucial question of the how and why of its force. Clearly, the representational weight of the word "musta mies" (black man) lies in the historicity⁶³ of the conception of race in visual terms – especially racialised meanings attributed to skin colours. Robyn Wiegman points out that this represents a sort of violent epistemological equation between "the idea of 'race' and the 'black' body" (1995, 21) that renders the body and its epidermis the locus of difference; a difference, to quote Sara Ahmed (1998), that matters. This hierarchical specificity needs to be underscored, especially against a mere celebration of the diversity of

⁶² I use the word "sticky" deliberately here, for it connotes a sense of the difficulty of movement. It indicates a palpable viscosity, a glue-like quality (as weight), most vividly felt on the skin. This also relates to my later engagement with Sara Ahmed's (2004) conception of race as sticky sign in this chapter, as well as the question of weight/value in the last chapter.

⁶³ I want to hasten to note that historicity is not a history that once was and is now absent (see Ahmed 2000). But as Judith Butler dilates upon in *Excitable Speech*, it refers to "the history which has become internal to a name, has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name, a sedimentation, a repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force." (1997a, 36)

colours (cf. Tuori 2007; Fortier 2008)⁶⁴ that sees racial differences as equally different,⁶⁵ as well as the rhetoric of colour blindness (cf. El-Tayeb 2011; Eng 2010) that “refuses to recognize the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation continue to be articulated and constituted in relation to one another in the ongoing struggles for equality and social belonging” (Eng 2010, x).⁶⁶ In fact, the celebration of racial diversity and the denial of its presence are essentially the same, as both positions fixate on racial differences as visible differences marked, for example, on the skin. But the image or the idea of race signified by the utterance “musta mies” appears to be different from the conventional sense of the visual perception, understood as seeing with eyes. What is the nature of the imagery of “musta mies”? From a different perspective, we could also ask what the utterance/signifier “musta mies” consists of? How would an examination of the process of signification in visual-aural terms, such as in the case presented here, assist a reconsideration of the racialised visual

⁶⁴ For example, in her study of a three-year-long project called the Kitchen that aims to assist the labour market integration and participation of migrant women in Finland, Salla Tuori (2007) notes the commodification, or what Ahmed calls fetishisation, of otherness figured in terms of “spices” that add colour to Finland and to Finnishness.

⁶⁵ Anne-Marie Fortier’s reading of Tony Blair’s advocacy of diversity as integral to the project of “modernizing” Britain is especially telling in this regard: “At the turn of the millennium, the Labour government declared its commitment to creating ‘One Nation’, a country where ‘every colour is a good colour’ and where ‘racial diversity is celebrated’” (2008, 16).

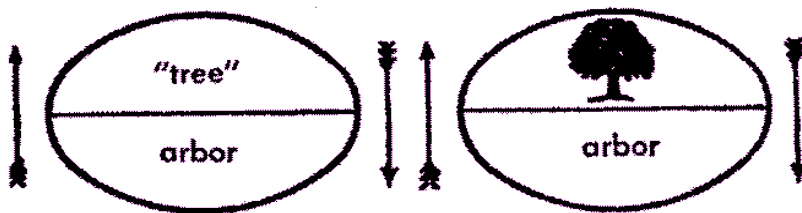
⁶⁶ Importantly, David Eng accentuates the importance of acknowledging the “coevalness of sexual and racial discrimination”, and argues against “historicist violence by casting them as radically discontinuous” (2010, x). By way of footnote, I want to highlight the question of discontinuity as it relates to the discussion of dis/continuity put forth in part one that addresses the question of continuity and discontinuity, sameness and difference. For example, focusing on the ways in which the political rhetoric of colour-blindness takes shape (especially in kinship relations), Eng subjects to scrutiny the analogical rather than intersectional formulation of different identity categories in legal practices that focuses on the continuous and the similar at the expense of heterogeneity/discontinuity and difference. Eng’s analysis sheds light on the “like race” (2010, 41) logic. Linking this analogical framework to the prominence of the rhetoric of colour-blindness, Eng provocatively asks, “As race disappears, how will the law ever come to see it?” (41). The importance of Eng’s observation is indisputable. And yet, in this dissertation, I want to rethink the relation between identity and difference through a notion of difference that inhabits with/in an identity, and at the same time differentiates itself (see Kirby 1997).

economy that underlines the fixation of racial differences?

In order to broach these questions, and in connection with our discussions of the Saussurean conception of language, part two starts with a closer engagement with the question of the Saussurean notion of the sign. My reading here is mostly inspired by Vicki Kirby's analysis of Saussure's work. The specific contribution of my reading is the critical engagement with Saussure's conceptualisation of the notion ethnisme, of the relation between the visual and the aural, as well as the question of dis/continuity through a close reading of the "carrying" function of the signifier. Chapter five pays particular attention to the phenomenon of language acquisition and broaches the crucial question, which is how to transform habits of racial thinking. Chapter six takes a closer look at the practices of learning to trill and analyses the psychic life of the tongue.

Signifier/Signified and the Unit of Sign

As Kirby reminds us, "Saussure's notion of the signifier ... couples the visual with the auditory in his *image acoustique*, not as one mode *with* another so much as the intermodality of perception itself" (1997, 64). I want to add to Kirby's observation, and to clarify a crucial point already here at the outset. For Saussure, the *image acoustique* is strictly the psychological imprint. That is, it is an interpretation, a representation, rather than the materiality of the visual and aural perception itself. Related to this, the signified is posited as the concept but it is also a form of imagery, a figure if you will, as we can see in the illustration below.⁶⁷



The unit of the sign binds and creates signifier/signified. Interestingly,

⁶⁷ For the original illustration see Saussure ([1983] 2013, 99).

Saussure has (within the same page) two contradictory claims concerning the relationship of signifier, signified and sign. First, Saussure states that a sign includes both signifier (sound image) and signified (concept), and should not be conflated with signifier alone. As Saussure explains, “if *arbor* is called a sign, it is only because it carries with it the concept ‘tree’, so that the sensory part of the term implies reference to the whole” ([1983] 2013, 100). Although terms such as “carry” and “refer” connote the different elements and their relations within the unit of sign, from a different perspective, they could also be interpreted as indicating that the signifier stands (in) for the whole of the sign by virtue of a necessary and essential linkage between the signifier and the signified.

Saussure seems to have also sensed such a possibility of conflation, and the necessity for further clarification. In the paragraph that follows this one, Saussure moves to the second proposition, which is to replace the term “concept” with the term “signification” and “sound pattern” with “signal”. According to Saussure, the change in terminology helps resolve the ambiguous relationship between signifier, signified and sign. This is because the words “sign-ification” and “sign-al” are not only both manifestly part of the “sign”, but are also arbitrarily related to each other.

Nevertheless, a contradiction arises in taking together Saussure’s two assertions. Arbitrariness is also a spatial notion. It assumes an originary separateness, because the lack of intrinsic connection, between the signifier and signified. This is made clear in Saussure’s likening of the sign to the operation of economics. Saussure considers both economics and the linguistic system share in common the notion of value that enables “*a system of equivalence between things belonging to different orders*. In one case, work and wages; in the other case, signification and signal.” ([1983] 2013, 114, emphasis in original). Given this, even if we can concede to the arbitrary nature of the sign, we still need to ask how the two originally distinct terms become linked together and what the nature is of their linkage that takes the shape of containment and transmission, as Saussure’s use of the word “carry” implies.

With this in mind, and to further contemplate the conundrum at hand, we can consider further the illustration above. Whereas Saussure’s

second assertion is in line with what is demonstrated in the illustration, his first statement nevertheless qualifies the separation and distinction of the three terms. As we see, it seems that although both signifier and signified are bound within the unit of the sign, a line nevertheless segregates them. Following Kirby, we can interpret this line in relation to Saussure's comparison of language with a sheet of paper (1997, 11). That is, the idea that the concept and the sound pattern each occupies the front and back side of the paper. Although the unity of the paper suggests that both signifier and signified are part of or contained in the whole, the spatial metaphor of the front and back suggests a space, a gap, that separates the former from the latter. Kirby's observation assists us here:

This analogy would appear to capture the paradox of the sign's divided unity *in time*. However, there is a problem with this. If the signifier and signified are contemporary according to this comparison, they are nevertheless separated in *space* by the thickness of the paper itself. Thus thought and sound are figured as both amorphous and spatially delimited. (1997, 11, emphasis in original)

Reading Saussure against himself, we see that his contention that the signifier carries the signified and refers to the whole contradicts the spatial segregation the illustration and the paper analogy attest to. For the word "carry" presents the signifier and signified not so much as disparate and enclosed parts of the sign that are simply joined together. In a similar vein, the word "refer" (re- "back" + ferre "carry") implies that not only is the signifier part of the whole, but it also carries traces of, and thus incorporates the whole. We should add here that in the chapter that immediately follows, Saussure argues for the inseparability of signifier and signified: "a sequence of sounds is a linguistic sequence only if it is the bearer of an idea: in itself, it is merely an item for physiological investigation ... a concept becomes an identifying characteristic of a certain sound, just as a given sound is an identifying characteristic of the corresponding concept" ([1983] 2013, 144 -145).

Having laid bare the relation between signifier (signal) and signified (signification), Saussure goes on to expand upon the criteria that defines the unit of the sign vis-à-vis its two parts. To put it briefly, the unit of the

sign is predicated upon the linearity and sequence of a segment of sound as well as the meaning attributed to it, which enables the sign to be delimited because it is distinct from other signs. Saussure uses the example of encountering foreign sound patterns:

When we listen to an unknown language, we are not in a position to say how the sequence of sounds should be analysed: for the analysis is impossible if one takes into account nothing more than the phonic side of the linguistic event. But when we know what meaning and what role to attribute to each segment in the sequence, then we see those segments separated in the sequence, then we see those segments separated one from another, and the shapeless ribbon is cut into pieces. ([1983] 2013, 145)

In an attempt to identify the basic unit or object of analysis for linguistics, Saussure (unwittingly) undermines his earlier proposition of the related but discrete domains of these three elements. Following on from the above assertion, not only is the signifier and signified part of the unit of the sign, but as it turns out, the whole of the sign only becomes such when it is, or better yet, is capable of being fragmented into its parts. That is, the unit of the sign is delimited and identifiable not despite, but precisely because of the cutting – “together and apart” (Barad 2007, 389) the signifier and the signified. Significantly, it could be further inferred that each part – signifier and signified – is already the whole unit of the sign, albeit differently. Signifier, signified and the sign each is enacted with and in the other, a simultaneity and implicatedness that articulate their consubstantial nature (Kirby 1997, 18).⁶⁸ As we will see, the ramifications of the consubstantial and radically involved nature of part and whole are considerable for the analysis of racialised political economy of the visual and aural. But before we proceed to reread the opening episode in visual-aural terms, I want to pause to consider the implications of the temporal and spatial relation of “carrying” that Saussure imputes to the signifier, as well as the corollary problematics of

⁶⁸ As Kirby makes clear, the term “consubstantial” captures the paradoxical essence of the Saussurean sign – “and ‘entity’ – whose invariance is made possible by a system of referral that is pure variation” (2006, 161).

the referent that haunts the Saussurean sign (Kirby 1997). This reading will also inform my analysis of the racialised visual-aural economy in this chapter. What I am trying to get at is the need to reconsider the perception and conception of race through, and not simply beyond, the visual.

Dis/Continuity and the Relation of Carrying

What interests me here is the ways in which the nature of the relation between signifier and signified bears resemblance to the idea that racial substance is carried in the blood as addressed in chapter two. With Haraway, we noted that the figure of blood in its fluidity and permeability both promises and threatens the continuity of racial lineage. We also discussed the how and where of the location of racial substance, supposedly predicating the identity and the signature of a racial unity. Based on these observations, it seems that the identity of race, an invariant mark of race's signature, is made possible only through the lineal referral and deferral of the blood flows. Is such a modality of the relational what Saussure had in mind when he described the carrying of signified in signifier? If the signifier, as Saussure explains, is the sensory part of the sign, what does the signified consist of? Quite a few issues need to be carefully unpacked here. First, in examining what is at stake in Saussure's depiction of the signifier that carries the signified, I want to draw attention to the second principle of the Saussurean sign: the linearity of signifier/signal.

An observation should be made here: in comparison with the other two sections (part one *Sign, Signification Signal* and part two *First Principle: The Sign Is Arbitrary*), Saussure's explanation of the linearity of signal makes up the least of the chapter *Nature of the Linguistic Sign*. Saussure has probably felt the need to provide an explanation of such an arrangement: "This principle is obvious, but it seems never to be stated, doubtless because it is considered too elementary" ([1983] 2013, 103). The linear succession of speech sounds in the form of a *chain*, to use Saussure's word, is often considered to be self-evident. Saussure summarises the linear character of the linguistic signal as follows: "(a) it

occupies a certain temporal space, and (b) this space is measured in just one dimension: it is a line" ([1983] 2013, 103, emphasis in original). In order to make this explicit, Saussure compares the auditory/linguistic signal with that of the visual. For Saussure, the nature of the visual entails multiple dimensions that coexist, whereas the auditory signal is only available one at a time.

Such a conception of the linearity of linguistic signal/signifier echoes our earlier discussion of the continuity of time. Recall that for Karen Barad the assumed distinction between continuity and discontinuity separates nature from culture, time from space, and enables the calculating, intentional and intelligent human subject. The continuity of time is predicated upon discrete and discontinuous moments - the segmented syllables and sounds in this case - contained in space and taking place *in* time. Clearly then, the configuration of the signifier as the carrier that incorporates the signified evokes something of the nature/culture question as well as the problem of the human subject. This is made patently manifest in Saussure's explanation of the ways in which the unit of the sign is delimited, or becomes a sign:

[A] language does not present itself to us as a set of signs already delimited, requiring us merely to study their meanings and organisations. It is an indistinct mass, in which *attention and habit alone* enable us to distinguish particular elements. The unit has no special phonic character, and the only definition it can be given is the following: *a segment of sound which is, as distinct from what precedes and follows in the spoken sequence, the signal of a certain concept*. ([1983] 2013, 146, my emphasis)

For Saussure, the attention and habit of the human subject is indispensably the single factor (as his deployment of the word "alone" must mean) in the becoming of the sign. Without the intending human, language is but "indistinct mass". This is interesting given Saussure's attempts to displace the agency of the speaker through likening the restricted liberty of the speaker to that of the card player. As Kirby comments, Saussure "retained an unqualified investment in agency and intention nevertheless. If the ordinary speaker is unwittingly played by

the dictates of language, it still remains somewhat heretical to suggest that the linguist is similarly duped" (1997, 48). Approached in terms of continuity, we see that the linearity of the signal presumes the self-presence of the consciousness of the individual subject at sign's initiation. From a slightly different perspective, it could also be said that the unit of the sign as a segment of sound imputed with meaning is a moment in time "whose tangible immediacy is present to experience *and then* absent from it" (Kirby 1997, 47, emphasis in original).

And yet, this purportedly self-evident linearity undergoes a sort of spatio-temporal distortion in the very conception of signifier/signal as a mental imprint of sound. It might seem straightforward that the signifier – the element perceptible through the senses or "the representation of our sensory impressions" (Saussure [1983] 2014, 98) – is psychological in nature. That is, it is a mediated effect of the meaning making process, primarily conditioned by subjective intention and attention, as well as social conventions. Nevertheless the term "signal" makes vulnerable the confidence with which the primacy of human agency is assumed. The word "signal" connotes a command, an incitation and invitation to action. With the replacement of sound image with signal, it follows then that the sound pattern is not only the result of the meaning making process of man, but it also commands and incites the subject to perceive and interpret. In other words, the sound pattern evokes and initiates perception even before it is perceived, substantiated and interpreted. But how is this possible? For surely, as Saussure notes, it is the attention of the human subject – the process of attending to, leading out of and toward, and regulated by social conventions as embodied habits – which *alone* makes perceptible and intelligible the otherwise amorphous mass in the first place. What then is the nature of the signal and the sound pattern? And how does it come to matter?

We are presented with a strange spatio-temporal condensation in which the command of the perceptible to be perceived, attended to and grappled with is heard by the very subject who makes it perceptible and intelligible in the first place. It follows that instead of a serial/linear unfolding of moments that flow from the initial moment of

perception/interpretation/representation by the human subject, we encounter dis/continuity *at and of* the beginning, wherein the intention of the human subject cannot simply be denied or conceded. This is the involuted and torsional nature of the “initial condition” (Kirby 2006, 89) that echoes Haraway’s wonder at the “somehow” of racial continuity. I recall the discussion of “somehow” of racial continuity here to flag the profound implications the question of dis/continuity has for the racialised visual-aural economy we are about to explore.

Returning to, and beginning again from, the question of the signified, it should be noted that, although Saussure emphasises the “unified duality” ([1983] 2013, 145) of signifier and signified, intriguingly, it seems that only the signifier carries the signified, and not the other way around. For example, as Saussure writes, “the phonetic contrasts” ([1983] 2013, 163) that distinguishes a word from other words “is what carries the meaning” (163). To carry is to contain and to transmit. In the relationality of carrying, the carrier is the medium that transports an object from point A to point B. The hierarchised configuration of the carrier and the carried needs to be underscored here. The signifier, understood as the linear and sensorial perceptible substantiated by human attention and habit is privileged as the carrier of the signified. Furthermore, it is said that the signifier also expresses the whole unit of the sign. As aforementioned, the mobility of the chain of signification is defined against what is relegated to be outside it, that is the external-linguistic reality. Such a configuration installs the nature/culture split that accords human calculus, as the arbitrary culture, with the capacity for mobilisation. And yet, as we have also pointed out, with the conception of signal, the temporal and spatial priority of the human agency is strangely confounded and radically qualified.

On a different register, the relation of the signifier and signified is reminiscent of the formulation of racial identity as blood lineage addressed earlier. In this account, the blood is the medium or vehicle through which a constant racial essence is sent from a former generation and inherited by its latter.⁶⁹ It is not difficult to discern the essentialising

⁶⁹ Kirby’s reading of the relation between language and thought also attends to the

implications in this formulation. And yet, and importantly, Haraway does not simply reject but teases out the indeterminacy entailed in the fluidity of blood. Regarded as necessary for the lineage of race, the figure of blood both promises and threatens to undermine the identity of an originary racial essence. That is because the continuity of the racial identity, carried in blood, necessitates the containment – discontinuous cutting, delimiting – against contamination. In a similar vein, the Saussurean sign also renders intricate the relation between continuity and discontinuity. Saussure's assertion that the signifier incorporates and transmits the signified could be read as an endeavour to uproot the concept/signified from the real object, and henceforth to re-locate the value of the sign in the chain of signification. Along these lines, we could consider the arbitrariness of the sign as providing the groundless ground for sign's discontinuous representation. That is, the identity of the sign is enabled by the process of pure differentiation within the linguistic system. And yet, we have noted that for Saussure, a signifier/sound pattern is only materialised – identified, delimited and distinguished from other segments of sound – through the attention and habit of the human subject. Not only is the self-presence and continuity of the conscious subject assumed in this account, the habit of meaning making is understood as predicated upon the continuity of conventions as social constraints. Interestingly then, not only “the conventional” and “the arbitrary” – terms that are supposedly oppositional – become conflated (see also Kirby 1997, 26), but both the continuity and discontinuity of the sign are made simultaneously possible and impossible. In chapter two, we discussed the ways in which Saussurean sign has considerable ramifications for an investigation of the nature of race. To reiterate the point made earlier, this is because the severance of the linguistic system

temporal priority accorded to signifier: Just as the relationship between signifier and signified was likened to that of a vehicle of expression and its content, the relationship between language and thought is similarly conceptualized. We noted above the temporal priority is granted to the conduit, or vehicle of expression, in the mistaken assumption that the signifier evokes the signified. Similarly, Benveniste argues here that language, as thought's instrument, is the necessary predication of thinking, for 'this content has to pass through language and conform to its framework'. (1997, 22-23)

from the material and the real assists to undermine any predetermination and fixation of what race is. Nevertheless, as we will see below, the hope to dispense with the extra-linguistic reality is proven impossible, because the identity of the signifier ultimately hinges upon, or rematerializes, the transcendent, foundational existence of the concept, and of the thing itself. This poses a conundrum, indeed.

The Outside of the Sign

We have mentioned that reality, nature, and concrete objects fall outside of the Saussurean linguistic system. Unlike the transparent immediacy of reality, the “empty configurations” (read lacking intrinsic value) of linguistic signal and signification suggests the delimited and ephemeral nature of signification processes. And yet, we might wonder what it is about reality/nature/object that makes them both inaccessible and known. On the one hand, they are inaccessible because the nature of the sign *is* the process of delimiting, wherein perception is always and already an inscription; that is it always involves the concept or idea of its object, rather than the thing itself. On the other hand, the assigning of reality to the exterior place of the process of signification necessitates assumptions about, if not knowledge of, its nature and properties. Put otherwise, the delimiting and emergence of the unit of the linguistic system links the knowable with the unknowable (read as the inaccessible). In light of this, both intelligibility and unintelligibility are reconceived. For if the linguistic system is radically set apart, because distinct, from the realm of the natural, or the real, how does the latter come to lend support to the emergence of the former? That is, how can the extra-linguistic reality be relegated to the outside of the linguistic system, thus marking its boundary and its identity, if it is unknowable and inaccessible? Consequently, even exclusion is an involved and implicated process wherein an outside is discovered as the outside that *in-forms* the inside.

This is made patently clear, as Kirby notes, when Saussure unwittingly (but perhaps inevitably) conflates the signified with the thing. In the *Course*, we see that Saussure is at pains to argue for the psychological

nature of sound patterns as well as of the concept. As Saussure writes, "The sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions" ([1983] 2013, 99). To prove this, Saussure draws on the example of internal dialogues: "Without moving either lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite silently a piece of verse. We grasp the words of a language as sound patterns" ([1983] 2013, 99). Consistent with this configuration of the signifier, and in an attempt to avoid confusing the signified with the material object or thing itself, Saussure goes on to argue that the signified – the concept, the meaning, that which is understood – is the more abstract part of the sign.

We could further note that Saussure's emphasis on the "unified duality" or consubstantiality of the signifier and signified is in accordance with his persistent rejection of the axiomatics of nomenclature. With the first principle – the arbitrary nature of the sign – Saussure posits that there is no "internal connexion" ([1983] 2013, 100) between the signifier and signified. Put otherwise, there is no natural origin or essence that determines the sound pattern. Interestingly, and particularly relevant to our discussion at hand, we see that Saussure contrasts the linguistic signal with the visual symbol to support his argument:

The word *symbol* is sometimes used to designate the linguistic sign, or more exactly that part of the linguistic sign which we are calling the signal. This use of the word *symbol* is awkward, for reasons connected with our first principle. For it is characteristic of symbols that they are never entirely arbitrary. They are not empty configurations. They show at least a vestige of natural connexion between the signal and its signification. For instance, our symbol of justice, the scales, could hardly be replaced by a chariot. ([1983] 2013, 101, emphasis in original)

Saussure does not actually dispute that the symbol is a visual signal, but firmly argues against the conflation of the visual with the linguistic signal. This is because for Saussure symbols are not "empty configurations"⁷⁰ but have intrinsic values rooted in "natural

⁷⁰ We might wonder what "empty configurations" actually imply. Does it mean that the linguistic signal and signification are devoid of the substantial existence that is found present in visual signification? But what then is the nature of the signal if the sign is only an ephemeral veil that only receives the mark of human inscription? In other

connexions". We could infer from this that by "natural connexion" Saussure means that the symbol as a visual signal is determined by and reflects a truth, a reality, a concrete, substantial fact. By comparison, the linguistic signal does not hinge upon any extra-linguistic essence. In the unitary bond in which the linguistic signifier contains, because it carries, the concept/idea, Saussure sets into motion a chain of endless deferral and referral. Yet interestingly, Saussure's endeavour to demonstrate the arbitrariness of this sign confounds the very identity of the arbitrary, for it eventually rests on the transcendental essence of the concept, and of reality itself. As Kirby observes, in Saussure's work, "there is a slippage ... between the words 'thing' and 'idea'" (1997, 11). For example, we see that in Saussure's discussion of the distinction between language and civilisation mentioned in chapter two, Saussure repeatedly comments on the thing in relation to the presence or absence of a word in a language that signifies it:

The absence of a word has been interpreted as proof that originally a primitive civilisation lacked *the thing* in question. This is a mistake. Asiatic languages have no verb for "to plough", but this does not prove that ploughing was originally unknown there. It may have been abandoned or replaced by other techniques, called by other terms. ([1983] 2013, 207–208, my emphasis)

In this quote in which Saussure attempts to counter the argument that language provides evidence for civilisation, it seems that Saussure cannot finally dispense with the presence of the thing. In this account, the concept and the thing seem to be blurred, or as Kirby puts it, "the

words, how can an empty, passive configuration generate an impression? I want to underline the sexualising economy inherent in this description. Kirby's discussion of the question of the "empty signifier" inspires my reading here. Commenting on Judith Butler's and Slavoj Žižek's investment in the transformative potential of empty signs, Kirby asks "what it could mean to describe phantasmatic projections in terms of emptiness, as if the body of the sign bears nothing? If these projections are also significations, as Butler suggests, then why is the differential of giving and receiving understood through the terms of presence and absence, value and lack, which mirror the phallocentrism and heterosexism of male and female? How is the difference of phantasmatic projections translated into anything given their apparent lack of identity, their nonexistence?" (1997, 119).

referent, or reality's substance, is inadvertently smuggled in as the signified to which it attaches" (1997, 12). In spite of Saussure's assertion of the abstractness of the signified, it seems to remain bound to the (extra-linguistic) referent, the materiality of the thing. In light of this, the conception of the linguistic sign both concedes to and repudiates the immediacy of self-evident reality. For even the domain of the arbitrary has to discriminate against, and henceforth incorporates, what it is not. In view of this, I want to briefly return to the distinction between symbol and signal that Saussure makes in the earlier quote. As we have seen, for Saussure, what differentiates the linguistic signal, conceived of as arbitrary in nature, from the visual signal is the attachment of the visual to the positive facts of reality. Saussure takes the example of the scale as the symbol of justice to bolster his argument. Curiously, in an attempt to prove the obviousness of the scale, Saussure is forced to differentiate the symbol of justice from the symbol chariot which often signifies war. The question then arises as to what is the nature of the "natural connexion" specific to the visual, if its truth can be proved only through the process of differentiation from other positive facts?

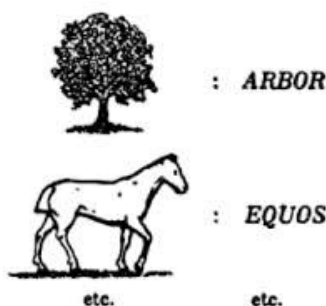
The Question of the Visual

Saussure's conception of the visual certainly demands further consideration. For how is the "natural connexion" of the visual signal and its signification readily assumed? What is it about the psychological imprint of sound that visual perception cannot articulate? Similarly, commenting on the image, with which Saussure demonstrates the "error" of nomenclature that presumes an independently pre-existing idea,⁷¹ Kirby considers the following points:

[I]t is conventional practice to describe the sign's components in the order signifier/signified (left/right) rather than the other way around. Given this, why do we so automatically break with convention and presume that the left-hand figure is the signified? Is the reason for this that we have also merged the notion of "concept" with "reality," just as Saussure did before us? If we admit that the difference between

⁷¹ Source of the image Saussure ([1983] 2013, 98).

“concept” and “reality” is indeed blurred here, we still need to explain how this confusion is produced. Why, for example, is the drawing quite naturally confused with reality? It is worth noting that the word is no less a graphic image than the drawing is. And yet, we tend to regard the word as a cultural (and therefore arbitrary entity), whereas we tend to regard the drawing as deriving from nature. (1997, 13)



In my opinion, Saussure does concede to the idea that writing is a visual form, wherein the visual shape of individual letters “functions like an ideogram” ([1983] 2013, 57). Interestingly, whereas visual signals such as symbols are considered as having natural connections, writing is conceived of as the second-order representation of the sound system of language, which is always inaccurate. For Saussure, the study of the sound system “provide[s] a *natural* substitute for the *artificial* aid” ([1983] 2013, 55, my emphasis), that is writing. Again, we see the slipperiness and ambiguities of the nature/culture distinction.

Throughout the *Course*, Saussure carefully distinguishes the visual from the auditory and privileges the latter over the former. For example and to recapitulate, Saussure argues that visual signs “are observed to coexist in space without confusion” ([1983] 2013, 145) as opposed to the linear succession of sound in time. Moreover, whereas Saussure distinguishes between the sound pattern – the semiological – and the changing, complex, though less important, physiological vocal production of sound itself, he seems to be taken in by the transparent immediacy of visual perception itself. That is, not only is the “natural

connexion” of the visual imagery to the extra-linguistic object self-evident, but the *how of the visual perception* of the signal is never itself in question.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that Saussure also concedes to the inseparability of the visual and the aural: “if we try to ... do away with any visual image altogether, we run the risk of being left with an amorphous object which is difficult to grasp. It is as if someone learning to swim had suddenly had his cork float taken away” ([1983] 2013, 55). Here, Saussure provides a very vivid metaphor wherein the visual imagery, as the concept, provides the pattern or form that makes perceptible and graspable the otherwise fluid string of sounds. Its centrality to the survival of the subject is depicted in the life saving function of the cork float that prevents the swimmer from drowning. Such a configuration makes palpable the entanglement of the visual and aural in the earlier mentioned term *image acoustique* or sound image. This is not a simple coupling of two disparate sensorial domains or orders, but a visual audibility and an audible visibility that displaces and reconceives both the visual and the aural. And yet, the temporal priority accorded to the human subject (depicted as the swimmer) and the fluidity of sound (represented metaphorically as the water in which the subject swims) needs to be further addressed. It seems that the visual image as the floating cork can be simply given or taken away in the scene of swimming. However, if the entangled unit of signifier/signified as sound image provides the condition of possibility for any identification that delimits an entity, how is the fluid and amorphous nature of sound and perhaps even the swimming subject itself readily available?

The question of the visual imagery becomes even more crucial when considered in the phenomenon of translation, based on which Saussure finds support for his conception of the arbitrary nature of the sign. For instance, Saussure gives the example of the signification “ox” that has as its signal “*b-ö-f*” ([1983] 2013, 100) (boeuf) in French and “*o-k-s* (Ochs)” (100) in German. Translation here is conceived of as the process of bridging different signifiers – *b-ö-f* and *o-k-s* enabled by the same signified – the concept/image of the ox. In this account, translation

necessitates an equivalence within difference. However, if we follow Saussure's assertion that the signified is carried by and incorporated within the signifier, and only acquires linguistic property when identified by "a *certain* sound" (Saussure [1983] 2013, 144, my emphasis), how then does the same concept anchor two distinct signifiers? What enables the process of variation/translation that also secures the invariance and consistency of its meaning? As Kirby's reading on the vexed nature of translation cogently shows, despite Saussure's persistent rejection of the idea of reality's substance that pre-determines language, "the notion of a 'thing in itself', an objective reality in a transparently translatable world, insistently manifests itself" (1997, 17). Instead of treating Saussure's thesis simply in terms of self-contradiction, we could consider such a complexity consistent with the very paradoxical nature of signification and identification Saussure's work explores and articulates.

Saussure's anti-essentialist formulation of language cannot finally bracket off the referent. It should be emphasised however that this does not mean that we have returned to a purportedly unmediated reality that pre-exists signification, because the thing/referent is immanent within, and henceforth mediated by, subjective perception. Neither is this simply a confusion of the compromised effect of reality with an unmediated and immediate fact, if confusion means that two radically distinct (to use Saussure's vocabulary here) entities are mistaken for each other. Rather translation is a process of "making equivalent" (Kirby 1997, 27), in which the "significance and substance, thought and matter, human agency and material objectivity, must be consubstantial" (2011, 77).

Further to this, and importantly, I want to stress that such a formulation of translation does not forfeit specificity for the sake of a universal translatability. As this consideration is especially important for a critical engagement with racialised and racialising language learning policies that install the hierarchical asymmetries between the origin and the copy, I want to make clear my stance on this point. As the engagement with Saussure's often contradictory arguments have shown, the origin is never simply present or absent, here or there, but is dis/continuous with itself. In light of this, the question of the translatable

and the untranslatable should also be rethought. Whereas the translatable is often conceived of as the universal condition of translatability that presumes an insured ground against which translation is measured, the untranslatable hints at the specificity of an originary unity which is then corrupted or compromised through the process of translation. Interestingly, both poles of the opposition assume the *a priori* self-presence of what is being translated. However, if the origin is never readily available, but relentlessly hails itself into existence as its other, then the translatable and the untranslatable could be said to be “fundamentally the same, and always translate each other” (Derrida 1998, 57). In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Jacques Derrida comments on the question of translation. As it is particularly relevant with my discussion here, I cite it at length:

Nothing is untranslatable, however little time is given to the expenditure or expansion of a competent discourse that measures itself against the power of the original. But the “untranslatable” remains – should remain, as my law tells me – the poetic economy of the idiom, the one that is important to me, for I would die even more quickly without it, and which is important to me, myself to myself, where a given formal “quantity” always fails to restore the singular event of the original, that is, to let it be forgotten once recorded, to carry away its number, the prosodic shadow of its quantum. Word for word, if you like, syllable by syllable. From the moment this economic equivalence – strictly impossible, by the way – is renounced, everything can be translated, but in a loose translation, in the loose sense of the word “translation.” (1998, 56-57)

Importantly, Derrida's meditation not only confounds the distinction between the translatable and the untranslatable, but also, and importantly, it foregrounds the specificity of subject formation that arises from the process of translation as writing in general, which always translates itself. Following Derrida, I want to stress that what is unable to be translated is not a self-present entity that is simply elided or lost in the process of translation. Rather, it is “forgotten once recorded” and “carried away” in the form of a shadow. To put it differently, the untranslatable is

materialised as it is rendered unavailable, in the same stroke. Significantly, Derrida does not simply concede to or deny the notion of origin. For example, his description of the failure “to restore the singular event of the original” is not simply the lament of the lost origin, for as Derrida writes, this very failure or error manifested as the untranslatable is what enables the subject. Without this failure of translation, Derrida argues, “I would die even more quickly”. We can glean two important insights from this assertion. First of all, if the untranslatable, the shadow that is forgotten once recorded, is the blind spot of translation all the while evincing the specificity of the subject's emergence, then it could be said that the subject is her or his blind spot (see also Chiew 2012). Second, if the untranslatable simultaneously marks the specificity and identity of the origin (read as what is being translated) and of the copy (read as the translation of the origin), then it witnesses and articulates the process of splitting as translation in general. Linking to my discussion of dis/continuity in this dissertation, I want to underline and clarify another crucial point. If the original is not present before (in both spatial and temporal sense), but marked by the failure of the event of translation, then translation process is not driven by the need to restore the origin, *as such*. Rather, the very stuff of the reiterative process of translation is the dynamic materialising of both translated and the untranslatable. What I am getting at is the spatio-temporal condensation and torsional becoming, wherein the split is not a cut, that takes the shape of a gap, and divides a *pre*-existing entity into two, pure and simple. Rather it is the dis/continuous and originary self-encounter, which as Derrida describes as the relationality of “myself to myself”. In other words, the split is itself “broken into, broken open, and globally dispersed (written/read) by a process of differentiation whose energies it is” (Kirby 2011, 36).

In view of this, both arguments for the specific and for the universal could be said to rely upon an unqualified investment in the notion of originary unity, even as these arguments are supposedly opposed to each other. Feminist, postcolonial and critical race theorists have importantly shown the situatedness that is the sexual and racial motivation inherent in every claim for universality. In spite of the indisputable importance of

the attention to specificity and difference in any knowledge production process, we also hear the concerns regarding the ways in which such a displacement will inadvertently undercut the political efficacy of the claim to identity. This conundrum about specificity and universality recurs throughout this thesis, and will continue to inform the rest of the dissertation. It will be more systematically engaged in my reading of the polyglots' accents and the cyborgs' noises in chapter seven. For now, I want to note that with the notion of dis/continuity that reconfigures the identity of the origin, and of the human (in fact of any entity), as dispersed, disseminated and all the while objectively manifested, the specific and the universal are not simply opposed and discrete domains, but each is manifested with, through, and as the other.

Racialised Visual-Aural Encounters

Here I will re-turn to and begin again with the utterance of "musta mies", which for me involved a process of translation that makes intelligible the Finnish pronunciation m-u-s-t-a-m-i-e-s. Although it was not directly addressed to me, I was held by and hailed into a racialising and racialised inter-subjective position expressed in the stiffness of my back as a felt surface, one which resonated with my and others' silence as a non/response (that is to say, my inability to respond to the situation was surely itself a response too).⁷² Approached in terms of a process of

⁷² I am thinking here of Rey Chow's discussion of the limiting process in terms of racialised aphasia, generally conceived as the loss of voice. Chow draws on the autobiographical account of Barack Obama, where he recalls his visceral reaction as a nine-year-old to a photograph in a magazine of the hands of a black man, who received chemical treatment to lighten his complexion. Obama recollects the visceral feeling of aphasia as his reaction to the encounter with the photograph: "'As in a dream, I had no voice for my newfound fear'" (Obama quoted in Chow 2014, 2). In contrast to a generalised conception of "limiting experience", understood as the experience "in which one reaches the end of certitude and touches the edge of the abyss" (Chow 2014, 2), Chow emphasises its specialising mechanisms. That is, aphasia as a wound that is *"asymmetrical, nonmutual, and unsuturable"* (2014, 7, emphasis in original). This resonates with the emphasis placed by feminist and postcolonial theorists' on the specificity of, and differences between, differences. As Chow argues, it is only some rather than others that come to "bear the brunt of the cut's force/violence" (2014, 7). The importance of attending to the hierarchical differences is indisputable. In the main, my work is in agreement with this strand of thought. And yet, in this thesis I

making equivalent, wherein dis/continuity is *at and of* the beginning of perception, the translation and signification of the word “musta mies” does not presume the *a priori* existence of the self-present racial truth of the black body that anchors various signifiers such as “musta mies” in Finnish and “black man” in English. Rather the utterance of “musta mies” signifies and real-ises the racialised *visual-aural* imagery of and as the material substance of racialised black body, which in turn is felt through and as inter-subjectivity.

The twists and turns of Saussure’s own argument afford us an insight into the operation of the chain of signification that qualifies any simple distinction between inside/outside, identity/difference, reality/sign, presence/absence, and visual/audible patterns of representation and interpretation, even as it reinstalls these divisions. In the scenario presented here, the utterance “musta mies” in the setting of the Finnish for foreigners class is also an articulation of the ubiquitous force or trace of an originary dis/continuous racial interpellation. Put differently, the here-ness of race or racial identity – in the case of the signification of “musta mies” – is also strangely non/locatable. Non/locatability hints at the originary ambiguity or ontological complexity where “the trace of an entity’s ‘being-itself’ could be present in various and seemingly separate locations” (Kirby 2011, 2-3). In the case here, the signification as translation process that real-ises the *location* of the racialised “musta mies” also and simultaneously in-forms the inter-subjective positions into which I am hailed. Such an interpellation (see Ahmed 1998, 2000) takes the form of dis/identification with the histories of racism that objectify the figure of the “black man”, which is saturated with injuries and brute violence.

In passing, I want to underscore my deliberate deployment of the term dis/identification, with which I mean to call into question and complicate

argue that the difference between specificity and universality should not be conceded quickly, simply to be elided once more. Rather than a conception of universality that is at the expense of specific hierarchical differences, I argue that an examination of the mechanisms that generate specificity demands the rethinking of the nature of difference itself.

the clear separation of identification and disidentification.⁷³ This is particularly important, I want to argue, when dealing with the question of one's response and responsiveness to racial prejudices. In her examination of racism in institutional life, Sara Ahmed problematises the gesture of disidentification with racism. For Ahmed, disidentification with racism and with the histories and conditions of racist violence paradoxically reproduces racism(s). This is because the disidentification with a form of racism implies that this particular set of practices are detected and recognised or made intelligible as racialising acts, rather than other forms of racism. In other words, disidentification is performative, because it generates what is considered as recognised racialising behaviours. This performative nature of disidentification must be made visible, for otherwise the definition of racism is reified "to what we can see", that is, to what "can be seen or detected" in certain forms of behaviour" (Ahmed 2012, 46), which leaves intact the social mechanisms that produce racialised asymmetries in the first place. As David Theo Goldberg asks, "In any affirmation, accusation, or denial of racism, what conception of 'race' is being asserted, presupposed, implied, or perhaps attacked? Is this assumption of 'race' identical for each kind of attitude,

⁷³ In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler remarks on the ambivalent displacement of identification and disidentification at the heart of any claim to identity. Whereas my discussion here focuses on the dis/identification with acts of naming, Butler's insight is about the relation between disidentification and identity politics (and in fact an apparent privileging of the former over the latter), especially in terms of the mobilisation of the identity categories of sex, which is worth noting here. As Butler writes, "Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. Such collective disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualisation of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern" (1993b, 4).

Taken together Ahmed's concern with the ways in which disidentification functions as a technology of indifference that reproduces racisms, I propose here that Butler's insistence on the political significance of disidentification, in the formulation of dis/continuous dis/identification, serves to elucidate not the ambivalence towards, but rather the dis/continuity that conditions and is integral to, any identification and disidentification.

indeed, for each instance of the kind? What, in other words, are the ontological and social commitments of any sort of ‘race talk?’” (1990, ix).

Furthermore, disidentification can also become a simple rejection of the responsibility for racism. As Ahmed argues, the recognition of the racist acts that one identifies against, might also mean that individuals do “not see themselves as involved ‘in it’ at all” (2012, 46). Concurring with Ahmed’s observation, I deploy the term dis/identification to make explicit the radical involvement and displacement at the heart of any identification. This also hints at the necessity for sustained political intervention into the absent presence of trace, the genesis and historicity of what is made identifiable and intelligible. This is consistent with Ahmed’s suggestion of the need to both identify racism *and* to maintain “the definition of racism as unseeing” (2012, 46). Further to this, in complicating the process of dis/identification with the ontological-epistemological dis/continuity, i.e. dis/continuous dis/identification, I argue for an inescapable response-ability (see Derrida [1994]2006, xviii; Taylor 1992, 182; Haraway 2008, 88) for racism.⁷⁴ This is because the sexual and racial diacritics of signification, translation or writing in general that generate political asymmetries also produce the perceiving and intending subject.

To further elaborate on the dis/continuous response-ability, I want to take a quick detour through the problematics of the spatio-temporal condensation of the notion signifier/sound pattern/signal discussed earlier. Recall that for Saussure, signifier as sound pattern is the representation of our sensorial impressions of language, which is substantiated and made significant by *attention and habit alone*. And yet, the replacement of the term sound pattern with signal gives rise to the conundrum as to how it is possible that the sound patterns are able to command and incite the subject to perceive and to interpret them even

⁷⁴ Reading Fanon’s analysis of the interpellation and objectification of the black man, Chow notes, “refusal or nonrecognition is not a simply matter – that nonparticipation in the transindividual situation of racialisation (or racialising interpellation) is in fact out of the question” (2014, 5). In some ways, my proposition of non/response is in agreement with Chow’s assertion of the inevitable inter-subjective process of racialisation.

before they are identified and made intelligible. It is important to note here that the capacity and will (Ahmed 2014) to animate – to bring to life, or in this case to attribute quality and identity to the otherwise amorphous sound – is often considered as characteristic of the human subject, understood in terms of freedom and agency.

In passing, I want to note the ways in which animacy is hierarchised. My understanding of the notion of animacy, which is a linguistic principle, takes its cue from Mel Y. Chen's work on animacies. In *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, Chen introduces the term animacy, which is generally understood in the field of linguistics as "the quality of liveness, sentience, or humanness of a noun or noun phrase that has grammatical, often syntactic, consequences" (2012, 24). Drawing on the work of John Louis Cherry (1992) who provides the schema for the hierarchy of animacy based on cross-linguistic studies of, for example, "Swahili, English, Navajo, Shona, Chinook, Algonquian, Hopi, Russian, Polish, and Breton" (Chen 2012, 26), Chen writes:

[A]n adult male who is "free" (as opposed to enslaved), able-bodied, and with intact linguistic capacities, one who is also familiar, individual, and positioned nearby, stands at the top of the hierarchy as the most "animate" or active agent within grammars of ordering. Lower down, and hence less agentive, would be, for example, a large, distant population of females. Lower still would be nonhuman animals (ranked by size). Near the bottom would be something like "sadness." (2012, 27)

For Chen, this hierarchy of animacy clearly indicates the ways in which animacy, and its related sense of "agency, awareness, mobility, and liveliness" (2012, 2), is gendered and racialised. Moreover, familiarity and proximity as the condition of possibility of animacy is telling of a "'like kind' recognition",⁷⁵ an anthropocentric gesture that differentiates

⁷⁵ The process of racialisation is also the dynamic spatial relation between proximity and distance. For example, in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, Ahmed writes that "[C]olonial encounters do not just involve a transition from distance to proximity: they involve, at one and the same time, social and spatial relations of distance and proximity. Others become strangers (the others who are distant), and 'other cultures' become 'strange cultures' (the ones who are distant), only through

between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate.

In view of this, animacy or the animating capacity of the human subject, entails and in fact *is* the involvement and intimacy of identification and disidentification. To further complicate this account, let's consider identity in its most general terms as the boundary-drawing and limiting process. The convoluted spatio-temporal involvement of the sound pattern/signal that calls into question the how and when of the human subject who identifies segments of sound, also obliterates the animacy of Man. In other words, the condition of possibility for the animating capacity of Man is the necessity to *respond* to the command and the evocation of what is being identified or disidentified.

I use the term "respond" deliberately to lead to the following meditation on the question of responsibility as dis/continuous dis/identification. In his essay "And Say the Animal Responded?" Derrida rethinks the difference between reaction and response, between human subject and animal nonsubject and argues against its reification. Instead, Derrida maintains that it is crucial to account for "the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms" (2003, 128). Of special relevance for my consideration of the spatio-temporal condensation of dis/continuous dis/identification that responsibility *is*, Derrida offers the following reading of Lacan that echoes the conundrum of the sound pattern/signifier. For this reason, I cite this passage at length:

[I]t would be a matter of developing another "logic" of decision, of the response and of the event – such as I have also attempted to deploy elsewhere and which seems to me less incompatible than one might

coming *too close to home*, that is, through the proximity of the encounter or 'facing' itself" (2000, 14, emphasis in original). In addition, Ahmed notes that the relation of proximity and distance is symptomatic of the "*economies of touch*" (2000, 49). That is, instead of a form of being-with, the social body *is* the hierarchised relationality of "*being with some others over other others*" (2000, 49). As Ahmed makes clear, "[t]he social body is ... created through the relations of touch between bodies recognisable as friendly and strange; who one allows near, who is further away, and so on. Bodies with skins, while they are already touched in the sense of being exposed to others, are touched differently by near and far others, and *it is this differentiation between others that constitutes the permeability of bodily boundaries*" (2000, 49).

think with what Lacan himself, in "The Subversion of the Subject," maintains concerning the code as "code of the Other." He refers to that Other as the one from whom "the subject receives even the message that he emits" (305). This axiom should complicate the simple distinction between *responsibility* and *reaction*, and all that follows from it. It would, therefore, be a matter of reinscribing this *difference* between reaction and response, and hence this historicity of ethical, juridical, or political responsibility, within another thinking of life, of the living, within a different relation of the living to their selfness [*ipséité*], to their *autos*, to their own autokinesis and reactional automaticity, to death, to technics or to the mechanical [*machinique*]. (2003, 128-129, emphasis in original)

At stake is the dis/continuous self-differentiation that identity *is*. From the Other, one receives the messages one sends. In other words, one is both the receiver and the sender of the message. Or one must respond to an incitation and a command even as one is responsible for the initiation of its frame and content. As Mark C. Taylor writes, following Derrida, "The subject's responsibility is actualized in its *response-ability*, that is, in its ability to respond to the provocation of the other" (1992, 182, my emphasis). Thinking the question of responsibility through response-ability reveals the internal split that at once makes the presence of human subject, who is capable of intending, deciding and animating, as well as the object that is subjected to the subject, both possible and impossible. This splitting contaminates the spatial and temporal coordinates that separate responsibility and reaction, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. Given this, it is ethically and politically salient to investigate how the line is drawn in these conceptual distinctions. This is because response-ability *is* the dis/continuous subject formation. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway elaborates on the implications of response-ability which is particularly relevant to the discussion of dis/identification with racism here. Haraway writes,

I act; I do not hide my calculations that motivate the action. I am not thereby quit of my debts, and it's more than just debts. I am not quit of response-ability, which demands calculations but is not finished ... Calculations – reasons – are obligatory and radically insufficient for

companion-species worldliness. ... We have reasons but not sufficient reasons ... Sufficient Reasons is a dangerous fantasy rooted in the dualisms and misplaced concreteness of religious and secular humanism. (2008, 88-89)

The crucial import of Haraway's elaboration, which is in line with Derrida's theorisation of responsibility, is that the essence of ethics and responsibility is an incessant demand for the examination of the limit-ing process as the condition for the emergence, in the case of the dis/identification with racism, of both the racialised bodies as well as of the dis/identifying subjects. The motif and gravity of the limit-ing process is the felt uneasiness through which the historicity of race persistently and insistently hails and articulates itself through and as its other. Such a conception of the corporeal as always and already inescapably social and affective, i.e., inter-subjective, is congruent with the onto-epistemological dis/continuity I am suggesting throughout this thesis. The question of limits relates to my discussion in chapter three of feminist engagements with difference through metaphors such as the skin and the contour of the body. We should also add to the list the formulation of limits in postcolonial literatures as borderlands (Anzaldúa) and as the third space (Bhabha).

For Gloria Anzaldúa, "a border is a dividing line ... a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary... and is in a constant state of transition" (1983, 3). In a similar vein, Homi Bhabha also asserts the hybrid (as opposed to the fixity of cultural differences) ambivalent third space, that is "the other space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference" (1994, 101).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Despite their similarities, the slight difference between Bhabha's third space and Anzaldúa's borderland needs to be mentioned here. The borderland in Anzaldúa's theorisation is an intersectional space that could take various physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual borders, and is inhabited by "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). The interpretation of the third space throughout Homi Bhabha's work seems to be a bit self-contradictory. For example, in his essay "Sly Civility", Bhabha celebrates the emptiness of the third space, that always gives rise to anxiety, as the "crisis of

Although drawing inspiration from these feminist and postcolonial conceptualisations of the limit, I want to go further and rethink the identity of the limit, not simply as the edge, the gap, the in-between, or a “middle space” (Cohen and Weiss 2003, 2). For example, despite their respective assertion of the “undetermined” (Anzaldúa 1987, 3) and “liminal” nature of the limit, in both Anzaldúa and Bhabha’s writing, it is represented as *the* place of difference, “the passage” (Bhabha 1994, 36), the “*something else besides, in-between*” (Bhabha 1994, 219, emphasis in original) that is “neither One nor the Other” (219). And further to this, both Anzaldúa and Bhabha argue that the in-between space is “peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 1994, 218). The discussion which follows about the question of the visual and the work of the tongue will further problematise this “conceptual containment” (Kirby 1997, 30) of difference as the in-between place. It suffices to note here that, following Kirby, I argue that difference is not only what is delimitable as *between and besides* two terms (however minimal the space, such as the notion edge indicates), “that separates identities and thereby also establishes its own” (1997, 79), but also that it resides within, that is *at the heart of* identity itself. This means that, for example, rather than considering the contour of the body as simply “the body at its limits” (Cohen and Weiss 2003, 9), which presumes the domain of the unrepresentable outside of confinement, I argue for “the pellicular essence” (Derrida quoted in Kirby 1997, 78) of the body that confounds any simple distinction between surface and depth, inside and outside. In other words, as I will argue, the body is its limit – “the scene of writing/reading” (Kirby 1997, 78).

Furthermore, I want to underscore that this does not mean that the social body and the biological body are now muddled together as the same. To say that they are ontologically consubstantial does not mean

authority” (Bhabha 1994, 101). And yet, in “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative”, Bhabha maintains that this in-between space, is “*neither empty nor full, neither part nor whole*”, but is a “vicarious processes of signification” (Bhabha 1994, 92, emphasis in original). It could be argued that Bhabha’s third space differs from the figuration of the borderland by way of its virtuality. That is, it presents as a cut or gap of intercutting, splitting and doubling.

they are in any sense the same. Rather, the social body, the biological body, and, we could add, the individual body, constitute, distinguish from, and manifest *with, through and as* each other. The specificities of these bodies are the very stuff of the dynamic process of differentiation. That is, a difference that subjects itself to what Derrida calls “the whole differentiated field of experience” (2003, 128). At stake is the where, when, and how, of the limitation and emergence of the social and the biological. This question will be further dilated on in the following engagement with the racialised visual economy. As we will see, such an approach is crucial for a critical project that addresses the objectification and fixation of the figure of racialised others differently. I have opened this chapter on the racialised visual-aural economy with this particular scene from the Finnish for foreigners course, a scene which cannot be straightforwardly discussed in visual terms, because I wish to highlight the intricate complexity of the visual and the aural which are the major focus from this chapter onwards. In what follows it will become evident that the visual and the aural are by no means clear cut perceptual domains or sensorial orders, but each is implicated *in* and manifested *with* and *as* the other. Undoubtedly, this dis/continuity is rehearsed in my engagement with such a convoluted involvement. Such is the intricate and labyrinthine structure of onto-epistemology that the following discussion of the racialised visual-aural economy will make manifest.

Chapter Five

Transforming the Racialised Political Economy

The Saussurean notion of the sign provides an important framework for critical anti-essentialist engagements with race. For if the signification and significance of race is not pre-determined by an *a priori* racial truth that determines and is demonstrated through racialised bodies, but is an indeterminate and contingent system/systematicity of differentiation and displacement, then the objectification and fixation of racial others is radically qualified. In this strand of thinking, the question of race is understood discursively, as “an ideology, a narrative” (Saldanha 2006, 9) and approached as an epistemological problem, predicated on readings and representations of visible differences, such as “hair type, nose shape and skin colour” (Alcoff 2002, 14). In light of this, theorists have convincingly argued for the ways in which racial differences are discursively constructed and made intelligible. And yet, other critiques have also expressed concerns about the political efficacy of such an account. For although we can show how “race-habits” (Opondo 2012, 248) of recognition fix bodies in racialised and hierarchical configurations of space that determine and discriminate the bodies in-place from those marked as alien and out-of-place (cf. Ahmed 2006; Puwar 2004), race still continuously operates as our “penultimate visible identities” (Alcoff 2006, 7) in every day encounters. As Alcoff writes:

The processes by which racial identities are produced work through the shapes and shades of human morphology, and subordinate other markers such as dress, customs and practices. And the visual registry thus produced has been correlated with rational capacity, epistemic reliability, moral condition and, of course, aesthetic status. (2006, 16)

Given the primacy of the visual in racialised social relations, Alcoff argues for the importance of taking into account the practices of the visual, without falling back into any naturalising appeal to phenotypic differences as illustrations of original essence. For Alcoff, one of the ways to achieve a contextual and located understanding of racial designation is to situate the analysis in a phenomenological description of the visual

mediation that informs “the way we read ourselves and the way others read us” (2002, 16). The question that remains is thus this: how do we proceed? Or: how do we contend with and transform various forms of “race habits” if they are always already constructed and constrained by the racialised visual episteme?

My task in the following pages is to read closely *conceptions* of the racialised visual-aural economy. Drawing on my auto/ethno/graphic account and online forum discussions among Chinese immigrants in Finland regarding how to train the trill, as well as other relevant anecdotes in scholarly work that engage with the question of the racialised visual-aural economy, I examine in this chapter what the transformation of race-habits consists of. Having teased out the conundrum of the visual, the audible as well as the extra-linguistic reality in the Saussurean theorisation of the sign, I hope to open up, rethink, and complicate assumptions regarding the visual in conceptions of race. The notion of onto-epistemological dis/continuity is again kernel to my reading and my engagement with the psychic life of the trilling tongue.

Before proceeding, a few preliminary remarks on the ways in which the notion “political economy” is deployed in this thesis are in order. In a sense, this notion is in line with the conception of the *moment-um* of the process of valuation that informs the Saussurean notion of the sign. Saussure’s remark on the relation between economics and linguistics elucidates the point. He likens the study of economic history with diachronic linguistics, and political economy with synchronic linguistics, i.e. the question of signification and signal. As Saussure explains, “The reason is that, as in the study of political economy, one is dealing with the notion of value” ([1983] 2013, 114). To recapitulate, in the Saussurean framework, the identification and delimitation of the unit of the sign is the process of valuation, that is not determined by any substantial and material truth. It involves a form of exchange between two dissimilar elements, such as signifier and signified, as well as the comparison between similar items, such as the signifier of one unit of sign and the signifier of another, or the signified of one unit of sign and the signified of another. With these two axes of comparisons, Saussure deliberately distinguishes value from meaning/concept/signification. For as he makes clear, to equate these two terms would simply repeat the erroneous assumptions of nomenclature. That is, a given meaning/idea

can be exchanged with a variety of different signifiers, by virtue of its determined value. In fact, for Saussure, it is precisely such presumed lack of the intrinsic value that underpins the possibility of the chain of signification.

Nevertheless, as our foregoing discussion has hopefully shown, the extralinguistic referent is always and already discovered in and repudiated by the signification process in which the sign's identity emerges. Given this, I prefer to think of the notion of value in terms of weight,⁷⁷ as in Derrida's conception. In *On Touching*, Derrida contemplates the notion of weight as thinking that is the writing of senses. Derrida underscores the simultaneous transitive and intransitive nature of the verb "to weigh":

1. Transitivity: thought *weighs*: and by weighing it examines and weighs out what it is weighing, evaluating sense exactly; it indicates its exact weight.
2. Intransitivity: thought *weighs*, it is weighty as much as pondering or thinking; it has the weight of sense; it weighs, itself, what sense weighs, neither more nor less, exactly. (2005a, 74, emphasis in original)

Thinking through the duplicity of the notion of weight and its affinity with thought, Derrida also reworks the temporal priority accorded to signifier/signal as our earlier engagement with the formulation of carrying has pointed out. We could consider thought weighs itself in acquiring its own weight. This takes place simultaneously, within the same stroke (read as writing) in which the perceiving subject is invited to substantiate what is being perceived. More importantly, this notion of weight as the operation and substance of thought also reconceives corporeal sensibility as "originally speculative" (Derrida 2005a, 74). As Derrida suggests, "in this *tactile corpus*, one is dealing ... with *thinking*, which is to say pondering, *weighing* that which gives itself over to tact in a thousand ways, namely, the body, the *corpus*, inasmuch as it weighs – and therefore, in a certain way, *thinks*" (2005a, 71, emphasis in original). Such a conception of the weight of and as thought assists further investigation of the matter of race, for it accounts for the insistence, that is the weight and gravity, of the perceived and conceived that renders the economy of

⁷⁷ Kirby also notes the question of weight as *valeur* in Saussure's theorisation of "the consubstantiality of semiological association" (2011, 78).

signification workable. Crucially, an account of the generalised operation of weight as a political economy needs not to be at the expense of hierarchy, difference and specificity. As Vicki Kirby reminds us, the political economy is “inflicted through a sexual diacritics” (1997, 79) that operates through a force field of hierarchical oppositions – intimate couplings – of “presence/absence, value/lack” (79). The radical import of this conception of the tactile corpus as thought that weighs and represents itself is to understand the identity and essence of race, differently.

Another aspect of the deployment of political economy in this thesis concerns the ways in which host country language skill is figured as a form of “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu 1991), a capacity that functions as a criterion for integration, especially into the labour market. According to John Thompson, the notion of linguistic capital refers to “the capacity to produce expression *à propos*, for a particular market” (1991, 18). It functions in relation to “the distribution of other forms of capital (economic capital, cultural capital, etc.) which define the location of an individual within the social space” (Thompson 1991, 18). It follows then that accent also comes to mark the hierarchical differences of linguistic capital that index “the social positions of speakers” (Thompson 1991, 18).

What can be gleaned from the rendition of accent and speech production in terms of capital, is that for Bourdieu and Thompson, accent as embodied differences marks class rather than racial differences. This presumed categorical distinction needs to be flagged here, as it relates to our discussion in chapter two on the relation between race and ethnicity, often touched upon in terms of terminological differences. Fatima El-Tayeb’s (2011) observation assists us here. Commenting on the construction of the narrative which proposes a colour-blind Europe, that is a geo-political space “free of ‘race’” in contrast with its American counterpart, El-Tayeb gives the example of the influential argument against race as an analytical category in the European context put forth by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. According to El-Tayeb, Bourdieu and Wacquant warn against the risk of introducing or importing the analytical category of race into the European context that it is alien to. Instead, Bourdieu and Wacquant present class as the pertinent category of social analysis for the European context. Class is the European alternative to race, which is particular to the American context.

The assumption that Europe is originally free of racial issues, because “racialised minorities have traditionally been placed outside of the national and by extension continental community” (El-Tayeb 2011, xvii) functions simultaneously to construct the whiteness of European identity and to equate race with people of colour. The substitution of class for race as an analytical category proper to the European context not only serves to “prohibit discourses around racialised oppression” (El-Tayeb 2011, xvii), but also presumes and generates a notion of race as an independent category, located in specific racialised bodies, that can be simply absent or present from analysis. I want to accentuate that the ways in which this logic, which singles out race as a self-present category from other identity categories, also underpins the argument that race is everything and everywhere. To explicate this point, we could consider the biologisation of race in polygenism, the argument for the originally diverse/distinct genesis of races. As Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin (2008) point out in their article “How Race Became Everything: Australia and Polygenism”, race was found everywhere precisely with the rise of polygenism and the turn to the biologically determined conception of racial differences. Understanding race as a process of becoming its other, my analysis here does not present accent as the embodied marker of either class, or race. Rather, I argue that at stake is the general political economy of valuation through which accents become identities through and as racial and class differences.

We will revisit the matter of accent in terms of racialised habitus, and in relation to what Nirmal Puwar calls “somatic norm” (2004, 109) in the following section. Related to this conception of linguistic capital, the political economy refers to the ways in which the specificity of the host country language learning process is entangled with the political economy of immigration and integration. This is evident in for example the particular course in which one is eligible to enrol, the choice of language – Finnish or Swedish – and the eligibility for subsidies as mentioned in chapter one. Taken together, we can consider these co-permeating and co-distinguished levels of political economy are of and as the general process of valuation – exchange and production. This is a “*différential* process” that is “a political economy because it operates through a force field of hierarchical oppositions whose presumed separability denies the ongoing mode of their production” (Kirby 1997,

79). Having laid bare the *im-plications* of the political economy, and keeping in mind the problematics of the referent, the visual and physiological sound in Saussure's account, it is now possible to examine the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters.

Prelude: It's a Trill

During the second session of a class on Finnish for foreigners at Turun Iltalukio, students were given instructions on how to practice their pronunciation of the Finnish alphabet. I sat at the back of the classroom, assuming that this position would provide a better view of the whole class and the events which would transpire. When the teacher approached me I was concentrating on taking notes about the practice of pronunciation – the sounds that bodied forth from all corners of the room of students playing with tone and pitch. When my Finnish teacher asked if I could try to pronounce the rolling r, a one-on-one instruction, I felt the attention focused upon me. Other students nearby turned towards me and stopped their practice. For some reason, I became nervous, feeling their sharp gaze, their silent scrutiny and anticipation. I was fully aware that my success rate in articulating the rolling r was (and in fact still is) very low. The chances of getting it right in a conversational situation are random, especially when I feel anxious. Nervously, my tongue tip pushed and rubbed against the alveolar ridge. A stream of air from my lungs was blocked by my tongue tip so that it vibrated, leading to a quick tapping movement. “Rrr”, I voiced, with a success that took me completely by surprise. It's a trill! The teacher was similarly shocked and commented, “Chinese cannot pronounce that, which can be sometimes very problematic for others to understand”.

The Racialised Visual Episteme

As mentioned earlier, in the line of inquiry that conceives of race as an epistemological problem, the seemingly neutral act of seeing is also subjected to scrutiny. The practices of visual representation – appealing to sight, “the King of the senses” (Braidotti 2011, 107) – are considered to be crucial to the genesis of the modern human subject. For example, in her analysis of “the process of speciation”, Megan H. Glick argues that visual representation as a form of “ocular anthropomorphism” entails “the dualistic movement between processes of racialisation and speciation”

(2012, 99). From a different perspective, this could be read in terms of “whiteness as humanness” (Sullivan 2012, 303), an optics – an epistemic perceptual schema – that engenders and differentiates between the white anthropos as the agentic center/sovereign subject and its others (see also Hinton and Liu 2015). To further elaborate on this, I turn to Nikki Sullivan’s (2012) description and analysis of the “somatechnics of perception” (2012, 302) through Janet Schaw’s anecdotal entry in her journal (see also Montag 1997, 281) at length, for it is an excellent illustration of the ways in which the universalisation of whiteness as humanness is at work. Sullivan writes,

On a visit to Antigua in 1774 Schaw wrote of an incident that tells us much about the somatechnics of perception and its role in the somaticization, the coming-to-matter, of the non/human. Proceeding on foot from St Johns Harbour to her lodgings, the newly arrived Schaw was startled by “a number of pigs [that] ran out at a door, and after them, a parcel of monkeys” (1923, 78). This, she writes, “not a little surprised me but I found what I took for monkeys were negro children, naked as they were born” (1923, 78). (2012, 302)

For Sullivan, as for Warren Montag, this anecdote attests to the racialised mode of perception that simultaneously engenders the human subject and its racialised (non)human others. That is, to quote Sullivan, “whiteness-as-humanness is integral to a specific, situated, somatechnics of perception which helps constitute the necessary background from which Schaw knows her ‘self’ and (her) ‘others’” (2012, 302-303).

This phenomenological configuration of racialised visual perception is echoed in Alcoff’s observation of the emergence of racial hierarchies. Drawing on a Foucauldian conceptualisation of the “Classical episteme”, Alcoff notes that Western fetishistic classifying practices which delineate and differentiate natural terrains and types, such as map-making and table-drawing, emerged simultaneously with the “metaphysical and moral hierarchies between racialised categories of human beings” (2002, 13).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Ahmed provides an excellent elaboration on account of the ways in which phenomenological methods could be supplemented by a genealogical approach. For example, Ahmed reexamines this possibility in *Willful Subjects*: “How can phenomenology and genealogy be seated at the same table? After all, the phenomenological method of the *epoché*, which requires we bracket our presuppositions of a given object, might also require we bracket our knowledge of the

In reconfiguring what is taken as self-evidently visual in racialised and anthropomorphic perceptual practices, the above accounts provide strong critiques against an “ocular consciousness” (Glick 2012, 99) characteristic of the sovereign and disembodied human subject, coded as white and masculine. This line of thought effectively argues that the immediacy of phenotypes is “a produced obviousness” (Alcoff 2002, 14). The significance of this argument needs to be highlighted here. In chapter two, it is noted that the received notion of race often concerns the ways in which the essence of human differences could be found – localised and contained in individual bodies – in a set of corresponding properties or attributes: for example phenotypical, biological and moral differences. Furthermore, the perceived fixity of racial differences are said to evince and index the racial hierarchies, thus providing the justification for various forms of racism. In reconfiguring the perception of race as engendered by racialised optics that are always and already conditioned upon the universalisation of whiteness as “the very form of human universality itself” (Montag 1997, 285), the direction of essentialism’s logic of causality is reversed. In other words, the visible racial differences are understood as the result, rather than the cause, of hierarchised racial positioning.

Nevertheless, despite such interrogations, the visual registry continues to function as a powerful determinant, mediating everyday racialised encounters. This speaks to critical race theory’s call for attending to “*everyday* racism” (Holland 2012, 3, emphasis in original), because it “defines race, interprets it, and decrees what the personal and institutional work of race will be” (3). In addressing the terms through which racialised visual practices operate, it may be argued that racialised and feminised others could appropriate the gaze in situated encounters, and produce an “oppositional gaze, of looking back or claiming the visual field, rather than looking down or being the object of visual inspection”

history of that object” (2014, 25, emphasis in original). For Ahmed, these two approaches are compatible because both of them assist an investigation of the arrival of the behind from spatial and temporal aspects. That is because one could only perceive the object in profile. Thus the coherence of the object’s identity is predicated upon the “conjuring of a behind” (Ahmed 2014, 25). This “behind” of an object is not immediately perceptible but is assumed to be there. It follows then that the conjoining of phenomenological and genealogical approaches could effectively address the “conditions of arrival” (Ahmed 2014, 25) of the behind.

(Griffin and Braidotti 2002, 223). And yet, in this formulation of social encounters, the self-presence of an ocular consciousness, the very stuff of how it works or what it is, is left intact. It thus unwittingly returns to the logic of presence/absence that has enabled the white racist gaze in the first place. Even when the process of subject formation is acknowledged, it remains contested as to whether and how to approach the materiality of phenotypes (Saldanha 2006). And further to this, it is unclear exactly how the field of the visible can be transformed, given the deep-rooted racial prejudices that often take the form of stereotypes. Is it at all possible to read otherwise?

The Materialisation of Racialised Bodies

In light of these concerns, Judith Butler's engagement with the question of race in "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia" proves important, for it offers a performative account of seeing that real-ises racialised bodies. I want to flag here the importance of the question of real-ising. In chapter one, it is noted that the fictitious drug Finnexia opens up the question of fact and fiction through, for example, the technics of visual illustration. In chapter three, the methodological implications of the pair – real / fiction – is laid bare. For example, drawing on Homi Bhabha's reading of the ways in which the colonial condition is captured and evoked on the border of history and the unconscious, I have argued that the auto/ethno/graphic account goes hand in hand with the troubling of what counts as the ground of analysis.⁷⁹ Furthermore, in the examination of the question of the visual in Saussure, I have observed the unqualified investment in the visual perception as attaching to and reflecting the real, manifested in the ways in which Saussure distinguishes the visual from the linguistic signal. For Saussure, what is seen is factual, by virtue of the natural connection with or reflection of reality. For example, to recall, Saussure argues that the symbol of justice,

⁷⁹ It should also be added here that the very notion of "ground" itself is symptomatic of the sexualised and racialised diacritics. The conception of empirical fact as the "ground" that is awaiting to be dissected, analysed and made sense of is informed by and reinscribes the sexualising and racialising economy which, as Kirby writes, "casts 'woman' as improper – the primordial ground against which the male subject is defined" (2006, 24). In light of this, Kirby continues to argue, "woman is aligned with 'otherness', 'the body', 'irrationality' and 'the animal', and all these concepts seem *naturally* to conjure one another" (2006, 24, emphasis in original).

the scale, cannot be replaced by a chariot, which often signifies war. The question of the real that has been touched upon so far in this thesis is central to discussions of race. As the beginning of this chapter makes clear, the reconfiguration of race in terms of discursive and produced effect has been an important manoeuvre to counter racist claims of racial properties and dispositions. Nevertheless, in the face of the continued effect of phenotypes as the primary markers of racial differences in everyday encounters, the question that needs to be raised is perhaps not simply whether race is real, but what the nature of reality is, and how it is realised.

With these questions in mind, Butler's commentary on the Rodney King case is relevant. On March 3, 1991, Rodney King, a taxi driver was stopped for speeding on the freeway by officers from the Los Angeles Police Department. During the arrest, King was beaten repeatedly by four officers, which was videotaped by a local witness George Holliday. This footage was aired nationwide. The four indicted officers were all acquitted. This came as a shock for many Los Angeles residents. Many took to the streets to protest, in a movement generally referred to as the Los Angeles uprising.⁸⁰

The video evidence was thought by many at the time to show an attack by the police on King, and not the other way around. For Butler, the "white racist episteme", as a "historically self-renewing practice of reading" (1993a, 22) which structures the visual field, is at work here. More specifically, it functions as the *precedent* and *antecedent* of regulatory norms that order the messy field of vision into a coherent and intelligible narrative. According to Butler, "the white paranoiac forms a sequence of narrative intelligibility that consolidates the racist figure of the black man" (1993a, 16), whose "body is circumscribed as dangerous, prior to any gesture, any raising of the hand" (18).

Butler depicts a scene in which the white racist episteme materialises and real-ises racialised bodies. In examining the *how* of the interpretation processes that render the beaten body as the source of violence, Butler argues that seeing is not a direct or neutral perception. Rather, it is a political construal of the visible, symptomatic of a racialised visual episteme, which is "hegemonic and forceful" (Butler 1993a, 17). This

⁸⁰ <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/rodney-king-case-and-los-angeles-uprising>, last accessed 6 July 2015.

means that what is seen is itself a racial formation, integral to a racialised visual economy that discriminates, “orchestrates and interprets” (Butler 1993a, 20). Positing the body as a sign, Butler’s account radically calls into question the referential stability of phenotypical differences as the immutable ground and the incontestable truth of hierarchical racial positioning. Importantly, this provocative argument does not simply reverse, but radically confounds the terms of linear causality that inform most racist narratives. As Butler makes explicit, “This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* it own action” (1993b, 30, emphasis in original).

The (re)production of what counts as valuable and intelligible is, for Butler, kernel to the political economy that (re)produces hierarchical differences that justify forms of violence, exclusion and denigration. At stake here is the condition of limit-ing, or the “‘logic of morphing’” (Kirby 2006, 84). According to Butler, the bodily contour is a permanently shifting and negotiated interface of interior and exterior, self and other. Drawing on several theoretical frameworks, Butler’s conceptualisation of contour/threshold is understood in terms of “interpolation[(sic] (Althusser), enunciation (Benveniste), body imago (Lacan), and inscription (Foucault)” (Kirby 1997, 126). Given that Butler’s reading of race here draws on Frantz Fanon’s notion of a “‘historico-racial schema’” (Fanon quoted in Butler 1993a, 20), which challenges the Lacanian model of the mirror stage, I want to focus on Butler’s reading of bodily contours in terms of bodily imago. This is because the psychoanalytic approach shows that a racialised and racialising dynamic is already present in the formation of a bodily image (Ahmed 2000, 59-60). This may shed light on the process of real-ising race in the example of the successful pronunciation of the trill.

In Jacques Lacan’s thesis theory of the imago, individuation and identification take place through the unstable dynamic of projection and misrecognition of imaginary bodily contours. This specular image is an idealised totality that confers a visual integrity and coherence, which is in fact a compensatory mask of the irretrievable loss of original unity. Significantly, the inevitable ambiguity of bodily ego/imago – as “a visual fiction” (Butler 1993b, 138), “a site of *méconnaissance*” (138) – has profound implications for the earlier discussion of ocular consciousness in

racialised encounters. First of all, given that the bodily ego as *imago* is the relation of identification, which can never be finally achieved, the phantasy of a self-present subject, capable of exercising an objectifying gaze that is itself coherent, is radically qualified. Secondly, since the morphological scheme that inaugurates the ego also provides grids of intelligibility – “the threshold of the visible world” (Kirby 2006, 58) – the racist phantasy that renders racialised others radically different and separate will prove futile. As Kirby observes, “how we perceive the difference between people, objects and their inter-relationships (the shape and definition of otherness) will be extruded through a corporeal imaginary which has constitutive force: the subject *is* this process, where the differentiation of world and ego emerge in the same reflex/reflection” (2006, 58).

Not only is the question of “who sees and reads” in racialised encounters radically confounded, but the materiality of racialised bodies is also cast in a new light. Following Fanon, Butler argues that “the black male body is constituted through fear, and through a naming and a seeing” (1993a, 18). This reading is exemplary of Butler’s conceptualisation of corporeality and materialisation. For Butler, there is no outside of signification, for “every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material” (1993b, 68). It is important to note that the term “material” here does not connote the “in-itself of matter” (Kirby 2006, 69). Kirby’s reading of this detail is especially informative. As she writes,

The argument that the body’s substance is a sign rather than a fixed solidity or prescriptive referent is furthered in the happy coincidence between the words “matter” and “materialise”. While these words evoke a *notion* of physical substance, these signs are also synonyms for “meaning” and the larger semantic process of meaning-making. (2006, 69, emphasis in original)

Butler posits the phenomenality of the visual (and the aural) as the materiality of the signifier, which “will signify only to the extent that it is impure, contaminated by the ideality of differentiating relations, the tacit structuring of a linguistic context that is illimitable in principle” (1993b, 68). Given Butler’s vigorous attention to initial conditions, in this account, the nature of phenomenality is assumed, and problematically rendered as

“the substantive, material anchor of signification” (Kirby 1997, 110). For if “what appears only signifies by virtue of those non-phenomenal relations, i.e., relations of differentiation” (Butler 1993b, 68), it seems that the process – the *how* of appearing visibly and aurally – is severed from what is understood as non-phenomenal.

Undoubtedly, Butler’s examination of the maintenance work that enables the anticipating and inscriptive efficacy of white paranoiac visual perception is an important intervention, for it is precisely the denial and erasure of its operation that reproduces “a white racist imaginary that postures *as if* it were the unmarked frame of the visible field, laying claim to the authority of ‘direct perception’” (Butler 1993a, 19, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, its implication is undercut by virtue of the incommensurable gap that Butler installs between signifier and signified, as well as between sign and referent. For Butler, the irretrievable loss of the referent or the *a priori* moment, determines the sign’s purported failure, and functions as the momentum that propels its recitation. Given this, Butler argues that it is precisely within the historicity of the sign – the necessity of its reiteration – that the potential for transformation, i.e., for reading otherwise – is located. For if seeing is a political construal, a cultural formation, then its inherent instability (because of the slippage of meaning) necessarily involves the process of re-signification. It follows then that it is only through reiterated readings that “the workings of racial constraints on what it means to ‘see’” (Butler 1993a, 16) may be called into question.

However, if the racialised visual episteme is equated with an oppressive notion of power that always already delimits perception as cultural imprint, then it remains unclear how to read differently within the “racially saturated field of visibility” (Butler 1993a, 15). As Butler herself acknowledges:

It is not, then, a question of negotiating between what is “seen,” on the one hand, and a “reading” which is imposed upon the visual evidence, on the other. In a sense, the problem is even worse: to the extent that there is a racist organization and disposition of the visible, it will work to circumscribe what qualifies as visual evidence, such that it is in some cases impossible to establish the “truth” of racist brutality through recourse to visual evidence. (1993a, 17)

This lack of clarity calls for the examination of the different but inter-related modalities of racialisation. What challenges would emerge or what possibilities would be opened up in taking into account the ways in which the materialisation of race is not only seen, but also felt and heard? Do these perspectives complicate and confound the racialised visual episteme? Or are they informed by and enclosed in the same political economy of racialisation? With these questions, I now turn to Sara Ahmed's theorisation of affect and racialisation.

Eye-to-Eye and Skin-to-Skin Encounters

Ahmed's and Butler's frameworks share a structural commitment to, and political investigations of, the notion of difference understood as a gap, or break, and I suggest that these parallels merit further analysis. For example, Ahmed locates the analysis of race in encounters, understood as involving gaps between histories of encounters and the present moment of contact, between the visual economy and the affective economy or the modality of eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin, between "unconscious emotions" (Ahmed 2004, 44) and conscious recognition. Drawing on Butler's formulation of performativity, Ahmed understands these gaps as the inevitable consequence of the cut or excision from histories of encounters and the repression of ideas "to which the feeling may have been first (but provisionally) connected" (2004, 44). Because of an "imperfect translation of the past" (Ahmed 2004, 184), these gaps indicate potentially transformative moments of hesitation "between the domain of the particular –the face to face of this encounter – and the general – the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism" (Ahmed 2000, 8).

Finding in Butler's consideration of the bodily boundary an important attention to historicity, Ahmed supplements the economy of the visual with the affective. Whereas the former involves "techniques for differentiating" (Ahmed 2000, 3) through racialised visual coding, the latter is a process in which emotions and feelings, as impressions felt on the skin, "circulate between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement" (Ahmed 2004, 44). For Ahmed, an encounter implies both eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin modalities that converge on the surface of the body. Importantly, conjoining the affective with the visual, Ahmed argues that an intervention into any one perceptual modality will always

involve other, related concerns.

First, the configuration of skin as "*a border that feels*" (Ahmed 2000, 45, emphasis in original) affords an account of racialisation that is attentive to the lived experiences of racialised others. Second, the metonymic sliding of affects calls into question "the tyranny of the visible" (Alcoff 2002, 19), which marks the hyper-visibility of racialised others that renders unassailable the invisibility of whiteness. As Ahmed dilates, "The skin is not simply invested with meaning as a visual signifier of difference (the skin as coloured, the skin as wrinkled, and so on). It is not simply implicated in the (scopophilic) logic of fetishism where the visual object, the object which *can* be seen, becomes the scene of the play of differences" (2000, 44, my emphasis). The proposition that the surface of skin as a bodily boundary "is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others" (Ahmed 2004, 25), significantly qualifies the racist phantasy of segregation and homogeneity. On this account, affective contamination is always and already implicated in the boundary formation of a supposedly pure and undifferentiated whiteness. For example, commenting on the economy of xenophobia, Ahmed argues that it "involves not just reading the stranger's body as dirt and filth, but the re-forming of the contours of the body-at-home, through the very affective gestures that enable the withdrawal from co-habitation with strangers in a given social space" (2000, 54).

Last but not least, drawing on critical insights from psychoanalytic accounts of unconscious emotions and Marxian notions of value, Ahmed posits that repression – the "'absent presence' of historicity" (2004, 45) – motors the affective, all the while contributing to the stickiness of signs that accumulate affective value as they circulate. The question "what sticks", centres on Ahmed's interrogation of the repetition and reproduction of stereotypes and racial prejudices. As she writes, "'What sticks?' ... is a reposing of other, perhaps more familiar, questions: Why is social transformation so difficult to achieve? Why are relations of power so intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance?" (Ahmed 2004, 11-12).

This last point in particular needs to be read in relation to Ahmed's general political project. Ahmed's primary concern is to account for the materialisation and the specificity of hierarchical differences, i.e., *which*

differences come to matter, a question that moves beyond the essentialist reification of racial differences that feeds racism. She is also critical of the postmodernist indifference to the specificity of difference, here, that of racialised others, as well as the privileging of mobility in narratives that celebrate nomadism, indeterminacy and the free floating play of difference. As Ahmed notes, "That chain of endless deferral, that seemingly open fluidity, is halted at certain points, partially fixed in the process of becoming intelligible" (1998, 129). With this in mind, it becomes clear that Ahmed's anti-essentialist account of race requires an economy of signification that operates without positive terms, and one which is manifested in the visual and the affective. In order to keep the question of origin moving, Ahmed endeavours to hold in tension the processes of "circulation and blockage" (Liu, 2012) that resonate with the "determined, but not fully determined" (2000, 6) nature of racialised and racialising encounters.

This approach is significant to Ahmed's analysis of "relations of othering" that "contest[s] the model of race as a bodily attribute" (2004, 16). A good example of this is Ahmed's reading of the "effect and affect" (2004, 59) of economies of hate. Recall that in Butler's reading of the Rodney King case, her analysis of the racialised visual episteme makes explicit the ways in which the inverted projections of white paranoia render the black man's body hateful and fearsome. Similarly, Ahmed acknowledges the racialising effect of the visual, whereby phenotypical differences function as "the visual prompt that triggers identity thinking" (2000, 129). And yet, Ahmed worries that a mere focus on the visual registry may run the risk of reinstalling the assumption that hate resides in particular bodies of and as signs because of the "fetishisation of skin colour" (2000, 130), which is "seen to hold the 'truth' of the subject's identity" (131). For example, with reference to John Griffin's *Black Like Me*, which is "an autobiographical account of a white man who receives medical help to alter the colour of his skin so that he can 'discover' the truth of being black" (2000, 131), Ahmed writes:

His transformation into a stranger, where he passes as black in the mirror, produces the naked face of the black man, a face that immediately gets coded as fierce and glaring, as monstrous and bestial. In passing as black in his own mirror image, the vision of the black face is hence over-determined by the "knowledges" available of blackness

central to the violence of colonialism. (131)

For Ahmed, bodies of and as signs of hate tend to stick “because they become attached *through* particular affects” (2004, 60, emphasis in original), which are “visceral and bodily” (2004, 58). In light of this, Ahmed asserts that at stake is the question of how emotions are actually produced in racialised encounters, as thinking through this aspect of the puzzle foregrounds the “contingent rather than necessary” (2000, 54) association between objects and emotions, suggested by the term “sticky”. Related to this, Ahmed offers a performative account of hate that operates “by providing ‘evidence’ of the very antagonism it affects” (2004, 52). As she explains, “In *seeing* the other as ‘being’ hateful, the subject is filled up with hate, which becomes a sign of the ‘truth’ of the *reading*” (2004, 52, my emphasis). In laying bare the contingency and historicity of the subject and object of emotions, Ahmed hopes to open up possibilities for seeing and knowing differently.

Nevertheless, as Ahmed’s description of the performativity of hate makes clear, her account of affect remains primarily visual. To put this differently, the histories of visual perception, limited by social regimes of significance, structure and condition the realm of the affective within the horizon of cultural intelligibility. In a similar vein to Butler’s theorisation of visual perception, the affective economy in Ahmed’s account focuses upon the problem of limiting conditions. We are made to wonder once more about the actual possibility of generating alternative readings that might enable political contestation, for it seems that an oppositional and prohibitive conception of power, one that also informs how signification works, foregrounds Butler’s and Ahmed’s interpretation of limiting conditions in the first instance. This is evident, for example, in Ahmed’s understanding of sociality as an antagonistic differentiation, opposed to the inclusion and the with-ness of corporeal generosity (2000, 48). Recall the spatial dimension of identification and disidentification articulated by relations of proximity and distance discussed in terms of animacy hierarchies. According to Ahmed, although the exposure of bodies in being touched is the condition of possibility for generating social and individual bodies, this is not a simple state of being-with. Rather, it involves “an economy of touch” (Ahmed 2000, 184) that differentiates and hierarchises bodies through touching and being touched differently

by ones that are near as well as distant others.

Butler's and Ahmed's interventions rest on the shared notion that prohibition induces a reconfiguration of approach. Inasmuch as perception always moves, it will never faithfully represent a referent that escapes culture, and this implies that a certain failure of fit, a mis-measure, is inevitable. However, it is precisely this movement that heralds the possibility of change. Nevertheless, Butler and Ahmed understand this "within-ness" as a failure to see what is really there, what could be there if we weren't encumbered with prejudice. The problem with this position is that if affective visual perception is always negative and oppressive in the first and last instance, then it is unclear exactly what will enable and substantiate the leap to its potentially indeterminate and subversive outcome, or, in terms of what Butler hopes for, "a contest within the visual field, a crisis in the certainty of what is visible" (1993a, 16).

Interlude

The discussion thus far has centred on the affective and performative reiteration of seeing in the racialised visual field. By way of a transition that also recalls the opening scene, I want to read two anecdotes provided by Ien Ang and Ming-Bao Yue respectively. In so doing, I want to lay emphasis on the racialised stereotypes that conceive of visible differences as correlated with one's accents or the language one ought to speak. It may appear that I am introducing the realm of the audible as a separate domain that joins forces with or complicates the logic of the visual. However, with these anecdotes, I mean to linger over and contemplate the how of the visual and audible perception, whose complexity and importance has hopefully been made manifest in my engagement with the Saussurean sign and Butler's and Ahmed's reading of the visual and the affective.

In her book *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, Ien Ang who is of Chinese descent, born in Indonesia and raised in the Netherlands, recalls her experience of being perceived as Chinese:

Chineseness ... inscribed as it was on the very surface of my body, much like what Frantz Fanon (1970) has called the "corporeal malediction" of the fact of his blackness. The "corporeal malediction" of Chineseness, of course, relates to the "fact of yellowness",

identifiable among others by those famous “slanted eyes”. ... So it was one day that a self-assured, Dutch, white, middle-class, Marxist leftist, asked me, “Do you speak Chinese?” I said no. “What a fake Chinese you are!”, was his only mildly kidding response, thereby unwittingly but aggressively adopting the disdainful position of judge to sift “real from fake” Chinese. (2001, 28-30)

We could interpret Ang’s account through the theorisation of a racialised visual episteme, wherein her visible Chineseness — “the fact of yellowness” – informs the expectation of her ability to speak Chinese (as her mother tongue). This determining prominence accorded to the visual is made all the more conspicuous in the “mildly kidding” judgement of Ang’s “fake” Chinese identity, which ironically is for Ang an imposed identity from which she desperately wanted to distance herself. As Ang writes, reflecting on the title of her book, “‘Not Speaking Chinese’ ... is a condition that has been hegemonically constructed as a lack, a sign of loss of authenticity” (2001, 30).

In other words, the inability to speak Chinese fails the expectation of Ang’s Chineseness. And yet, we could ask as well, what is it about the visual perception that implies the mis/recognition and identification of one’s supposed capacity to speak a certain language, which is normally considered as audible in nature? How can the visual register anticipate, and thus include in its operation, another perceptual realm – the audible in this instance – that supposedly occupies a different spatio-temporal dimension from the visual? With these questions in mind, I want to consider Yue’s account of not looking German. Whereas in Ang’s anecdote, her inability to speak the Chinese language did not actually alter the perception of Ang as Chinese, albeit as a fake/inauthentic copy, in Yue’s account below, the fact that she and her brother speak German natively, did not change the perception of their non-Germanness. In “On Not Looking German: Ethnicity, Diaspora and the Politics of Vision”, Yue, who is born and raised in Germany, sets out to elucidate the practices and processes of visual othering:

The incident happened in the 1970s when my brother and I took the subway home one day. We were chatting away in German and hardly noticed an older German male, sitting in a row behind us. He had obviously been eavesdropping for a while when he suddenly got up from his seat, walked over and interrupted our lively, if self-absorbed

conversation. "Excuse me," he asked, and his tone revealed a mix of curiosity and annoyance, "how do you speak German so fluently?" I was totally unprepared for this interruption, but while I was still thinking of an appropriate reply, I heard my brother saying: "Well, that's because we've learned it." To which the man responded in a more hostile tone: "But how long have you been living here?" Before I could think of a reply, I heard my brother saying with a smile: "Oh, we've only been here about a year. You know, German is such an easy language!" Of all possible responses, this was certainly the last the man had expected, especially as Germans believe their language to be particularly difficult. The man's face paled instantly and, without so much as another word, he turned around and retreated to the other end of the subway car. (2000, 175)

What I find striking in this scenario is that Yue and her brother's fluent German speech did not so much convince the German male of their Germanness, as it became a source of a confusion – "How do you speak German so fluently?" The difficulty in identifying their Chinese appearance with their Germanness is all the more telling in the ways in which the German male was offended by Yue's brother's answer "You know, German is such an easy language!" The German language is often marked by its difficult grammar. We could here recall our discussion in chapter two of the identification of the grammatical complexities with the capacity of a race and a nation for intellection, culture and civilisation. What we could glean from the German male's annoyance – indicated by his instantly paled face and his retreat from Yue and her brother – is that he was probably offended not only by Yue's brother's belittling of German as "an easy language", but also, and more importantly, by the downgrading of his German identity. Although Yue's intention was to make visible the overdetermination of visual perception as a technology of othering, Fatima El-Tayeb finds intriguing the contradictory visual and aural logic at work in the perception of Yue and her brother's non-Germanness. As El-Tayeb asks:

Why was the perfect German of the children not enough to make them readable as (minoritarian) Germans? Why did their answer, which seemingly confirmed the man's curiosity and end the conversation? (2011, xxiv)

Taken together, it seems that on the one hand, these anecdotes evince

the primacy of the visual perception of phenotypical differences which, as El-Tayeb maintains, overrides the logic of the audible. On the other hand, it could also be said, using Butler's terminology, that the aural perception *troubles* the visual perception of racial identification in Yue's account. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that on one level trouble is inevitable, because it is precisely the ambiguities of trouble – in the sense that making trouble would get one in trouble, thus “the rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms” (1999, xxvii) – that condition power's operation. As Butler makes clear, “the prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble” (1999, xxvii). On another level, and given the inescapable yet troublesome force through which the “I” or any category of identity emerges, Butler suggests the enduring and necessary interplay of the “seriousness” of the process of claiming identity for feminist politics and the “laughter” (1999, xxviii) which denotes the parodic problematisation of these very identities. That is, there is a need both to claim identity, in however provisional and contestable ways, as well as to trouble it.

In the main, the ways in which the term “trouble” is deployed here are akin to Butler's meditation on the inherent ambiguity of power and identity. And yet, as Butler's first assertion of the conjoined sense of rebellion and reprimand in the word “trouble” shows, central to this conception of trouble is the juridical notion of power, whose intention, as has been noted in our discussion earlier, remains repressive and suppressive if not in the first then in the final instance. Following this line of inquiry, it could be said that the racialised visual episteme structures racial perception and identification, whereas the realm of the audible becomes a potentially transformative site of “the queering of ethnicity in response to the European ideology of colorblindness” (El-Tayeb 2011, 177). And yet, if such a trouble, understood in terms of disturbing the otherwise stable order and structure, is intrinsic to power's operation, its iterability, then the trouble and confusion brought by the audible mis/match, in Yue and her brother's case, is actually essential to and strengthens the regulation of a racialised visual episteme as exerting prohibitive power. Reading Butler's meditation on the trouble of power alongside the “*difficulty* without which no “I” can appear” (1999, xxv, my emphasis), we could ask the how of power's own emergence. That is, what are the troubles and difficulties through which the prohibitive

identity of power may emerge? It is not that power as racialised visual episteme *first* establishes its confinement and regulation, and is *then* troubled by an alternative force from outside it. Rather, the trouble of identity is at, and of, power's inception, i.e. the dis/continuity of power.

To elaborate on this point, we could consider the connotation of trouble. Not only does it denote disorder, conflict and disturbance, but it also hints at a generally muddy, sedimented and yet agitated and restless condition, as its etymological association with the word "turbid" indicates. It follows then that, besides interpreting the aural as confusing the visual determinations and constraints of racial identity that are felt to be an imposed surface that contours the body, what I am conjuring up is also a convoluted and troublesome, because muddy, agitated and restless "corporeography" (Kirby 1997) wherein visibility as aurality as tactility is "utterly referential" (Kirby 2011, 124). This restlessness or excitation points to the later discussion in this thesis on the psychic life of the tongue. Again, this dis/continuous consubstantiality means that the racialised visual and aural perceptions are distinguished from, limited by, even as they are emergent through and as, each other. What are the implications of this configuration for our examination of the racialised visual episteme that contours racialised bodies as a felt surface? Furthermore, and importantly, what are the implications of the psycho-social open-ended involvement (the troubled power) which gives rise to our declared desire for political intervention and transformation? With these questions in mind, and especially given the urgent need to break away from the racialised visual episteme, I will turn to the possibility of moving beyond the visual.

Moving Beyond the Visual?

Writing in the context of the racialisation process of the turbaned Sikh, Jasbir Puar acknowledges the importance of Butler's and Ahmed's interventions, but remains unconvinced of the political efficacy of the performative reiteration of seeing. If the visual field is so thoroughly saturated by the historic-racial schema and constrained within the realm of the cultural and the discursive, then, according to Puar, it seems that the only way out of this epistemological, ocular economy is by moving beyond and outside its confinement. As Puar writes,

Butler and Ahmed rely on acts of reading to contest epistemological truths; that is, the logic of visibility is challenged through the logic of visibility by pointing out the instability of visual evidence, rather than moving aside the visual, however momentarily, as the primary epistemological terrain of racial knowledge. Similarly, the logic of signification is contested through pointing out the instability of signs. (2007, 189)

Part of Puar's concern is that the preemptive force of the visual entails a paranoid logic that will endlessly confirm and reconstitute its own racialised reading. Instead, Puar opts for the perceptual realm of the haptic and/or the tactile. Following Brian Massumi (2002), Puar approaches affect and bodily matters not as an effect of cultural inscription, but as "the body's 'visceral sensibility'" (2007, 189) which "precedes sense perception" (189) and "reasserts ontological rather than epistemological knowing" (194). For Puar, the implications of the disparities between conceptions of bodily participation are considerable. Instead of rendering the body as a sign, Puar argues that the antedating nature of bodily visceral sensibility provides a site of intervention *before* and *beyond* the "discursive baggage" (2007, 184) and "representational weight" (191) of racial prejudice.

Rather than focusing on the limiting conditions, Puar attends to the conditions of emergence. Whereas limiting conditions, or the logic of morphing,⁸¹ concern the operation of regulatory norms that always already structure and constitute what counts as intelligible, the condition of emergence is said to shed light on the ontogenetic priority that is itself a field of affective intensity. In light of this, discursive structures, or cultural grids of intelligibility, are understood as forms of relative stasis which derive and emerge from a state of flux, i.e., *affect before representation*. This distinction between the economy of representation, which that cuts and dissects, and the purportedly material and affective domain that exists before and outside the constraints of representation and intellection is made clear in Arun Saldanha's following remark:

⁸¹ The notion of morphology, according to Kirby, "mediates between a purely anatomical and a purely psychological account of the body and its pleasures" (Campioni and Grosz quoted in Kirby 1997, 171). It designates the forming of the contour and the structure of the bodily ego as necessarily marked. In Kirby's work, the question of morphology is read through the process of limiting that resonates with the pellicular essence of the body *as* writing discussed earlier.

While today's poststructuralist thinkers of racism have done much to dismantle the notion of a rational individual acting independently from exploitation elsewhere in the world, their radical force is tempered by their shared adherence to the post-Kantian paradigm founding universalism upon consciousness and representation allegedly entirely contingent in relation to materiality. But, like all power relations, racism operates first of all through the materialities of desire and landscape far "below" any mental or linguistic detectability. (2013, 7)

For Saldanha, the poststructuralist and Marxist anti-racist projects lose sight of the actual corporeality of the "looking, desiring, struggling *bodies*" (2013, 8, emphasis in original) that is indispensable in the constitution of racial differences. That is, as Saldanha argues, the materiality of bodies are the prerequisite for racialised signification to have any effect at all. In an attempt to address the material irreducibility of the process of racialisation, Saldanha proceeds to read Fanon's "train passage", wherein Fanon was interpellated by and discovers his blackness through "a racial epidermal schema" (Fanon [1952] 2008, 84). As Saldanha maintains:

The statement "*Tiens, un nègre*" requires a larynx, the proximity of a Negro, a comprehension of French, and being within the earshot to hear it ... Fanon's phenotype is not at all "performed" or "constituted" by the body's exclamation ... [but] is constituted ... by genetic endowments, environmental conditions, exercise, hormones, diet, disease, ageing, etc. (2006, 12)

In line with Saldanha's proposed "immanentist-materialist" conception of race that attends to its material irreducibility and inquires into "how bodies are materially differentiated into hierarchies" (2012, 7), Puar conceives of affect in its "ontogenetic dimension", "as prior to representation – prior to race, class, gender, sex, nation, even as these categories might be the most pertinent mapping of or reference back to affect itself" (2007, 215). Whereas visibility is said to freeze bodies in cultural frames of sorts, the ontogenetic difference takes the expression of "movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities" (Puar 2007, 215).

In accordance with this reading of affect, Puar endorses Saldanha's theorisation of phenotypical encounters, that is attentive to "the matter of phenotype and how phenotype matters" (Puar 2007, 190). In contrast to

Ahmed's reading of encounters wherein the regulatory and hegemonic mechanism of racialisation imposes itself upon bodies "through the force of historically blighted signifiers that metonymically link and bleed into each other" (Puar 2007, 190), in Puar and Saldanha's formulation, phenotypical difference in itself is regarded as operating through the autonomous affect that is "unmediated, in all of its *connective glory*" (Saldanha 2006, 22, my emphasis). This unmediated and autonomous phenotypical encounter is understood as "the encounter of smell, sweat, flushes of heat, dilation of pupils, the impulses bodies pick up from each other, the contagion of which *we know little*, the sense of being touched without having been physically touched, of having seen without having physically seen" (Puar 2007, 190, my emphasis). In sum, by rendering encounters in corporeal terms Puar aims to "comprehend power beyond disciplinary regulation" (Puar 2007, 215).

Given the visual connotations of phenotypes, the proposition that the tactility of phenotypical encounters is somehow before and beyond visual perception is indeed curious and confusing. For how are phenotypical differences perceived as such? Butler's intervention into "the presumption of the material irreducibility of sex" is pertinent here (1993b, 28), in as much as she enquires as to, "how and why 'materiality' has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions, and, therefore, cannot be a construction?" (1993b, 28).

In addition, we could ask whether the postulation of the material irreducibility of race and sex, as the tactile corporeality, that is "charged" (Saldanha 2006) by and bears the mark of representation, is not itself an inscription of matter with racialising and sexualising connotations. That is, the body is the ground that awaits the charged inscription, and penetration of language, and only through this process alone does it become signified/significant. This is telling in Saldanha's reading of the process of interpellation in the "train passage". Note the temporality in this reading:

There was certainly real phenotypical difference before the exclamation, but it *had no effect* on the situation (yet). The exclamation brings out a latency, a latency Fanon knew was there, but had perhaps forgotten, looking absent-mindedly for a seat. *After* the exclamation, Fanon's options are limited. *Now*, his phenotype is alive, chaining him

to the histories and geographies of race and colonialism. (2006, 12, my emphasis)

Undoubtedly, the attentiveness to corporeality is a significant attempt to re-value the presence of bodies, which is said to be absent in the constructionist account. Nevertheless, this flip-flop from absence to presence renders the bodies as *lacking in significance* as they are seen to have “had no effect on the situation (yet)” (Saldanha 2006, 12), a deficiency attributed to racialised and feminine others.

And yet, the importance of Saldanha’s account of the specificity, historicity and embodied sedimentation of racial formation should be highlighted. His attention to the materiality of race also makes visible a “relative fixity” (Saldanha 2006, 18) that is manifested in “sticky connections” (18) or “‘local pulls’” (18). For example, Saldanha argues that “Whiteness [...] is about the sticky connections between property, privilege, and a paler skin. There is no essence of whiteness, but there is a relative fixity that inheres in all the ‘local pulls’ of its many elements in flux” (2006, 18).

In view of this, Saldanha suggests a modality of viscosity that complements an ontology of emergence. Whereas the notion of viscosity pertains to the certain propensities in racialised bodily formations, the term emergence refers to the genesis of racial differences. This formulation of viscosity echoes Ahmed’s conceptualisation of the stickiness of signs. It is interesting to note that both Saldanha and Ahmed draw on the figure of slime, as exemplary of the quality of a substance that “is not simply solid or liquid” (Ahmed 2004, 90). The material specificity of viscosity – neither solid nor liquid, neither fixed nor flowing – affords a consideration of the reiterative emergence and contingency of racial becoming.

For Saldanha and Puar the ontology of emergence – the question of genesis nevertheless proceeds *before* and *outside* the formation of hierarchical power relations. As the earlier quote about Saldanha’s reading of the Fanon’s “train passage” makes apparent, the phenotypical encounters are conceived of as *unmediated*, as opposed to the epistemic constraints imposed by modalities of representation and categorisation. Underpinning this conception is the logic of temporal and spatial separation, which takes the shape of an incommensurable gap between

ontological emergence and epistemological mediation.

To make explicit what is at stake, especially in relation to the onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race I am proposing throughout the thesis, I want to turn briefly to Derrida's reading of the haptic in *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*. It assists our thinking here in two interrelated ways in that it addresses both the question of continuity and its relation to visibility and the (re)centering of the human subject. First, in terms of continuity, Derrida writes, "What makes the haptical ... cling to closeness ... [and] ... keep up with the appropriation of the proximate, is a *continuistic* postulation. And this continuism of desire accords this whole discourse with the general motif of what [Gilles] Deleuze and [Felix] Guattari ... claims as the 'body without organs'" (2005a, 124-125). Second, and in relation to its relation to the visual and the subjective, Derrida observes the certain place of "becoming-haptical of the optical" (2005a, 123) in Deleuze and Guattari's oeuvre: "The hand is not far ... The finger is not far ... since this even deals with the 'close range', with 'close vision' ... with *the mind*, the very mind" (2005a, 123, emphasis in original).

The upshot of Derrida's point is that the discontinuity, fracture and fissure are found at the heart of the continuism of the haptic. That is the originary separation of the smooth and the striated space, the haptical and the optical. Furthermore, this originary determination/separation (which is what Derrida refers to when he says the "hand is not far"), is the product of the labour of the hand of the self-present human subject, that is, the hand of Man. This reading of the haptic in terms of continuism resonates with the earlier examination of the question of the human, of anthropocentrism as well as the functionality of carrying of the signifier/sound pattern/signal. It is interesting that even, and perhaps especially, when the human, the visual and the cultural are most vehemently repudiated and decentered, their central position are reasserted and transmogrify into other shapes and forms.

This point is of particular relevance for the rethinking of the question of the visual. Puar's "affective politics" (2007, 215) shares with Butler's and Ahmed's theorisation the taken-for-granted understanding of what constitutes an ocular economy – visibility as seeing through the eyes – as an overdetermined, epistemological and cultural construction in which power aims to restrict and to prohibit. Ironically, given Puar's vehement challenge to the fixation of difference in poststructuralist epistemology,

her investment in the affective must nevertheless depend upon and therefore reinstall this reading, interpretation, and representation of the visual as fixed and somehow incorporeal when compared to tactility.

Returning to the question of sensorial, translative involvement posed earlier, we will recall that Puar holds that bodily affective contagion cannot be known to us, because “‘something recognizable’ [is already] a quality (or property)” (Massumi quoted in Puar 2007, 281). However, given this, the question remains as to how the “subtraction” (Massumi 2002, 58) and registration of “excitation” and “intensity” (61) from the purported fixity of the symbolic order might actually proceed. This puzzle is clearly exemplified in Puar’s elaboration of bodily visceral sensibility:

It anticipates the translation of the sight or sound or touch perception into something recognizable associated with an identifiable object.” So the lungs spasm *even before* the senses cognate the presence of a shadow in a “dark street at night in a dangerous part of town” and the shadows are *then* the identifiable objects for which epistemic force is confirmed only *after*, or more accurately, as affective response *has taken place* (2007, 189, my emphasis added).

In the above description, there is a clear sense of a mind/body split, in the form of a temporal and spatial linearity. The corporeal body, the lungs in this case, generates affective and active responses *before* intellection, understood as culturally constrained epistemological knowing. And yet, Puar is quick to assert that affect as ontogenetic difference is not a matter of “pre-existing” through “temporality” (2007, 214), nor is it in a relation of “relay between stasis and flux” (215). Rather, according to Puar, it is “a temporality and a spatialization that has yet to be imagined” (2007, 214).

If, as Puar claims, affect occupies an ontologically different order “yet to be imagined” (2007, 214), one quite different from an epistemological order which presumably is imaginable, then we are left with something of a riddle. Simply put, given this radical abyss, this in-between the ontogenetic and epistemological, it is unclear how one can perceive these bodily responses at all. What is it that falls between these two orders of experience? After all, how can the ontogenetic affect exist “outside” our ability to be affected by it?

Recall that in Ahmed's formulation of racialised encounters, individuation and differences are said to arise from encounters. As Ahmed remarks:

Identity itself is constituted in the "more than one" of the encounter: the designation of an "I" or "we" requires an encounter with others. These others cannot simply be relegated to an outside: given that the subject comes into existence as an entity only through encounters with others, then the subject's existence cannot be separated from the others who are encountered. As such, the encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology (the question of the being who encounters).(2000, 7)

Distinct from the immediacies of affective corporeal sociality in Puar's and Saldanha's propositions of phenotypical encounters, Ahmed posits encounters as performative, which "cannot, then, be detached or isolated from such broader relations of antagonism" (2000, 9). In other words, the absent present historicity, as the limit of intelligibility, foregrounds the very designation of "'the encounter' as such" (2000, 9). Interestingly, Ahmed concedes that an encounter "involve(s) surprise" (2000, 8), because it "is not a meeting between already constituted subjects who know each other: rather the encounter is premised on the absence of a knowledge that would allow one to control the encounter, or to predict its outcome" (8).

This description of the encounter seems to echo that of Puar, at least in terms of the surprising, multi-layered and enlivening possibilities that may be generated. Are these two notions of encounter radically different? Or can we entertain the possibility that the enclosure and limitation of the performative encounter confined within the social/cultural *is* implicated with/in the corporeal sociality in phenotypical encounters? If we can agree in the main with Ahmed's postulation of the encounter as the foundational frame that accompanies any ontological question, and if we add this to Puar's reading of ontogenetic differences, could we perhaps interpret these seemingly different encounters – their enclosure within two distinct and segregated orders – as a bifurcation which is affected by, through and as, a generalised self-encounter which the organism has with itself?

In sum, what seems to be presented here are two expressions of the

same racialisation process. Butler and Ahmed locate the transformative potential in the instability of signs and various gaps. Puar, following Saldanha and Massumi, stresses the need to account for bodily experiences before and beyond the visual register. It is unclear, however, how the tactile and the haptic can be neatly severed from (or be seen as existing before, beyond, outside of) the visual, because as Puar herself concedes, phenotype is experienced “through the haptic where the visual induces the sensation of touch” (2007, 190). But what is most intriguing here is that in segregating “ontological becoming” and “epistemological knowing” (Puar 2007, 196), as well as the bodily sensation in itself, *from* the visual – because this is mediated by the racialised economy of signification – two modes of racialisation, isolated temporally and spatially, are said to be at work.

However, in an attempt to both explain and counter prejudice, is it possible to close off the realm of the sensible as if it exists as an absolute exteriority? If so, what would be the locatable difference, the in-between, which mediates and communicates these two modalities of racialisation? To put this differently, if bodily, visceral sensibility precedes culturally mediated perception, as Puar understands it, and by extension, if the neurobiological precedes the socio-political as nature precedes culture, then the question remains as to where and how the transition from the former to the latter can proceed.

It is to this extent that the conceptualisation of racialised encounters seems unnecessarily circumscribed in both frameworks. And yet a generalised notion of the encounter *that affirms the historicity and specificity of visibility and tactility* could, together with Butler and Ahmed, be read in a way that will acknowledge Puar’s concern about corporeal sociality, not as an absolute exteriority, but as always already knitted into an economy of signification. For if the encounter is what enables an ontological interrogation of the question “what is”, as Ahmed notes, as well as the production of any difference, any identity, then the construction of the insurmountable barrier that severs corporeal substance as an absolute exteriority (outside and beneath) from the materialisation (the cultural construal) of skin is radically qualified. Kirby offers a compelling contribution to this issue which can assist us here:

By remaining on the body’s surface its internal meat needn’t be mentioned: it is simply excluded from corporeal reinscription, its process

and registration. Thus, although signification is an operation whose very experience and possibility is registered and forged through the entirety of the body's biological and perceptual apparatuses – our neurological maps, cognitive representations, sensate recordings, expressions and translations, and so on – Butler's thesis must refuse any suggestion that biological substance might be semiological in nature. ... What is it that actually creates and receives inscriptions if it is not the body's interior complexity? And if that interiority reads and writes those inscriptions (because it must be in the nature of biology to do this), then need we assume that flesh itself is outside, or before, textuality/language? (2006, 83)

As Kirby's last question makes clear, the investigation of the bodily substance does not mean that it is below or before the inscription of language, which would return us to the conception of the material irreducibility of race. Rather, it points to the pellicular nature of the body, conceived of as the scene of reading/writing, that is the process of limiting and emergence. On this account, the distinction between bodily surface and its substance is reworked. The conception of the pellicular nature of the body is coherent with the onto-epistemological dis/continuity that does not reify the differential as the middle space, the in-between, the spatiality of beside, against the "vertical dimension" (Bhabha 1994, 48) of identity in terms of depth and memory.

Instead, I argue that depth and its associated terms such as interiority, specificity, and memory are never simply present or absent, but are expressions of the "infinite allusion" (Derrida quoted in Kirby 1997, 78)⁸² that involves both the becoming space or becoming locatable of memories and substances, as well as inherent resistance to any final enclosure. In

⁸² Kirby's reading of Derrida's reading of the mystic pad in Sigmund Freud's work informs my analysis here. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida comments on the writing machine, the "Mystic Pad", which includes the double system of "freshness of surface and depth of retention" ([1967] 2005b, 272). For Derrida writes, "the *depth* of the Mystic Pad is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. ... Temporality as spacing will be not only the horizontal discontinuity of a chain of signs, but also will be writing as the interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels: the remarkable heterogeneous temporal fabric of psychical work itself. We find neither the continuity of a line nor the homogeneity of a volume; only the differentiated duration and depth of a stage, and its spacing" ([1967]2005b, 281).

light of this, it is possible to engage productively with the conundrum of performativity and generation as set out by Vikki Bell, which was mentioned in chapter two. For the *identification*, or enclosure, of the essentialising gestures found in terms such as depth, interiority, substance, memory is simultaneously an opening and rewriting, which marks, as Kirby asserts, “an indebtedness to limits that is limitless” (1997, 81).

Following on from the rethinking of surface/depth, and returning to our discussion of the visual, I suggest that a potentially more illuminating argument, one which continues to address political concerns, might conceive of the encounter as “the relational dynamic of sociality itself” (Kirby 2006, 114). This conception would serve to open up the very identity of power, language, corporeality and visibility as the generative nature of the Sensible that encounters and produces itself in all its expressions. Instead of conceding to the interpretation of visibility as seeing with eyes, vision is recast as “a sort of wild associational and synaesthetic conversion, a supersaturation within and across all perceptual modalities, such that we hear visually, taste aurally, and so on” (Kirby 2011, 128). Thus, this “radical interiority of the Sensible” (Kirby 2011, 124), “the flesh of the world” (118)⁸³, posed as subjectivity in general, interrogates and acquires knowledge of itself through self-encountering. In view of this, “perception is instead likened to an ontological organ of *conception*. It is a desiring organ that seizes upon its own alienness, and in the wonder of the encounter, is reconceived” (Kirby 2011, 120, emphasis in original). As we will see in the following section, such a rethinking helps us to broach the problematics of accent which articulates what I call “the psychic life of the tongue”.

⁸³ I want to make clear that the notion of flesh and corporeality I am engaging with here does not simply assume the distinction between body (understood as belonging to the proper personhood) and flesh (as what precedes the forming of the body) that informs both Hortense Spillers’ (1987, 2003) and Alexander G. Weheliye’s (2014) theories. For Weheliye, following Spillers, the flesh represents “both a temporal and conceptual antecedent to the body” (2014, 39). In other words, before the body as “legal personhood qua self-possession” (Weheliye 2014, 39) takes shape, the flesh presents the site of “human life cleaved by the working together of depravation and deprivation” (39). My understanding is that the point is not to simply erase the difference between body and flesh either. Rather, in my engagement with corporeality or corporeography, I seek to open the very notion of difference to the momentum of the originary dis/continuity in order to rethink the how of the differentiation, where and when.

Chapter Six

The Psychic Life of the Trilling Tongue

Parched Tongue, Stammering Tongue

By way of engaging with such a self-encounter, and to circle back to the opening scene of the previous chapter, in which I tried to pronounce the trill, I want to examine the question of the tongue. The tongue is figured prominently in scholarly and literary work on language issues in the postcoloniality. For example, Hosu Kim presents “the parched tongue” (2007, 34), whose sensation articulates the loss and displacement of racialised subjects in “the political economy of language ... of the dominant society” (34) as well as making palpable the multiplicity of “unrecognized tongues, bodies and memories” (34). The parched tongue is then the locus of displacement and condensation, whose poetics is made manifest in Kim’s following autobiographical account of her own experience as a Korean student in the United States:

Nobody dared to question why I wanted to learn English so bad like that
Nobody asked why I wanted to study in the United States
Agreed silence may connote the shame and the pain interlaced with U.S. -Korean relations
Instead I was told that we are living in a global society and English is the global language
Thought that English gave me a power that I can’t reach
Hoped that English would be the language that I can master
Carefully chosen, meticulously practiced
Yet my unruly Korean accent in English disclosed soon
After passing a few seconds
My accented tongue sticking out of its own will against my arduous efforts
too much foreign touch, translated into *untamable and uncivilized - grocery, nail salon, fish market* English in the United States. (2007, 39)

To *Um-ma*
 Did you ever notice that I despise your curse?
 Did you ever notice that I felt embarrassed because of your tongue?
 I have been running away from your swearing and devouring tongue
 Far father farthest
 Time arrested
 for the moment my envy to perfect English halted
 The voice heard
 which is not from me
 which has never lived in, but through me
 My loss in words filled with your memory and someone else's memory
 It slams back to my own experience, which has never been fully
 experienced
 Running away from you, *um-ma*
 Running from your impoverished tongue
 I met different *ummas* through my blushed skin
 Many untold stories without a body
 Passing through my broken tongues
 Other mother's unacknowledged sobbings
 Joined my bruised tongue with many injured bodies
 in the American dream for *a better life*
Um-ma,
 My tongue always accidentally configured
 My tongue always in between
 My tongue always dreaming
 My tongue always unsealing
 For the stories yet to be told

(2007, 44-45)

We can glean from Kim's description two important insights. First, accents, typically understood as the speech production of the target language inflected by one's habits of speaking – the labour of “mouth work” (Kim 2007, 34) – are embodied differences that are not equally different. As Kim makes clear, the “Korean tongue with English [is] treated differently from those European tongues in English. Korean-accented English does not invite the same curious gaze and envy as European accented English does. Instead, disapproving looks and outlandish racial slurs” (2007, 39). For Kim, her accented English betrays

her attempts to try to pass as a native speaker, to acquire the social and economic status that she could not otherwise achieve. Importantly, Kim's writing reverses the terms of causality. It is normally considered that (certain) accents present as the failed copy of the target language and contribute to difficulties in communication that result in the speaker's disadvantage in the labour market of the host society. Further to this, accents are said to be embodied differences that reveal or mark one's racial and ethnic identity. Related to our discussion of discontinuity and continuity, we can consider accented speech production as what disrupts and corrupts the fluency of the original target language. Rey Chow's reading on this point assists us here:

Having an accent is, in other words, the symptom precisely of discontinuity – an incomplete assimilation, a botched attempt at eliminating another tongue's competing copresence. In geopolitical terms, having an accent is tantamount to leaving on display – rather than successfully covering up – the embarrassing evidence of one's alien origins and migratory status. (2014, 58)

Chow's insight is that these discontinuities associated with accented speech should be affirmed rather than stigmatised. This is because such discontinuities are the condition for the emergence of the identity of any language and its speaking subject. For Chow, any claim to originary unity/wholeness is contestable, for the discontinuity that is the cut (and we can recall that the process of delimiting is essential to the Saussurean system of the sign) which bifurcates subject from object, is "fundamental to the way language operates" (2014, 6). In the main, my take on accented speech production in terms of dis/continuity concurs with Chow's observation. However, I want to push further and complicate the relation between the origin and the copy, continuity and discontinuity through the trilling tongue. For even if the coin is flipped, so that accents are revaluated as signs of multiplicity and discontinuity, as what precede and give rise to the identity of language and its speaking subject, the identity of discontinuity is itself kept intact. In other words, discontinuity and multiplicity now assume the prominent status of origin. We see this in Chow's assertion that "A native speaker becomes audible or discernible only when there are non-native speakers present, when more than one language is already in play, explicitly or implicitly, as a murmur

and an interference" (2014, 58). On this account, difference is understood in oppositional terms as situated in-between different languages. However, if the origin of any identity is never simply available, how is the originary status of discontinuity as accents so readily assumed? We can recall Karen Barad's question discussed earlier. What is discontinuous discontinuity? We will shortly revisit this point.

As Kim points out in her theorisation of the parched tongue, the irony of the global lingua franca status of English is that only certain versions of English with certain accents, for example European accents, and we could add, spoken by certain rather than other bodies, are considered to have a rightful claim to the socio-economic privilege that the English language accords. "Translated into untamable and uncivilized - grocery, nail salon, fish market English", the marked deviance of Kim's accent, with "too much foreign touch" is not the cause, but the effect of the racialised hierarchies manifested in the racial discrimination and segregation in the labour market, as well as the historicity of American imperialism, or more specifically, of "U.S. - Korean Relations". In other words, Kim's accent is the effect of what Chow calls "preemptive hierarchical value judgements" (2014, 25). Just as Fanon discovers his blackness in the historico-racial schema, Kim comes to recognise the shameful Korean inflected English pronunciation and her unruly tongue in the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters.

This preemptive hierarchical value judgement resembles Jasbir Puar's diagnosis of the performative loop of the racialised visual episteme, which means that Kim's laborious attempts to pass as a native speaker of English, an acquisition of whiteness (cf. Chow 2014; Fanon [1952] 2008), will prove futile. This is expressed through the stubbornness of the parched tongue, "sticking out of its own will against my arduous efforts". We could perhaps interpret the unruliness of the tongue, of Kim's Korean accent, in a similar vein as my earlier discussion of the uneasy non/response to the accented utterance "musta mies". That is, what is unruly is precisely the historicity of racialisation and the sedimented violence and injury that persistently and insistently articulates and surfaces itself, through and as the parched tongue. Kim's accented speech is in fact a "skin tone" (Chow 2014), an expressed and perceived racial identity that manifests audibly and visually (see Butler 1987, 1993b). Importantly, as the term "skin tone" indicates, the visual and aural

registry converse and translate into one another.

This leads to the second insight gleaned from Kim's poetic writing. For Kim, the parched, brokenness of the tongue attests to the disjoining or severance from the origin that is manifested on three levels: (1) the shame and pain of the "generation of [Korean] comfort women who were forced to work as sexual slaves to maintain high morale among soldiers in the Japanese imperial army" (2007, 46); (2) the loss of the mother tongue, through the phenomenon of Korean birth mothers who sent their children to other countries for adoption "due to poverty, war, and the stigma of unwed motherhood"(46); (3) and the perpetual state of displacement of the general condition of language (read as chains of signification) that is most vividly felt by racialised accented speaking subjects. These are not independent, self-present levels, because the lost origin defies such claims. Rather, Kim's argument is similar to Chow's affirmation of discontinuity. That is, that these levels traverse and speak through and as each other finds expression in the parched tongue. Sara Ahmed's discussion of the different levels of the body is informative in this regard. As Ahmed urges us:

We need to refuse any assumption of the body as a material given that operates at one level, in order to understand "the body" as *a trace of the collision between different levels*: the body feels, it is mine (psychic), this body is read and interpreted (textual), this body is touched by others (social), this body is written as "the body" (theoretical/philosophical), and so on. (1998, 20, emphasis in original)

For Ahmed, traversing and "crossing over" (1998, 20) is the condition for any identification and discussion of *the* body. Likewise, the tongue in Kim's theorisation comes to be felt, recognised and identified, albeit in its brokenness, precisely *because of* the sedimented and displaced historicity of these intertwined levels – the tongue that feels, the tongue that is touched by other tongues – whose relations are "always accidentally configured". And yet, Kim's revision of accent as the discontinuous bodying forth of sedimented historicity, raises the question of the *how* of the parchedness of the tongue. For although we can concede to the displacement of the tongue that traverses multiple and indeterminate levels, we still need to account for the ways in which the unease of this displacement is expressed through the heat and the dryness of the tongue

and the throat. For example, how is the memory of shame, once embodied in the mother tongue that is now lost and disjointed from, capable of “spilling through porous ... lines” (Kim 2007, 44) of “discrete bodies” (44)? And how does the parched tongue *articulate* the affective lived realities of racialisation if it is only discontinuous, decentered and dispersed?

Sneja Gunew’s account of the “stammering” (2003, 41) tongue in her work on language learning practices in the context of colonisation and migration could help us to think about this question further. According to Gunew, the stammering sensation registered on the tongue in the process of language learning testifies to the ways in which colonised and migrant bodies are choreographed and structured. The palpable displacement of the mother tongue is described as a form of somatic *reaction* that provides an insight into the otherwise inaccessible unconscious process of displacement and alienation. The stammer is a psycho-somatic expression that indexes “a ghostly absence ... where the presence of another tongue impedes the subjugated tongue of the stammering speaker” (Gunew 2007, 107).

Importantly, the conception of language learning as choreographies of the tongue, a psycho-somatic expression, leads us to think further about the relationality of the corporeal and the psyche. A few issues bear closer investigation. First of all is the question of what the two tongues in Gunew’s analysis actually consist of. As Gunew explains, her theorisation of the ghost absence of the mother tongue draws inspiration from Jacques Derrida’s conception of “hauntology” ([1994]2006, 63) which is understood to hint at an irreducible absent presence that undergirds the question of being itself. According to Derrida, “To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time” ([1994]2006, 202). Given this, what does it mean to say that the “presence of the other tongue impedes and subjugates the mother tongue”?

Contrary to Derrida’s hauntology as the condition of any identity and being, the mother tongue in Gunew’s writing was once present, and only becomes an absent present because of the presence of and suppression by another language. My point here is not to say that Gunew simply misreads the implications of hauntology. Rather, I see this contradiction

as indicative of the tension in accounting for the embodied specificity of the racialised language learning practices on the one hand, and the general condition of discontinuity and displacement that is considered symptomatic of an enlarged and universal process of writing, what Chow terms “*linguaging*” (2014, 37), and being.

We can see this in the ways in which Gunew opposes somatic affect as “corporeality in a specific sense” (2004, 57) to “subjectivity in general” (57). Gunew’s thinking on corporeal choreographies follows Elizabeth Grosz’s corporeal feminism, where the study of bodies affords an understanding of “concrete specificities ... in a way that mind does not” (1994, vii; see also Hinton 2007, 4). For Gunew, the study of somatic affect provides a glimpse into the psychic-corporeal operation of language that presents as an alternative to subject formation through the visual register. This conception of the visual clearly echoes Ahmed’s and Butler’s insights, wherein the visual is understood as the subjective, the symbolic and the cultural. With this in mind, we can see more clearly the originary separation of the corporeal and the subjective, of specificity and abstract generativity in this account. Given this, one wonders how the “psychic phenomena [of language learning] ... are linked to corporeal reactions” (Gunew 2004, 58). Related to this, feminist philosopher Adrianna Cavarero’s theorisation of the voice needs to be mentioned here. I do not claim to be able to give a thorough engagement with Cavarero’s delicate writing, by which I am greatly inspired. I want to underline here the ways in which Cavarero imputes transformative potential to the voice as opposed to the visual sphere, as this relates to my discussion of the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters. For Cavarero, “The visual sphere generates and decides the norms of politics” (2005, 158). Importantly, Cavarero does not posit the absolute distinction between the vocal and the visual, and rejects the notion of the originary wholeness of the mother tongue, the pure voice against language as the Symbolic and the Paternal. As Cavarero dilates:

[T]he insistence on the mother as the source of this vocalic pleasure – no matter how good or theoretically grounded the intention may be – does not therefore justify her stereotypical opposition to a father who would be instead the one from whom speech ultimately comes. This opposition in fact goes on corroborating the old metaphysical dichotomy between “pure” phonic and “pure” semantic, which

identifies the semantic itself with thinking rather than with speaking.
(2005, 179)

I absolutely concur with Cavarero's insight on this point. What differentiates my reading from Cavarero's is the way in which she conceives of the visual in terms of the subjective, whereas the vocal for her is intersubjective and material. This is evident in her assertion that "the aim is to free logos from its visual substance ... to listen ... in speech itself the plurality of singular voices that convoke one another in a relation that is not simply sound, but above all resonance" (Cavarero 2005, 179). Related to this, Cavarero reads Derrida's conceptualisation of auto-affection – the ways in which the speaker at once "coincides with ... and ... dissociates himself from his name (pronounced, audible)" (2005, 237) – in terms of the separation of the presence from voice, as if the immediacy of voice is itself not in question. In my opinion, however, this precise excerpt on auto-affection speaks of the consubstantiality of the subject and object of interpellation, a self-encounter that is a notion of body as primordially inter-subjective (cf. Johncock 2014).

Having said this, I now turn to the second concern regarding the workings of the stammering tongue. Gunew's conception of the psychosoma follows the Lacanian psychoanalytic account of language as associated with the Symbolic, with consciousness, and with the paternal. Calling into question the centrality of the ego in Freud's thesis, Jacques Lacan asserts "a rift, an unmastered gap or discontinuity between consciousness and the unconscious" (Grosz [1990] 1998, 10). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage fully with psychoanalytic theory and its implication for the theorisation of sexual and racial difference, but in order to make sense of the idea of "trilling" race, I want to point out an important detail in Lacan's theorisation of language, which relates to our discussion of Saussurean system of the sign. Saussure's use of the analogy of the sheet of paper to explain the relation between signifier and signified is significant here. Following Vicki Kirby, it has been argued that the thickness of the paper itself presents as the separation between signifier and signified, in spite of Saussure's overall argument about their consubstantiality. Within the parameters of Lacanian formulation, the space that separates the signifier from the signified takes a central stage. For Lacan, this space in-between presents as the absolute discontinuity

between two chains of signification that are “separated by a barrier, a censorship, which cannot be traversed” (Grosz 1990 [1998], 96). As Grosz notes, “The unconscious consists in signifiers which have fallen below the barrier, i.e., submitted to repression, preventing them from traversing the bar and gaining access to consciousness” (1990 [1998], 96).

Given this radical break between the unconscious and consciousness in the Lacanian framework to which Gunew explicitly refers, her theorisation of the psycho-somatic reaction is indeed puzzling. What is the nature of this linkage that bridges the unrepresentable psycho-somatic operation, and our perception and conception of it? In addition, what is the process through which the “somatic reaction” of one tongue “impedes” or “subjugates” (in the sense of constrains, limits and forces the submission of) the other? Where does this process take place? And when does it begin?⁸⁴

⁸⁴ There are some interesting and relevant observations within the field of second language acquisition (cf. Moyer 2004; Norten 2000; Menard-Warwick 2009) as well as phonetic sciences (cf. Hardcastle et al. 2013), that I want to mention here. First, in the scholarly fields of both second language acquisition and the phonetic sciences, cross-disciplinary engagements are advocated. Second, some studies on the neurobiology of second language acquisition could enter into an interesting dialogue with, if not complicate or challenge some of the assumptions of, host country language learning efficiency, often articulated in discussions on integration. For example, Simmonds et al. suggests that “producing speech output does play a role in language acquisition, but only indirectly. The benefit of speaking is not that it improves language acquisition itself, but rather that the acquisition and use of fluent speech encourages dialogue with others. Thus, speaking increases being spoken to, the quantity of which is matched by the quality, as native speakers use more natural language to learners they deem to be at a higher level” (2011, 9). Further to this, and somewhat counter-intuitively, Simmonds et al. suggest that by artificially prohibiting the production of second language, adult language learners may be able to perceive the subtle features and differences of inputs (thus better the production) of the second language, such as “new phoneme distinctions and unfamiliar sequences of stress patterns” (2011, 10). This is what they call a mute period, which can be artificially induced, in which adult second language learners are intensively exposed to the second language (especially acoustically) *before* the actual uttering practices. Another interesting suggestion by Simmonds et al. is that learning orally, rather than being exposed to the written/orthography of the second language is to the advantage of the efficient speech production. That is, “Representations of L2 speech sounds are more plastic and less influenced by automated activation of native representations that might be triggered by reading a letter.” (Simmonds et al. 2011, 10) In sum, these observations suggest that taking time to be spoken to, and to be exposed to the sound of the second language is more beneficial for efficient second language acquisition than *rushing into* producing the second language in both oral and written form. I want to emphasise that this does not mean that the neurobiological researches on second language acquisition provides

The title of this chapter “The Psychic Life of the Trilling Tongue” alludes to Butler’s theories about the psyche and subject formation. In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Butler considers the ways in which “power that at first appears as external, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity” (1997b, 3). In opening up and reconfiguring the division between the social and the individual, the Symbolic and the psyche, Butler shows that not only can the spatial-temporal separation between the two systems not be simply maintained, but also, and importantly, that the social and the psychic do not pre-exist the process of internalization. Through a critical intervention on subjection, Butler discovers the excess of the unconscious and the residue of the body at the heart of power, and rethinks agency and the possibility of transformation. We could recall our earlier elaboration on the notion of *trouble*, which enables and compels the reiterative operation of power. The formulation of the psychic life of the trilling tongue points to two interrelated aims. First, with reference to the “originary humanicity” (Kirby 2011) set out in chapter two, the displacement of the psyche that is presumably human calls into question the premises about the corporeal and the subjective, and assists us to reconsider the nature of intention and agency,⁸⁵ crucial for a conception of the onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race. The second aim concerns the accents and corporeography of the tongue, and is related to Butler’s reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s theorisation of habitus. Likening the notion of habitus with Althusser’s conception of ideology “that constitutes the ‘obviousness’ of the subject” (1997b, 210), Butler emphasises the sociality of the body that enables the process of subjection. As Butler writes, “the concept of the *habitus* ... underscores the place of the body, its gestures, its stylistics, its unconscious ‘knowingness’ as the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality could not

incontestable truth that should be simply applied in language learning and education planning and practices. And the brief reading here in no way does justice to the field of neurobiological research on language acquisition. My intention is to flag the importance of interrogating the nature of language acquisition and the underlying assumptions and investments in certain notions of efficient language learning process.

⁸⁵ Kirby’s discussion of the book’s title *The Psychic Life of Power* informs my reading here. As Kirby writes, “To impute human intention to the notion of force/power, while at the same time destabilizing the subject as a self-possessed and self-conscious agent, muddles the reference points of these debates and makes us think more deeply about our (humanist) premises” (2006, 110).

be constituted" (1997b, 210, emphasis in original). Especially relevant to our discussion here is the notion of linguistic habitus exemplified in accented speech production (Bourdieu 1991). As Thompson elaborates:

A particular accent ... is a product of a certain way of moving the tongue, the lips, etc.: it is an aspect of what Bourdieu calls, following Pierre Guiraud, an "articulatory style". The fact that different groups and classes have different accents, intonations and ways of speaking is a manifestation, at the level of language, of the socially structured character of the habitus. (1991, 17)

In both *Excitable Speech* and *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler takes leverage from Bourdieu's theorisation of habitus to rethink the operation of the social, the linguistic and the psychic. Habitus, understood as unconscious knowing and bodily being, which gives rise to a certain obviousness (the second nature of bodily practices), is at once constitutive of and regulated by the social and the linguistic. Butler argues that the spatio-temporal differentiations between these seemingly separate realms are radically compromised.

In light of this, we could take further the reading of Kim's poetic writing about the parched tongue and Gunew's description of the stammering tongue. I noted the importance of Kim's strategic revision wherein the shameful and anxious Korean accent is no longer the cause, but is rather the bodying forth of the historicity of racialising and sexualising violence and injury, as well as the lived realities of racial discrimination and segregation, in for example the labour market. We also wondered about the how of psycho-somatic reaction, the corporeal choreography that makes it possible to understand the otherwise inaccessible unconscious unease of the subjugation of the mother tongue by the presence of the second language. With the notion of accent as (linguistic) habitus, can we entertain the possibility that an accent, often conceived of as a form of speech production which deviates from the norm, is not so much the second-order error, but is the spatio-temporally sedimented, dispersed, differentiated, yet objectively manifested corporeality that is inter-subjective and agentic?

With the assistance of Kim's and Gunew's theorisation of the tongue, we have attempted to set into motion the question of origin and presence in asking not only about the nature of the stammering tongue, but also

about the where and when of its location. What happens if the parchedness and the stammer of the tongue is not the *reaction* to a prohibitive power that exerts its force from a supposedly locatable outside, but *is* the dis/continuity – the process of uneasy delimiting – that enables the performative reiteration of the racialised visual-aural economy that is never in the same way (see Kirby 2011; Barad 2003).⁸⁶ I want to underscore that this dis/continuity does not privilege discontinuity, differentiating or splitting, (which in Chow's and Kim's work, for example, is considered as the means to reevaluate racialised others) as the groundless ground that *precedes* the substantiation of the corporeal, the social, the psychic. Rather, it emerges with, through and as the psycho-soma that is the inter-subjective. The task in the remainder of this chapter is to think further about this question and examine the trilling tongue in its torsional self-encounter.

Tonguing Tongued Tongues

Let me begin this contemplation with an episode in which I was instructed by a friend to practice the alveolar trill with a pencil in my mouth.

Abril: "Place this pen, breadthwise, in your mouth. Bite it. Now push your tongue against it. Do you feel the tip of your tongue?"

I nod.

Abril: "Good. Now try to move it up and down, say, rrrr."

"lll."

Abril: "No, no, come on, chinita, say rrrr."

"lll."

Abril: "No, you have to practice", my friend laughed.

Frustrated by the stubbornness of my tongue, I took my friend's advice and tried the pencil. The entangled sensation of the warm and fleshy surface of the tongue caressing, and pushing the cold plastic body of the pencil enabled a bodily awareness of and forceful attention to the tip of the tongue.

In an endeavour to think through the psychic life of the trilling tongue

⁸⁶ In her article "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", Barad argues that "performativity is not understood as iterative citationality (Butler) but rather intra-activity" (2003, 828). Barad's point here is to call into question the assumption that performativity is the reiteration of the same. This could be read in relation to Barad's formulation of discontinuous discontinuity.

that qualifies the premise of the tongue as a self-evident organ, as well as the location of the sovereign subject who intends and perceives its racial inscriptions, I want to consider here the verbal meanings of the word “tongue”. When *tongue* is used as a verb, it connotes either: (1) a musical sound (a note) made on a wind instrument *by interrupting the air flow with the tongue*; or (2) a lick or caress with the tongue.⁸⁷ The title of this section, “tongued-tonguing”, is intended to accentuate these associations. These meanings point to the general capacity of tongues to disturb an air stream and to make it vibrate, thus producing *sound*. More importantly, they indicate an articulation with and openness to other objects through touching and licking.⁸⁸ To stroke, to lick, to touch, to feel, to interrupt: the materiality of the tongue articulates and is enacted by an open-ended corporeography that is the process of transvaluation which entails the *whole* of the body’s erotogenicity.

The reference to the Freudian vocabulary of “erotogenicity” - “that activity of a given bodily area which consists in conveying sexually exciting stimuli to the mind” (Butler 1993b, 60) - is a deliberate attempt to think through the psychic life of the trilling tongue and to muddle the separation of sexual difference from racial difference. Butler’s reading of the instantiation and identification of body parts through the totality of the process of erotogenicity, that also troubles the sovereignty of the conscious subject, is informative here:

Curiously, Freud associates erotogenicity with the consciousness of bodily pain ... however, it is fundamentally unclear, even undecidable, whether this is a consciousness that imputes pain to the object, thereby delineating it – as is the case in hypochondria – or whether it is a pain caused by organic disease which is retrospectively registered by an attending consciousness. ... If erotogenicity is produced through the conveying of a bodily activity through an idea, then the idea and the conveying are phenomenologically coincident. As a result, it would not be possible to speak about a body part that precedes and gives rise to an idea, for it is the idea that emerges simultaneously with the phenomenologically accessible body, indeed, that guarantees its accessibility. (1993b, 59)

⁸⁷ See oxforddictionary.com.

⁸⁸ The word “articulation” which connotes both making music and speech, and forming joints and connections, pairs well with the doings of the tongue that I want to stress here.

Along these lines, we could consider that the tongue is not a fixed substance, but it is made accessible and known, at the precise moment as it demands and enables the attending consciousness. The substance of the tongue is “its intra-active becoming – not a thing but a doing; a congealing of agency” (Barad 2007, 336).

The key to achieve the rolling r, or in its phonetic terminology, the alveolar trill, lies in the activation of the tongue tip in the form of “a series of very rapid tap-like closures” (Ashby and Maidment 2005, 59). This movement of the tongue tip channels the airstream along the centre of the tongue. The Finnish voiced alveolar trill or the roll entails both the vibration of the tongue tip and of the vocal chords. Chinese is my first language. I started learning English in Junior High school. Neither Chinese nor English features the rolling r. How to activate the tongue tip was already a major difficulty for me, let alone orchestrating and making the airstream vibrate. The method of biting and pressing against the pen, placed sideways in my mouth, did not directly lead to a successful rolling r articulation. But the phenomenon of the *tongued tongue tonguing pen* enabled an energising of the tongue tip. This did not result in a static and muted adjacency or enmeshment of the tongue and the pen. Rather, the action of the tongue tip, within the phenomenon of *tongued tonguing tonguing pen*, is rather a set of pressing, squeezing and vertical movements. The tongue licked and pressed against the pen. But so did the pen tongue back on the tongue. This entangled phenomenon, following Barad’s (2007) agential realist account, encompasses the reconfiguration and rearticulation of relationalities, hinting at a *dynamic topology* with primary ontological units as “*things*” – *in – phenomena*.

The title of the section *tonguing tongued tongues* indicates this originary dis/continuity. Through the somewhat confusing phrasing, putting together the active, and the passive verbal forms and the noun form of the word “tongue”, my intention is to trouble the assumptions about the corporeal. This is also to foreground, by way of contrast, the inherent rhythmic dynamic of corporeality,⁸⁹ which is anything but dynamism,

⁸⁹ In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida speaks of the rhythm, that is the “waves, cycles, and periods” ([1994]2006,133). As Derrida explains elsewhere, the rhythm is “the intermediate schema” (2002, 99) that substantiates and undermines “the greatest predictability” (99) and “the most unpredictable singularity” (99). In my reading, this rhythmic schema is the onto-epistemological dis/continuity. This has important implications for questions of change or the possibilities of transformation.

because it is a dis/continuous operation through which it reads and writes itself. To illustrate my point further, let's turn to the following accounts regarding how to train the trill posted by anonymous members on the online forum kina.cc.⁹⁰

My friends taught me this method. Use an electric toothbrush. Then tie a soft copper wire at the brush end of the toothbrush. Turn on the electric toothbrush and place it under your tongue. The copper wire will make your tip of the tongue vibrate with it. Practice this daily for 2 months. (My friend is Finnish. Her parents figured out this method to help her with articulating the rolling r when she was young. She could not do it either back then). (This comment of the thread was entered in the forum on 9th of February 2010.⁹¹)

Practice making knots out of cherry stalks. It can be either red or green cherries for cocktails. The tongue should become quite flexible with this practice. (This comment of the thread was entered on the forum on 11th November 2006.⁹²)

Lie on the bed. Relax your throat and your tongue. Feel the airstream start from the end of the tongue. The airstream provides a wave-like impetus along the tongue. This impetus would eventually enable the vibration of the tip of the tongue. Finnish was my major in university. I think it took me 2 months for pronouncing a clear rolling r. In the initial stage, other consonants such as t and d are helpful. One can get rid of them once one gets more experienced with the rolling r. (This comment of the thread was entered on 1st of December 2006.)⁹³

In the above accounts, a variety of creative strategies are suggested for learning to activate the tongue tip, conjoined with organic and inorganic artefacts and techniques. These artefacts include an electric toothbrush, soft copper wire, cherry stalks and airstreams. The movement of the tongue tip in articulating the consonants t and d are also suggested. Technically, the oral consonant t is a voiceless alveolar stop, whereas the

⁹⁰ This online forum is among one of the biggest virtual Chinese communities in Europe. It was established in 2000. I became a member of this virtual community already in 2004 when I decided to pursue studies in Europe.

⁹¹ See the original thread in Chinese at http://kina.cc/cm/script/forum/view.asp?article_id=5441661, last accessed 8 July 2015.

⁹² See the original Chinese entry at http://kina.cc/cm/script/forum/view.asp?article_id=4106227&Page=1, last accessed 8 July 2015.

⁹³ See the original Chinese entry at http://kina.cc/cm/script/forum/view.asp?article_id=4106227&Page=1, last accessed 8 July 2015.

oral consonant d is a voiced alveolar stop. Alveolar stops are produced in the vocal tract through a complete blockage of the airstream (Ashby and Maidment 2005, 54). But the rolling r, as a voiced alveolar *trill*, as has been discussed in chapter one, necessitates the channelling of the airstream over the tongue tip so that it vibrates. As one member wrote, the consonant t and d are supposed to assist the articulation of rolling r in the initial stage. This is because these articulations and its involved techniques enable an acute awareness and articulation of the tongue tip, just as the sensation felt on my tongue tip when I tried to pronounce the trill with a pencil in my mouth. In articulating alveolar stops, the tip and/or blade of the tongue is pressed against the alveolar ridge, while the tongue sides are pressed against the upper side teeth and gums (Ashby and Maidment 2005, 54). The tongue tip in the articulation of the consonants t and d can be seen as the materialisation of the phenomena of tongued tongue tonguing alveolar ridge coupled with tongued tongue tonguing teeth and tongued tongue tonguing gum. The awareness and attention condensed on the tongue tip is qualitatively engendered and informed by the kinaesthetic movements of the tongue in tonguing and being tongued.

Surely this process of learning the rolling r is emotionally laden. In my experience, the inability to articulate the rolling r elicited surprise, confusion and frustration. It was not until this moment that the dysfunctional coordination of my tongue and the airstream, and the resulting utterance mismatched with my expectation that my “mouth work” (to quote Gunew 2007), became felt and audible. This echoes the account which advocates relaxing the throat and the tongue by lying on the bed. For Mandarin speakers, the closest to the rolling r is the pronunciation of the Chinese d, similar to the English consonant t. The airstream is obstructed to “Feel the airstream start from the end of the tongue. The airstream provides a wave-like impetus along the tongue. This impetus would eventually enable the vibration of the tip of the tongue” (quoted from the third blog entry). When I tried to practice the rolling r with the pen sideways in my mouth, it also brought forth immensely uncomfortable, foreign and yet curious feelings. As the tongue and the pen touched, licked, squeezed and stroke each other, I felt the concentration on and the sensorial awareness of the tongue tip and the possibility of moving it in a vertical motion.

But in my opinion, these emotionally laden and physically intense practices do not necessarily and only evidence an oppression and subjugation of the tongue. The tongue tip activated and made to vibrate does not displace but reconfigures my Chinese mother tongue. That is, borrowing Erin Manning's term "originary technicity" (2007, xxii), the tongue is qualitatively in-formed by technics and apparatuses at and of its origin. As Manning maintains, "Technology is not something that is simply added from outside. Technology is a supplement, an aspect of the body that adds to it while it qualitatively alters the very body" (2007, xxii). The mother tongue is never simply present or absent. Rather, its identity *is* the open-ended process of entanglement – a dynamic topology – that is the internal movement which produces and differentiates. I suggest that the understanding of the mother tongue as lost, or suppressed and awaiting recuperation, as we have seen in Kim's and Gunew's respective work, is premised upon a conception of its spatio-temporal separateness from the newly acquired foreign tongue. Interestingly, both the notion of "parched tongue" and "stammering tongue" foreground the felt movement of the tongue in the practices of speech production, which expresses the psycho-soma dynamic of displacement and uprootedness. It follows then, that for both Kim and Gunew, the identity of the tongue is the process of its affective operation. If the tongue is not an unchangeable entity, but whose substance is materialised in tonguing and being tongued, then the question arises as to how the mother tongue is replaced by the foreign tongue. Exactly when and where does the foreign tongue begin? And when and where does the mother tongue end?

The configuration of the tongue as a dynamic and affective process assists us to rethink its nature and its emergence. Rather than considering the mother tongue as lost or as rendered ghostly present, because oppressed by and subordinated to the other tongue, I argue that the tongue is the tonguing tongued phenomenon that materialises, and in fact *is*, the surface of the pen, the cherry stalk, the soft copper wire, the felt airstream in the form of waves and the sensation of vibration. In other words, in the practices of learning to roll r, the tongue is located, identified, all the while as it is displaced and differentiated. Such a non/locatability (see Kirby 1997, 2011) means that the specificity of the tongue's emergence expresses and *implicates* the entirety of the force field

of transvaluation. It should be noted that this formulation of the substance of the body as the dynamic process of materialising does not suggest a simple assembly that adds together various human *and* nonhuman apparatuses.

For example, in “How to Talk about the Body”, Bruno Latour forwards the notion of “articulation”. According to Latour, the term articulation assists “to take on board the *artificial and material* components allowing one to progressively have a body” (2004, 210, emphasis in original). For Latour, the articulated body is materialised in learning “to be affected through the conjoining of the body with artefacts, techniques, and technologies which define the particular social practice” (Blackman 2008, 97; Latour 2004). My proposition of the non/locatability of the tongue as an intra-active phenomenon (see Barad 2007; Kirby 2011) differs from such a configuration of assemblage. The non/locatability of the tongue means that the material being of the tongue is the inter-subjective relationality that is dis/continuous at and of the beginning. To reiterate, such a conception does not privilege either discontinuity or continuity, but radically reconfigures both terms. Further to this, the identity of any entity – the tongue, the body, the human, the nonhuman – is emergent with/in a force field of differentiation, which does not proceed these identities in either spatial or temporal sense. In Latour’s conceptualisation of the sensorial body as an assemblage, it seems that although the nonhuman apparatuses acquire or are accorded agency (as Latour’s description “to take on board” seems to imply), the hybridity and multiplicity of the body as an assemblage is found on the logic of “and-ness” (see Kirby 2011). That is, it is a form of conjoining and aggregating that is inclusive in nature. We see this in Latour’s following statement: “Articulations ... may easily proliferate without ceasing to register differences. On the contrary, the more contrasts you add, *the more differences and mediations you become sensible to*” (2004, 211, emphasis in original). This understanding of proliferation here appears to be rooted in a conception of difference as different from, a point we have dilated upon earlier. Moreover, Latour distinguishes between an inarticulate subject and an articulate subject. Whereas the former is said to be affected only by itself, the latter is “affected by others – *not by itself*” (2004, 210, emphasis in original). As Latour further distinguishes articulation from inarticulation, “Articulation thus does not mean ability to talk with

authority ... but being affected by differences" (2004, 210). Clearly, Latour opposes identity to difference. Curiously then, there remains an unqualified investment in the identity of difference in Latour's paradigm that attempts to include and grant equal agentic capabilities to all human and nonhuman entities.

Approaching the question of difference through onto-epistemological dis/continuity, and in a way that might also assist to think further with Latour's insistence on the holistic conception of the body, which does not divide into the physiological and the phenomenological, I argue that the phenomenon of tonguing tongued encounters is always a self-encounter, myself to myself. This means that the tongue wills, desires and learns to perceive and to be affected by (others) itself. In so doing, the tongue (re)conceives and identifies itself and its other. Furthermore, this non/locatability also means that these tonguing tongued phenomena cannot be confined into the quarantined realms of the biological, the social, the psychic or the cultural.

What is the implication of the reconfigured notion of identity and difference for an examination of Finnishness? My following discussion is an attempt to address this question. To begin with, I want to recall one of the anonymous member's suggestion to activate the tongue tip through the use of copper wire, was provided to the anonymous user by a Finnish friend. According to the post, this Finnish friend could not articulate the rolling r when she was young. Her parents devised this method of using an electric toothbrush and soft copper wire to help her. The emphasis on the Finnishness of the method, in my opinion, reflects two intentions of this anonymous member. On the one hand, it claimed the technique's viability. It was a Finnish method that helped the Finnish friend who at an early age had difficulty pronouncing rolling r, and the scenario implies that the technique must have worked. On the other hand, it also implied that *even* a Finn might not be able to articulate the rolling r. Thus, the difficulty that a Chinese speaker faced could be solved with right techniques and sufficient practices. We see how the racialised stereotypical fixity of the Finnishness of the trill is both destabilised and reinstalled in this account.

Related to the question of the Finnishness of the trill, I want to return to the opening scene in which I successfully pronounced the trilling r during a Finnish lesson. What happens if this scene is approached in

terms of Butler's racialised visual field? Recalling Butler's description here, the racialised body is always circumscribed and read in certain ways, prior to any actual gesture of the body. In other words, racialised visual regulatory norms are "the narrative precedent and antecedent to the frames that are shown" (Butler 1993a, 16), which order and rearrange the visual field and its pluralities into a coherent fiction. In light of Butler's account of seeing as reading and writing in the general sense, this scene can be interpreted as a performative encounter/enactment. That is, the way in which I was seen performatively already anticipated and materialised how I might be heard.

However, using Ahmed's account of the affective porosity of skin, we can further argue that while the socialised visual field sets (racialised) limits to intelligibility - how I might be read and why I would probably fail - the feeling, for example, of such nervous apprehension in being read by others made me aware of the bodily boundaries and differences that set me apart from others. Yet, with Puar and Saldanha as our guides here, we also want to account for the haptic encounter, such as, for example, the tension felt on my tongue tip - its activation, its rubbing, pressing, licking, tapping - and the blockage formed by the interaction of the tongue tip and the air stream. But how do I come to feel and register these tensions? How are they limited, delineated and made intelligible? How do they emerge?

My articulation of the rolling r bodies forth the audible and palpable movement of the vibration of airstreams and articulators, a strange self-encounter that occurs *within me*. What confused and shocked the teacher and other students that gave rise to a conflicting reading of my race cannot be reduced to the epistemological economy that equates seeing with ocular perception. Rather, this visual perception of my Chineseness is already a saturated field of perception that involves a complex and intricate transvaluation and translation of the tone and pitch of my utterance and the vibration of my tongue. In order to digest this scene from a different perspective I want to turn to Florence Chiew's work on sensory substitution. Here, we are offered another approach that again questions the easy assumption that sensory modalities are somehow independent of each other. Working with research in neuroplasticity, her account of its wiring is one of interimplicated connectivity, which Chiew goes on to elaborate as an ecology of mind, or ecological tangle. As Chiew

argues, “the individual experience of perception is not separable from the general ecology of phenomena” (2012, 48). Calling into question the locatability of the origin of perception, the where and what it is that confounds the difference between perception and sociality, Chiew draws on a familiar example in phenomenological research and discusses “the points of contact between the blind man, the cane, the object/ground”:

[T]he blind person’s perceptual experience is oddly “externalized” from the hand to the point of interaction between the cane and the object/ground, suggesting that the cane has been incorporated into his body schema, and one might say indeed that the cane is the hand, or that the cane *is* the eye – and even that the ground is the eye! (2012, 51)

The tongue becomes tense when faced with the rolling r challenge. Can the tongue see the approaching teacher and the judgemental gaze of other students? Can the tongue hear the teacher’s pronunciation of the rolling r? Can the tongue predict and anticipate my potentially failed attempts, my accented foreign pronunciation? Do the modalities of perception recall each other? Chiew’s work on neuroplasticity and sensory substitution cogently shows that the emergence of any modality, any “locus” of perception, in fact any entity, involves the whole system of translation and differentiation. Rather than an absolute break or separation of *entirely* foreign entities, we could say that the origin of encounters remains strangely open, local and dispersed, a constant that continually reads and rewrites *itself*. In light of this account, the tongue sees and hears through tonguing and being tongued in practicing the rolling r. I see this scene as a stuttering moment of race not only because it is a crisis of perception that *is* the performative reiteration in which power as visibility as sensibility as sociality is astonished and confused, but one which also confirms the alienness within itself - between its own anticipation of perceiving the condensation, translation and convers(at)ion (see Kirby 2011) of Chinese accented speech production and its substantiation.⁹⁴ In doing so perception as sociality re-reads and re-writes itself, even appearing as “not Chinese” sometimes and thereby changing for everyone what the living signifier of Chinese identity actually is. Tonguing tongued encounters *are* expressions of the scene of

⁹⁴ The notion of “convers(at)ion” draws on Kirby’s provocation that “any identity is articulated with and by all others” (2011, 88).

writing origin, a scene which includes the intricately involved condition of limit-ing with, in and as emergence, integral to the performative reiterations in which race's "arrival" will always founder and stutter.

Conclusion: Part Two

The question of what race is, according to Saldanha, should be coupled with another equally urgent query about *what race can be*. As he explains:

Race need not be about order and oppression, it can be wild, far-from-equilibrium, liberatory. ... Similarly, the molecularisation of race would consist in its breaking up into a thousand tiny races ... the pleasure, the curiosity, and concern in encountering a multiplicity of corporeal fragments outside the common sense taxonomies. (2006, 19)

Saldanha's assertion is indicative of the current critical investment in the hope to transform preemptive racialisation mechanisms, to reevaluate the materiality and agency of racialised bodies, and eventually to shift our understanding of the nature of race. To be sure, my discussion of the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters shares the same conviction that the question of race must be addressed rather than shunned. And yet, in positing the onto-epistemological dis/continuity throughout my analysis in this chapter, I hope that have shown that the various temporal and spatial gaps – between the unconscious and consciousness, between the visual and the aural, between the corporeal and the discursive, between ontogenetic and epistemological, between continuity and discontinuity, between nature and culture – that are imputed to have transformative potential are im/possible to maintain.

Beginning from the question of the visual and aural in the Saussurean system of signs, proceeding to the weight of the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters, and finally to the exploration of the psychic life of the trilling tongue, my aim in this chapter is to rethink some of the premises regarding the process of racialisation through locating it in the particular discussion of accented speech production. The trilling tongue articulates the dis/continuity that also marks the non/locatability of race, that we also saw in the case of the "musta mies" event in the classroom.

In traversing the above mentioned realms that are supposedly separated by an insurmountable gap, I argue that discussions of race,

commonly perceived to be a risky terrain, should not and in fact cannot be simply avoided by virtue of their essentialising tendencies. In fact, even the nature of essence trills and reinstalls itself. In light of this, a major focus of the latter part of the chapter has been on the psychic life of the tongue. The deliberate manoeuvre that affirms, refutes and reconfigures the anthropomorphic configurations of agency, intention and psychic interiority is consistent with the general contemplation of the thesis regarding the dis/continuity of human race and racial differences and the necessity for an account of “originary humanicity”. The tongued tonguing tongues present the originarily inter-subjective corporeality as displaced and differentiated, at the same time as it is localized and specific.

Accordingly, the onto-epistemological dis/continuity is the primordial sociality, a self-encounter that conditions and whose emergence is simultaneously dependent upon, because manifested through and as the weight/gravity/valuer of, identification. In this racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters, the process of exchange and transvaluation produces racialised and accented speaking bodies. Moreover, the valuation process itself is unavoidably the erotogenic transmutation of the racialised body. I have argued that such a conception of valuation proves crucial for the contestation of the reification of certain accented bodies as the locus of racial differences, whose lack of linguistic capital, because of erroneous speech production, is said to cause disadvantage in the labour market.

Through the conception of the psychic life of the trilling tongue, I venture to rethink the nature of transformation in terms of an “intra-ontology of being itself” (Barad 2007; Kirby 2010, 136), wherein alterity and difference are *intrinsic*. This intra-ontology radically reconfigures the relation between the mother tongue and the foreign tongue from that of oppressive displacement and limitation to that of immanent enactments. In other words, the relation between self and other, and difference as temporally and spatially separated from identity, is reformulated as follows: “It is not another entity on the border of my being, an entity that marks the limits of my situation and what can be known from what is unknown. If the limit to my situation is chiasmatically given, then my situation is more than local” (Kirby 2011, 136).

This last quotation leads us to the question of ethics that is central to

feminist politics of difference. I can imagine that the ensuing question or concern from my foregoing discussion is the ethical effect of how I negotiate between difference and identity, specificity and universality. More specifically, how the seemingly generalised and theoretical engagements can account for everyday encounters in the political economy of racialisation without further essentialising racial differences. This is a question I have often been asked during the dissertation work. In fact, I have kept on asking myself this very question, as I consider it highly salient not only in our critical scholarly engagements with race and difference, but as the engagements have direct implications for socio-political negotiations and transformations. In this thesis, I have tried to engage with this conundrum from the start, and will continue to focus on it in the remaining chapters. As a whole, part two argues for a notion of trilling race, that witnesses “corporeography” (Kirby 1997) wherein visibility as aurality as tactility is “utterly referential” (Kirby 2011, 124). In view of this, I argue that we should not, and in fact cannot simply move beyond the visual, with the invested hope in identifying that which is before and beyond signification or a racialised epistemological knowing. Furthermore, the analysis of tonguing tongued encounters and the psychic life of the trilling tongue suggests that bodies racialise themselves, or that racialisation only happens by and through the body. This is a form of bodily complicity, which as Peta Hinton maintains, means that the stuff of the body “(as difference) shares in a process of producing value or meaning, even if this meaning is considered ‘negative’, and even if it is productive of relations of inequality” (2007, 225). Clearly, this raises disconcerting questions regarding ethics and the possibility of political change. For example, Butler meditates on the question of complicity in the process of subject formation and its implication for notions of agency and subordination:

A critical evaluation of subject formation may well offer a better comprehension of the double binds to which our emancipatory efforts lead without, in consequence, evacuating the political. Is there a way to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, yet insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination? ... The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That “becoming” is no simple or continuous affair,

but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being. (1997, 29-30)

Butler's contemplation raises many important questions that are particularly relevant for feminist political and ethical engagements, which will continue to be addressed in the following chapter. Whereas Butler focuses on the complicitous nature of subject formation, what I am proposing, following Kirby and Hinton, is that the very stuff or substance of bodies is a *corporeo-graphy* that generates and is produced in the general process of valuation and weighing, as thinking and writing. This also means that difference is intrinsic and change is constant. As with corporeal feminism (see Grosz 1994), racialised corporeality is itself open to transformations and reconfigurations.

Part Three

Chapter Seven

“Not Like a Native Speaker”: The Limits of Polyvocal and Performative Transgressions

Prelude

In a recent television documentary program *Silminnäkijä* [Eyewitness]⁹⁵ aired by the Finnish national broadcasting company YLE, the issue of accents was featured prominently as a marker of race. The significance of the aural quality of accents was made all the more obvious in scenes where all three participants, among whom only one spoke Finnish as a native language, while the other two spoke Russian and Somali respectively, made inquiries for jobs by phone. As the three possessed exactly the same credentials and working experiences, the only differences between the applicants communicated over the phone were their accented speech and their names. Both the Finnish and the ethnic Russian were invited to two interviews, but the participant who spoke Finnish with a Somali accent was not interviewed for any of the jobs.

The issue of accent and its impact on communication was often addressed in the different Finnish for foreigners classes that I attended. For example, one of the teachers explained to us the necessity of correcting students' accents: “I was at a seminar, and we were suggested to correct your pronunciation at an early stage”. And she continues to explain: “there have been some cases ... they know the vocabulary... but cannot speak it correctly”.

This part of the dissertation considers the urgency of racial transformations through a critical engagement with questions of polyvocality as well as transgressive performativity. Chapter seven examines polyglots' accents and cyborgs' noises. It asks whether the

⁹⁵ http://yle.fi/uutiset/yle_uncovers_discrimination_in_job_market_and_nightclub_quotes/6885954, last accessed 16 July 2015.

difference between universality and specificity, homogeneity and heterogeneity, represents an inevitable impasse for a feminist politics of difference. It also asks about the possibilities and limitations of transformation. Chapter eight engages with the art work *Mamme/Vårt land* to investigate the paradoxical yet productive tension between normative anticipation and transformation, with its attendant problematic of responsible feminist practices of knowledge production. After all, the question of how to think race differently often leads to discussions of norms, and their implications for the politics and ethics of theorising race.

Against “Mother Tongue”: Rethinking Nomads’ Accents and Cyborgs’ Noises

Nomads and Cyborgs, conceived as “traveling companions” (Braidotti 2011, 66), present as two of the most influential feminist figurations. Evoking embodied experience as much as mythical abstraction and idealization, the figuration of nomads and cyborgs affords a reconciliation of the tension between specificity and universality in Rosi Braidotti’s and Donna Haraway’s respective political projects. That is, they pay attention to the historical specificity of embodied subjectivities, on the one hand, and the necessity to radically reconfigure a phallocentric conception of universality, on the other. For Braidotti (2011), nomads and cyborgs as travelling companions promise a shift toward political alignment through heterogeneity and coalition, counterposed to homogenous community formation. Nevertheless, the ways in which embodied specificity is *accommodated* within the abstract figuration of nomads and cyborgs has been criticised for its neutralisation of differences, such that all differences are rendered equally different (cf. Gedalof 1999).

At stake here is the difference between homogeneity and heterogeneity, and by extension, universality and specificity. Is this an inevitable impasse for feminist politics, or, as Peta Hinton points out, “the symptomatic of the convoluted nature of difference itself” (2007, 9)? In this section, I will approach this supposed impasse with a focus on how nomads’ accents and cyborgs’ noises are attributed empowering and transformative potential. Nomads’ and cyborgs’ politics advocate the plurality of voices against the unifying force of language and the lament

over the lost mother tongue. However, while nomads' accents and cyborgs' noises exhibit multiplicities and complexities, in as much as they are presented as *other than* "once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man" (Haraway 1989, 174-175), the difference between specificity and universality is curiously recuperated. In other words, the loss of a steady fixed origin provides the *universal condition* for cacophonous politics. But if the origin is *re-marked as unitary and lost* against which the evolved difference of nomads' and cyborgs' affirmative politics can be measured, then at work is the simultaneous instantiation of the lost origin and nomadic and cyborgian subjectivities.

In an attempt to engage with Braidotti's meditation on "the question of how feminists reconcile the radical historical specificity of their embodied experience with the insistence on constructing new values that can benefit humanity as a whole" (2011, 66), I will turn to Jacques Derrida's (1998) conceptualisation of the question of the mother tongue in postcoloniality. I want to begin by conjuring a scenario of accented and multilingual communication. It is presented, hyperbolically, as exemplary of the everyday communications experienced among immigrants in Finland trying to use their newly acquired Finnish language (or target language, as Derrida would have it).

"Kaak'ao! I said Kaak'ao, but she could not understand me, so I had to say hot chocolate!" Ilona complained, as we sat down at a cafe after that day's Finnish class. This "miscommunication" struck me as odd. Ilona was my classmate at the Finnish for Foreigners class organised by Arbis/Työväenopisto in Turku. She moved from Poland to Finland with her husband, who started his doctoral training at Åbo Akademi University. She spoke Polish as her mother tongue, as well as fluent English. Our accented English conversations were always smooth. It is thus intriguing that the subtle inflection in stress and aspiration in Ilona's Finnish pronunciation brought her considerable difficulty in Finnish conversational situations. As is described in the case here, the Finnish word "kaak'ao", translated into English as "hot chocolate", is normally pronounced with the stress on the first syllable. In Ilona's pronunciation, the stress was on the third. Also, the plosive consonant k in Finnish resembles the English consonant k as in the word "kit", but should be pronounced without aspiration.

A quick note on the workings of aspiration is informative here.

Aspiration, in phonetic terms, indicates that the Voice Onset Time – the delay from the start of the burst of the airstream occluded in the vocal tract, which is “the airway from the larynx to the lips, and the side-branch via nasal cavities to the nostrils” (Ashby and Maidment 2007, 22) to the beginning of vocal fold vibration – lasts longer than 30ms. In the case of voiceless unaspirated plosives, the Voice Onset Time lasts for a shorter time, around 10ms in average (Ashby and Maidment 2007). Ilona’s pronunciation of the phoneme k resembled that of the voiceless aspirated plosive k. But the difference between an aspirated and unaspirated plosive k is in fact only a matter of degree. That is, they *differ* by the duration that the vocal folds – contained within the cartilage – are held still, and by the intensity in the burst of air. For Ilona, this difference was difficult to discern. Not only did she find it difficult to actually hear the difference between the Finnish consonant k and the English voiceless aspirated plosive k, she also had trouble in keeping the stress always on the first syllable.

The feeling that she was pronouncing the right word, using correct grammar, but still could not be understood or heard “correctly” was somewhat disturbing and indeed confusing. The concomitant anxiety is considerable if one is uncertain whether one’s pronunciation of the most simple words such as *kaakao* or even one’s own name could be understood. In fact, the Finnish teacher in our Finnish for Foreigners course was also called Ilona. Unlike the Polish pronunciation, with stress on the second syllable, the name in Finnish is pronounced with stress on the first syllable, as with all other Finnish words. If the miscommunication in the *kaakao* example is intriguing, yet somewhat understandable, the difficulty in registering an address/a hailing, because one’s name is pronounced with a slight different intonation, as described in the following example, presents a puzzle that challenges my assumptions about accents and communication.

During a lecture at the Finnish for foreigners course, I sat with Ilona for group work. Some questions regarding the group work came up. Ilona wanted to ask the teacher for help, but hesitated. “I don’t know how to call her name”, she turned to me and the other classmate in our group. “But you have the same name, why can’t you just call her the same way as you would call yourself.” I was curious. “She won’t understand me. I would say Il’ona, the Finnish version goes down”. Ilona explained her

concern. "But try, maybe she will, I will write this in my field notes", I encouraged her, finding this all the more interesting in relation to Ilona's and my earlier discussion regarding the pronunciation of kaakao. She agreed. "Il'ona". No response. "Il'ona", still no response. "Il'ona", the third time she called out slightly louder. This time the teacher Ilona turned around, and said "just a minute".

Braidotti's nomadic subjects seem to provide counter arguments against the racialisation of accents, as the justification for various forms of racism. The transgressive and transformative potential attributed to cacophony and to the polyvocality of the polyglot certainly poses a radical challenge to the politicisation of accents and other forms of "insufficient" language skills, figured as a threshold in the integration discourse. It may be argued with Braidotti that if we are all together "in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated *misunderstandings*" (2011, 40, my emphasis), and if "we are all stuttering for words, even when we speak 'fluently'" (2011, 40), then the issues with accents or other difficulties in language acquisition are not so much threats to perfect communication, as the exemplary expression of the nomadic polyglot practices.

Nevertheless, the scenarios presented earlier do not sit comfortably with the celebration of accents and misunderstandings. Ordering hot chocolate at a café and addressing others by name are exemplary of quotidian communication situations. They are also considered to be good means to practice Finnish. For example, the Finnish teacher Ilona organised meet-ups at cafés and bars after class, so that we (the students) could all practice Finnish by ordering drinks and food. Such practices were also meant to encourage us to get more comfortable with speaking Finnish in public, and in ordinary conversational settings. In light of this, one can surely get a sense of my classmate Ilona's anxiety and frustration. For Ilona, the uncertainty about certain pronunciations made some of these supposedly simple conversational routines at once enlarged and fractured into episodes of intonation, stress, airstream and others' responses. If nomads take pleasure from accented miscommunication, as if playing "a constant and childlike game of persiflage" (Braidotti 2011, 40), then it seems that Ilona's anxiety and frustration disqualifies her as a nomadic, poly-lingual subject. Indeed, while it is obvious that "polyglot nomadic intellectuals" (Braidotti 2011, 21) such as Luce Irigaray and

Braidotti herself could fit easily into the nomadic framework, it remains unclear to whom the phrase “polyglot Asians of all kinds” (Braidotti 2011, 41) refers, and in what ways they exhibit polyglots’ creativity and transgressive capacity.

I puzzled intensely over the strangeness of this question: if the nomadic polyglot provides a model of feminist coalition through partial connections, why do some of the everyday practicalities in terms of language learning among adult migrants seem to be at odds with the cacophonous pleasure of the nomadic polyglot practices? This seems to resemble the problem of difference and representation, and by extension, specificity and universality, central to various forms of debates in feminist theorisation and politics. Detailed ethnographic contextualisation shows that the scenarios presented here could not be adequately located in or addressed by the nomadic framework. It can be further argued that the incorporation of such embodied subjectivities would significantly contribute to a more robust feminist politics of difference, promoted by nomadic subjectivities and cyborgian politics. From a slightly different perspective, one can also diagnose the implicit whiteness in Braidotti’s theorisation of nomadic polyglots and Haraway’s figuration of cyborg politics, because the play of accents and noises already seem to presume a certain form of bodily and linguistic capacities, as well as class and social mobility. One can analyse Ilona’s case further and argue that even though she was troubled by her Finnish pronunciation, she was highly educated and fluent in English, so that she could in any case switch to English.

In a different Finnish for Foreigners class that I attended, a more dramatic “miscommunication” scenario took place when a student from the Dominican Republic, who spoke only Spanish, joined the class. Since the Finnish course was taught in English, the teacher was not prepared for a situation in which a student knew no English at all. This led to an intensely awkward scenario in which the teacher’s simple questions in English and in Finnish such as “what is your name” were returned with nothing but a blank stare from the student. Even when the teacher tried to ask again much more slowly, the response from the student was only an even deeper blush and more staring. Both of them looked around the class, almost crying out for help. “Now we have a problem”, the teacher explained, “we have to try to make her feel comfortable. She must be very

scared if she does not speak any language at all”.⁹⁶ Luckily, a student from Germany volunteered to translate, as she was fluent in English and had learned Spanish at school.

This instance troubled me even further. Who *can* actually qualify as a nomadic polyglot? This echoes concerns over the ways in which embodied specificities are accommodated within the abstract figuration of nomads and cyborgs. In her book *Against Purity*, Irene Gedalof describes the conundrums in Braidotti’s nomadic feminism as the difficulty in “sustaining a double focus on ‘women’ and their differences” (1999, 123). For Gedalof, the figuration of the nomad unwittingly re-centres the white Western feminist subject. Acknowledging the “undoubted sensitivity” (1999, 123) towards the question of difference in Braidotti’s nomadic project, Gedalof worries that “the differences that race, nation and other community identities might make to her [the nomadic] model” (127) fail to be engaged. Similarly, the ways in which women of colour are posited as cyborgs *par excellence* has been criticised for the “incorporation by analogy” (Schuellar 2009, 54). According to Malini Johar Schueller, such an “incorporation by analogy” points to “the methodology by which racial difference gets incorporated into and bracketed under gender difference, locatedness under generalized language of border crossings” (2009, 54). And as Jasbir Puar furthers this argument, the “*specific difference* of ‘women of color’, ... has now become ... simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment” (2012, 52). For Schueller, the problem lies in the implicit recuperation of universalism

⁹⁶ This reminds me of the question of the rationale of multilingualism in the EU economic integration policy. This rationale grounds its motif in countering the dividing linguistic impact of the Cold War – whereas English (and French to a lesser extent) dominate the Western side of Europe, Russian was predominantly used for communication and education in Eastern Europe. In contrast with and in fear of the fascist linguistic ideology of Germany during the Second World War and the linguistic pervasion strategy of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) in the cold war, multilingualism was seen as a sound solution for mitigating the tension on the one hand, and advancing the socio-economic integration of Europe on the other (cf. Bot 2010). For example, early second language teaching is made compulsory in many European member states. The proficiency in other European languages is understood as supporting the border free movement of labour in European countries. However, this multilingualism is a selective one, in the sense that languages spoken by immigrants outside the European Union were neglected in the European linguistic landscape (cf. Buchberger 2002).

within feminist theory, “even as universalism is ostensibly being challenged as imperialistic” (2009, 54). Like Gedalof, Schueller argues for grounding analyses in “a specific, local moment” (2009, 67). It needs to be highlighted here that the question of race ultimately becomes the centre in the debate about difference. This is an important point that I will shortly return to. Importantly, Braidotti and Haraway, as well as other theorists inspired by the nomadic and cyborgian projects, have indeed responded to the charges of relativism through theoretical and methodological elaborations.

Nevertheless, my point here is not to simply diagnose or to offer correctives and counter claims. In my opinion, the claim that a particularity is *missing* from feminist political and theoretical projects, does not solve the conundrum, for the multiplication of differences rehearses the very logic of liberal humanism (cf. Butler 1993b), or in Haraway’s terms, a “white humanism” (2004, 20). This is because it obtains the distinction and opposition between embodied specificity and abstract universality. At stake here is the difference between homogeneity and heterogeneity, and by extension, universality and specificity. Is this an inevitable impasse for feminist politics, or, in Hinton’s terms, is it “symptomatic of the convoluted nature of difference itself” (2007, 9)? Recalling the examples presented earlier, what needs to be asked here, rather than simply assumed, however, is this: what constitutes the specificity of these scenarios? Indeed, why is it that accents, understood as embodied markers of difference that carry traces of one’s mother tongue(s), so readily grounds claims of specificity, signifying originary uniqueness as well as racial and ethnic differences? How do accented speaking subjects emerge? As I have argued in the previous chapter, the location of accent, as linguistic habitus, involves the entirety of a corporeography that is primordially inter-subjective. That is, even the seemingly self-evident location of the accented speech by an individual speaker is emergent as it is displaced and dislocated. This operation of onto-epistemological dis/continuity also calls into question the taken-for-granted distinction between miscommunication and communication.

With these concerns, I venture to address the tension of universality and specificity with a focus on the question of race and the aural as manifested in nomads’ accents and cyborg’s noises. I want to further think with Braidotti’s provocation to consider “the question of how

feminists reconcile the radical historical specificity of their embodied experience with the insistence on constructing new values that can benefit humanity as a whole" (2011, 66). Thinking through the nature of difference and the problematic of race, I want to consider whether the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity, and by extension, universality and specificity inevitably persists as a virtual impasse for feminist politics.

Nomadic Polyglots and Cyborgs

The polyglot is a linguistic nomad, an embodied subject who is at once situated and non-unitary. The notion of "non-unitary" is crucial here. Embedded in a Deleuzian framework of becoming and the Irigarayan notion of sexual difference, Braidotti defines non-unitariness in terms of "qualitative multiplicities" (2006, 94) as opposed to "quantitative pluralities" (94). As she notes, quantitative pluralities pertain to steady and fixed identities, that are "merely a multiple of One" (Braidotti 2006, 94), required by the "political economy of global capitalism as a system that generates differences for the purpose of commodifying them" (94). Such a unitary form of identification entails violent exclusion that is underpinned by the logic of noncontradiction and mutual exclusion, so that for example "to be 'European' ... excludes blacks and Muslims. To be feminist assumes an identity that excludes blacks and lesbians, and so on" (Braidotti 2006, 94). Contrary to this, non-unitary subjects indicate qualitative multiplicities, that "express changes not of scale, but of intensity, force, or potentia (positive power of expression), which traces patterns of becoming" (Braidotti 2006, 94). As Braidotti makes clear,

This subject can also be described as postmodern/industrial/colonial, depending on one's location. In so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once. (2011, 25)

Nomadic politics affirms differences and promotes ethical bonds with alterity, which humbles feminism with particular, situated or located experiences of "non-Oneness" (Braidotti 2006, 269). This is an important attempt to elaborate the complex nature of difference, for it maps a dynamic cartography in which any location of enunciation is inherently

non-unitary, fractured, dispersed, differed and differentiated (see also Hinton 2007).

In a similar vein, cyborg politics is foregrounded in multiplicity, particularity and partial networks of connections. As a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 2004, 7), the figure of the cyborg confounds the boundary of fiction and fact, as well as its associated terms of political construction and lived social relations. Such a figuration is enabled by the use of irony, an expressive mode that is “about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both and all are necessary and true” (Haraway 2004, 7). In other words, the style of irony serves as both a rhetorical strategy and a political method. It reconfigures the phallogocentric conception of knowledge through an insistence on the tension between inherent incoherence and self-contradiction. In line with the ironic rendition of knowledge, Haraway shows that the reflection of the Same is a masculinist determination and a disembodied illusion. Instead, Haraway invokes the optic phenomenon of diffraction as a metaphor for “a heterogeneous history, not originals” (2004, 33), thus providing “another kind of critical consciousness” (33). Echoed in Braidotti’s conceptualisation of nomads as subjects of *dissonance*, these figurations have opened up alternative spaces that ground feminist politics in situated, partial and embodied location.

For Braidotti (2011), nomads and cyborgs as travelling companions promise a shift toward political alignment through heterogeneity and coalition, counterposed to homogenous community formation. Accordingly, nomads’ accents and cyborgs’ noises are celebrated as primary tools against the unitary force of language as well as the lament over original wholeness and lost mother tongue. It is important to note here that the theorisation of accents and noises in Braidotti’s and Haraway’s respective work should be contextualised in “the surfacing of ‘difference’ as the second critical phase in feminist thinking in the late 1970s and 1980s” (Griffin and Braidotti 2002, 221). As Griffin and Braidotti make clear:

The move in feminism from notions of universal sisterhood and equality of oppressedness within patriarchy, to an understanding of the

role that differences among women play in the formation and maintenance of power structures and inequality that affect women differentially, was *inter alia* spearheaded by black American feminists. ... Once difference became established as the key concept through which privileged signifiers might be critiqued, that concept became transportable into other terrains in which difference had been utilized in the service of oppression and exclusion. (2002, 221)

Central to this feminist political and conceptual movement is the issue of race. It is thus crucial to trace the ways in which *the question of race* is implicitly and explicitly configured in nomads' accents and cyborgs' noises. Given that the implication of race in and for the aural does not appear at all obvious, I want to flag here the ways in which race is understood in both Braidotti's and Haraway's respective projects. In fact, in tracing race in the figuration of nomad and cyborg, a curious anxiety regarding biology, essentialism and universalism becomes palpable. Both Braidotti and Haraway read race in terms of a construction, as "ideologies about human diversity" (Haraway 2004, 21), and hence "cannot provide the basis for belief in essential unity" (14). And as Griffin and Braidotti assert, the question of race should not be understood as fixed and biologically determined by for example skin colour, because "biology is culture, and *must be read as such*" (Griffin and Braidotti 2002, 227, my emphasis). It is not difficult to see that race is rendered entirely discursively. The anxiety in associating race with biology, understood as immutable and determining, is surely understandable. Griffin's and Braidotti's following description is worth citing at length, as it provides a genealogy of the vocabulary of scientific racism in Europe. Moreover, it is still highly relevant in the face of the (re)ascendence of whiteness, racism and nationalism witnessed not only in Europe but also on a transnational scale. As Griffin and Braidotti argue:

Sexual identity, religious affiliation, political persuasion and ethnic identity – under the Nazi regime all of these could and did serve as indicators of a diversity that was to be eliminated in favour of a homogenized race...Within this context biology was gestured towards through the assertion that the *Herrenvolk* should consist of pure-bred Aryans only, their racial purity being a function of a specific genealogy. The biological argument, underscored by evolutionary theories served as the "scientific" basis for the discrimination and oppression exercised

as part of the anti-Semitism strategy of the elimination of Jews in Nazi Germany. The complex biological, and therefore seemingly essential, classifications which eugenics provided enabled the racialisation of cultural differences and personal choices, which has been at the root of all nationalist European movements of the last two hundred years. (2002, 227)

Importantly, Griffin, Braidotti and Haraway call for serious attention to racialised power differentials, and at the same time endeavour to challenge the understanding of racial differences as incontestable truths and as biologically given, thus providing justification for various forms of racism. Nevertheless, the anxiety of associating race with biology remains a curious phenomenon in Braidotti's and Haraway's respective work. This is because both writers argue for the importance of materiality, and have in many other instances attempted to denaturalise nature, and move beyond the binary knot of the nature/culture opposition. However as Vicki Kirby observes, "the division surreptitiously reasserts itself" (1997, 147). In my opinion, it is by reinvigorating and opening up again the question of race, biology and essence through the notion of difference that the anxiety and tension in Braidotti's and Haraway's projects and feminist politics of difference in general can be reconsidered. As Griffin and Braidotti so rightly suggest, "One of the key issues, then, for dealing with issues of race and ethnicity in Europe is a review of how we conceptualize and deal with difference" (2002, 231). My thesis confirms that the question of difference is in many ways kernel to the problematics of race.

Accents/Noises against Mother Tongue and Originary Wholeness

Haraway's reading of race and language provides a sound entry point for the discussion about accents/noises which follows. Delineating the genealogy of race or racial discourse at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, Haraway draws our attention to the ways in which race was understood in terms of "accumulated cultural differences" (2004, 251) on a social-biological continuum carried by blood. Importantly, as Haraway points out, in this historical context, "no great discussion could be maintained between linguistic, national, familial, and physical resonances implied by the term of *kinship* and race" (2004, 251).

Indeed, as Haraway observes, even in the work of a writer such as Du Bois, who takes an anti-biological approach to race and racism, racial discourse is assimilated to that around family and lineage, and thus inevitably evokes “discussions on the childhood and maturity of collective human groups called race...” (Du Bois quoted in Haraway 2004, 252). Despite the evolving discourse about race, population and genomes, according to Haraway, the idea of “the community of race, nation, nature, language and culture transmitted by blood and kinship” (2004, 56) sustains itself through various implicit and explicit reincarnations. The haunting mother tongue, though rendered absent and impeded, is a myth of origin that is salient to diasporic politics. As Anne-Marie Fortier elaborates, “the concept of mother-tongue is part and parcel of the myth of origins that ... carries with it the obsession with their recovery, ... Moreover, the kinship trope from which the notion of mother-tongue stems further suggests that idea of gendered and generational differences that bears the hallmarks of ethnic difference” (2000, 83).

It is from here that I want to lead to the discussion of accents/noises against mother tongue and origin. Despite the differences in their respective theoretical approaches, both Braidotti and Haraway consider mother tongue and its originary wholeness irretrievably lost. For Braidotti, “There are no mother tongues, just linguistic sites from which one takes as her starting point” (2011: 40). This is because “all tongues carry that name of the father and are stamped by its register” (Braidotti 2011, 42). Similarly for Haraway, mother tongue is associated with the “orientalist myth of the ‘original illiteracy’ of a mother” (2004, 34), and the “once-upon-a-time wholeness before before language, before writing, before Man” (2004, 33).

Nomadic feminism and cyborg politics reject the illusion of homogenous origin as ontological foundation, and strive for a radical displacement of the centre understood as “originary sites or authentic identities of *any* kind” (Braidotti 2011, 26, emphasis in original). To make this more explicit, it is important to take note of the ways in which language is understood in both Braidotti's and Haraway's work. In a sense, both writers concede to the arbitrariness of language. The notion of the arbitrary, as already mentioned in chapter two, is understood “as something purely random and capricious” (Kirby 1997, 24). According to Kirby, the function of mediation and constitution are conjoined in this

term (1997, 30). To recapitulate, this Saussurean notion offers a significant intervention against the essentialism of nomenclature, that is the “causal, or teleological, understanding of language” (Kirby 1997, 31), considered as ahistorical and immutable.

In this strand of thinking (and this anticipates Braidotti’s and Haraway’s approach to origin and mother tongue), language is circumscribed and founded negatively. In this sense, representation is always already a mediation, so that nature and origin are rendered inaccessible and foreclosed before and outside of the prison-house of language. Interestingly, despite their endeavours to counter the phallogocentric circumscription of language, Braidotti and Haraway argue against lamentation for the lost origin and mother tongue, and the romanticised illusion of its recuperation. For Braidotti and Haraway, even the origin story is a myth that is mediated by and constituted in the phallogocentric order. Haraway’s following assertion illustrates this point:

An origin story in the “Western”, humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. (2004, 9)

Though similar in its ultimate argument, Braidotti’s reading proceeds from a slightly different perspective, one which could be read in line with Irigaray’s conceptualisation of the maternal debt. That is, as Kirby observes, “attempts to recuperate the originary moment of debt to maternity through its reification in the present actually bury and repress its specificity even more deeply” (2011, 129).

It should to be added here, and related to the earlier discussion of race, language and nation in Haraway’s reading, Braidotti’s vehement rejection of mother tongue needs to be read in relation to her critique of the trope that attributes a foundational value and an illusory unity to the mother tongue, that “feeds into the renewed and exacerbated sense of nationalism, regionalism, localism” (2011, 43). Braidotti’s following contemplation is a strong critique of the violent politicisation and racialisation of mother tongues. As Braidotti writes:

The emphasis on the sacredness of the “mother tongue”, a sort of nostalgia for the site of cultural origin – often more fantastic than real –

tends to be all the stronger in people who speak many languages or live in multicultural surroundings. Is it because of their mother tongues that women in Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia are being systematically raped and held in procreative concentration camps? Is coercive motherhood by gang rape the price to be paid for speaking the “wrong” mother tongue? Is not every appeal to the “right” mother tongue the matrix of terror, of fascism, of despair? (2011, 39)

Against this background, Braidotti celebrates polyglots’ accented speaking, characterised by “strange sounds” (2011, 40), for its inherent “polymorphous perversity” (40), and its resistance against “the stupidity of doxa” (2011, 41). Polyglots in Braidotti’s configurations have “long since relinquished any notion of linguistic or ethnic purity” (2011, 39). Polyglot’s accents are said to “reveal the *capacity* to slip in between the languages” (Braidotti 2011, 40). Their inherent creativity and playfulness are manifested in the speaking subject’s capacity to steal “acoustic traces here, diphthong sounds there” (Braidotti 2011, 40) and “to produce strange sounds, phonetic connections, vocal combinations, and rhythmic juncture” (40).

Similarly, cyborg’s noise in Haraway’s understanding resists “a common language” (2004, 34) and “perfect communication” (34). Haraway’s insistence on noise or noisy pollution against universal translation and common language operates in multiple realms – communication science, modern biologies, language policies and writing practices among women of colour. This weaving together indexes the cyborgian politics of noise, and invites consideration of a multiplicity of languages. In other words, the slippery associations of noise enable, by analogy, the cyber feminist’s advocacy of noisy resistance. For my purpose here, I want to focus on the Haraway’s discussion of language politics and writing.

Haraway opposes the notion of writing, perceived as the phallogocentric tool of marking and inscription, against the oral, as the “original illiteracy” (2004, 34) of the mother in the orientalist configuration. But this is not simply writing and orality in the common sense. Indeed, writing here needs to be read in terms of mediation and representation against the immediacy and stability of speech. Whereas the former stance suggests a view that the attributes of human culture are held hostage by language, the latter indicates the lack of literacy in nature, and in

primitive, racialised and sexualised others. Rather than reclaiming the innocence and unity of the original mother tongue, Haraway advocates cyborg writing that is “about the power to survive ... on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (2004, 33).

In her reading of the figure of indigenous woman Malinche for example, Haraway praises her as the “mother of the mestizo ‘bastard’ race of the new world, master of language” (2004, 33). As she makes clear, “Malinche’s mastery of the conqueror’s language ... [is] a violation, an illegitimate production, that allows survival” (Haraway 2004, 33). For Haraway, such a form of writing by a woman of colour is the prototype of the cyborg, “as the chimeric monster, without claim to an original language before violation, that crafts the eroded, competent, potent identities of women of color” (2004, 33). Haraway notes that, like the writing of women of colour, the figure of vampire is also typical of the postmodern subject in that it speaks too many languages. Given that race, for Haraway, is closely tied to notions of racial purity and (the purity of) type, the figure of the vampire directly challenges and pollutes the chain of association between blood, race, language, lineage and reproduction. In this infectious copulation, the vampire embodies radical contagion, polluting and eroding race and the integrity of the paternal language, all in one bite.

Nevertheless, the difference between specificity and universality is implicitly reinstalled. The loss of a steady and fixed origin provides the *universal condition* for nomad’s and cyborg’s cacophonous politics. But, to repeat a point made earlier, if the origin is *re-marked as unitary and lost* against which the evolved difference of nomads’ and cyborgs’ affirmative politics can be measured, then at work is the simultaneous instantiation of the lost origin and of the nomads’ and cyborgs’ subjectivities. In other words, even though the unity and identity of the subject has been displaced by the non-unitary, and the inherently fractured and dispersed, it is now re-centered and reinstalled in the enclosure and confinement of the mark qua language, as the enlarged identity of the individual.

What is the nature of this interface, this difference in-between that seems to relocate itself? At this juncture, I want to recall Ilona’s accented communication in order to converse with nomads and cyborgs. Whereas Braidotti proclaims “misunderstanding” to be the general condition and the ground of nomadic polylingual practices, Haraway considers the

noisy multilingual practices among women of colour for example as disturbing universal communication, which is itself a translation process that converts all meaning perfectly through the one dominant code. Here we can read these two assertions through and against each other, to open up an interesting issue regarding identity and difference itself. If the origin, as the stable referent, is inaccessible, as Braidotti's understanding of the arbitrariness of language clearly posits, and as Haraway also acknowledges, then translation, in its strictest sense, is impossible. The radical abyss between nature/culture, origin/language means that the translation process is eternally suspended in a state of differing, differal, and displacement. Related to the earlier meditation on the question of translation in chapter four, it could be further asked what the criteria or reference point would be that enables the translation of kaakao into hot chocolate. After all, what constitutes the identity of the invariant element in its obvious variation?

If accents and noises are regarded as contributing to misunderstanding and perfect translation, it is because the model of communication is here understood in the form of a spatial-temporal model of sender, transmission of message, and receiver. Following this logic, in the scene where Ilona orders kaakao, the stress on the third syllable and the aspirated pronunciation of consonant k distorts the message, and causes misinterpretation and miscommunication. As Kirby notes, this form of communication relies upon notions of self-presence and the unity and sovereignty of the subjects' intention, which interestingly is precisely what Braidotti and Haraway reject. If language speaks us, as Braidotti notes, and the unitary origin and the immediacy of the mother tongue is lost, as Haraway insists, then this resurgence of the intentional universal subject is certainly curious.

Rather than simply dismissing this as an unfortunate mistake, could we entertain the idea that this recuperation of origin is symptomatic of difference itself? In *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, Jacques Derrida begins with the following aporia: "I only have one language; it is not mine" (1998, 1). Two implications could be gleaned from this assertion. First, if language is never simply a property, but the promise and threat of its arrival is the very condition of the *I*, then nomads' and cyborgs' wilful play with the multiplicity of languages in

purely self-present terms is radically qualified.⁹⁷ Secondly, if any arrival of *the* language is the symptom of a general amnesia (Derrida 1998, 31), then the uniqueness and plurality of nomads' and cyborgs' voices and universal original writing must be consubstantial. As Kirby notes, "'Consubstantial' in this sense evokes the 'sameness' of an identity that endures (invariance) through morphogenesis (variation)" (2011, 109). Given this, the amnesic arrival of the *I* and my (m)other tongue(s) carries with it everything, so that its specificity "might prove more comprehensive and entangled than seems possible" (Kirby 2011, 20).

For Derrida the amnesia of original writing is symptomatic of a general translation that translates itself. The amnesia of original writing is here understood not as mere forgetfulness, wherein the past is lost and forgotten, pure and simple. Rather it is the perpetual and reiterative process of re-membering. Such a reiterative re-membering as originary amnesia is compatible with the onto-epistemological dis/continuity that I argue for in the dissertation. Importantly, this conception of language, writing and translation as originary amnesia means that nothing is excluded or written off. Derrida argues that amnesia does not arise from the prohibition of language, which leads to the absolute loss of origin or memory, which is a form of radical discontinuity. Neither is it driven by the resistance to interpretation (read as dissection and delimitation) of the self-present interiority/depth, which is supposedly, and curiously inaccessible. For Derrida, this account assumes the simple continuity and homogeneity of the psyche. Again reading through the lens of onto-epistemological dis/continuity and linking to the discussion of the writing pad and the question of depth/memory/interiority, I understand that Derrida's point is precisely about the radical involvement of continuity and discontinuity, surface and depth. This is so well captured and illustrated in his following poetic depiction of original writing:

It ebbs and flows like a wave that sweeps everything along upon the shores ... It carries everything, that sea, and on two sides; it swells, sweeps along, and enriches itself with everything, carries away, brings back, deports and becomes swollen again with what it has dragged away. (Derrida 1998, 31)

If the scene of miscommunication is approached in terms of the

⁹⁷ See Ahmed's (2014) discussion of the intimacy of will and wilfulness.

originary writing where nothing is excluded, then the spatio-temporal separation, and then the succession of the sending and receiving of the message, are radically confounded. As Kirby argues, "If we think temporality as textuality in the Derridean sense, we are reminded that the grammatological textile does not wait in anticipation of time's coming through the promise of the punctum, a lineal unfolding through an evolutionary march of different, separate, self-present moments" (1997, 94). Moreover, the accented speech production, understood in terms of embodied specificity, is exemplary of a universal structure, an originary "alienation". Rather than considering that Ilona's accented pronunciation failed to hit its mark, could we entertain the possibility that miscommunication *is* communication that is spatio-temporal remembering, wherein language anticipates and apprehends itself in the first and final instance?

In chapter five it has been argued that the visual and the aural are not two separate perceptual realms whose perceptions somehow contradict or cohere with each other. Rather, my analysis of the scene of the successful but surprising pronunciation of the trill shows that visuality as aurality as tactility is self-referential. In other words, and in keeping with Derrida's notion of the general writing, perception is not segregated into different ciphers or registers – the visual, the aural etc. It follows then that this scene of miscommunication in which Ilona attempts to order a cup of hot chocolate in Finnish could be read as referring to visual-aural perceptions of Finnishness which re-calls, re-members and re-writes itself.

In light of this, we could venture to rethink the questions of accent, race, difference and origin, in terms of the amnesic arrival that carries with it everything, so that the specificity articulates the with/in-ness of universality. The remarkable implication of Derrida's aporia "'We only ever speak one language,' and 'we never speak only one language' or 'I only speak one language, (and, but, yet) it is not mine'" (1998, 27) lies in the ways in which it affirms and undermines the specificity of the mother tongue, the language "we only ever speak" in one and the same gesture. For Derrida, the point is not to simply repudiate or reject an originary maternal language or the idiomatic specificity or singularity of our speaking and coming into being. Neither should it lead to a kind of neutralisation of differences. Identifying himself as the "hero-martyr –

pioneer – outlaw – legislator” (Derrida 1998, 47) who surrenders to the purity of language, that is anything but purism, Derrida writes:

[O]n the contrary, that is what allows the stakes to be repoliticized. Where neither natural property nor the law of property in general exist, where this de-proprietation is recognized, it is possible and it becomes more necessary than ever occasionally to identify, in order to combat them, impulses, phantasms, “ideologies,” “fetishizations,” and symbolics of appropriation. Such a reminder permits one at once to analyse the historical phenomena of appropriation and to treat them politically by avoiding, above all, the reconstitution of what these phantasms managed to motivate: “nationalist” aggressions or monoculturalist homo-hegemony. (1998, 64)

This provocation reminds me of the earlier discussion of response-ability where I have noted, following Derrida and Haraway, that justice is never final and that response-ability is the condition of possibility for any calculation, decision and judgement. Another significant point that needs to be reiterated here is that the point is not to reduce difference, between for example identification and disidentification, reaction and response, specificity and universality, but to re-member and identify through opening up difference itself to the dis/continuous force of original writing. To be more specific, the import of the above quote assists further consideration of the politics and ethics of rethinking race, identity, difference and language, as well as the implications for feminist knowledge production practices, as is detailed in the next chapter.

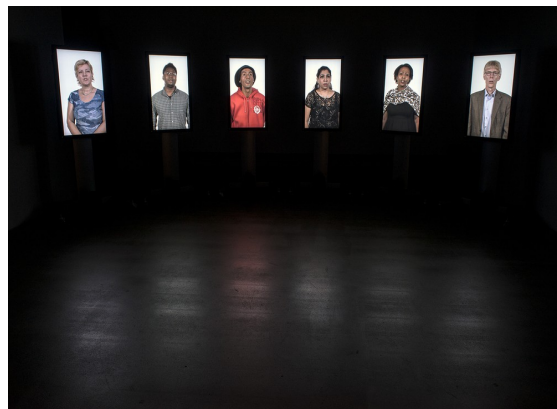
Chapter Eight

Who Sings the National Anthem

Interlude: Maamme/Vårt Land/Our Land



Sing-screen installation



Part of the six-screen synchronised video installation⁹⁸

⁹⁸ <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.



From the exhibition at the Finnish Museum of Photography⁹⁹

The Maamme/Vårt Land/Our Land video installation features non-native Finnish citizens singing the Finnish National Anthem. Its lyrics are based upon a poem written in Swedish by Johan Ludvig Runeberg in 1846. The music was composed by a German immigrant, Fredrik Pacius. The poem consisted of eleven verses. For the respective Finnish and Swedish versions of the national anthem, the first and the last verse of the original poem (or its Finnish translation) were used. In this video installation, participants sang three verses – the first in Finnish, the first in Swedish and the last in Finnish.

Its single-screen version, as shown in the first picture, was exhibited in Esplanadin Lava, in the heart of Helsinki on Finnish Independence Day, December 6th, 2012. The lyrics were translated into English as follows: Our land, our land, our Fatherland! Ring out, dear word, oh sound! No rising hill, or mountain grand, no sloping dale, no northern strand, there is, more loved, to be found, than this – our father's ground. Our land is poor, and so shall be. To him who gold will crave. The strangers proudly pass, but we shall ever love this land, we see, in moor, and feel, and isle and wave, a golden land, so brave. Thy blossom, hidden now from sight, shall burst its bud ere long. Lo! From our love, shall rise aright, thy sun, thy hope, thy joy, thy light. And higher, once, more full and strong, shall

⁹⁹ <http://www.valokuvataiteenmuseo.fi/en/exhibitions/past/event/194---minna-rainio-ja-mark-roberts-maamme>, last accessed 10 July 2015.

ring our country's song.¹⁰⁰

The primary aim of this video installation was to provoke a rethinking of the definition of Finnishness and the current multicultural context in Finland. As Rainio and Roberts write,¹⁰¹

The people in the work were not born in Finland, and do not have Finnish heritage, but have – through relocation, immigration, adoption or other reasons – all been granted Finnish citizenship. The multi-screen installation collects various people together, forming a united choir out of the disparate parts. Together, they sing the words of their adopted nation's anthem, highlighting their unified status as “new Finns”.

Transforming Racial Normativity

Commenting on the relation between the conception of performativity and precarity, Judith Butler notes that the linkage between these two terms relies on the condition of intelligibility, which is also a delimitation and differentiation that makes certain rather than other bodies more thinkable and liveable. In other words, whereas performativity points to the enabling conditions for the one “‘who’ *can* become produced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when lost, would be worthy of mourning” (Butler 2009, xii, my emphasis), precarity characterises those “who *do not* qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable” (xiii, my emphasis). This strategic conjoining of the general conditions of the performative and the hierarchical differences and specificities of the precarious lives “that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless” (Butler 2009, xiii) accords with Butler's general political project; this, as mentioned earlier, is the need to keep taut the tension between the troubled identity and identity trouble. This is an important endeavour to foreground a political project in hierarchical differences that also seeks to make visible and challenge the mechanisms that produce such hierarchies in the first place. I want to underscore here that the ways in which the questions are framed and posed in this dissertation, such as, for example, the questions of how race arrives and what race will(can)/not be, are in a sense, consistent with the ways in which performativity and precarity are

¹⁰⁰ <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

¹⁰¹ <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

theorised in Butler's work.

To explicate her point, Butler refers to the event in which “illegal immigrants in May of 2006 took to the streets in Los Angeles and started to sing the national anthem of the United States” (2009, iv) in both English and in Spanish, with the aim to claim citizenship in the United States. Before continuing with the reading, the contextual differences between these two specific examples should be clarified. The participants in the installation *Mamme/Vårt Land* had already been granted Finnish citizenship and they sang the Finnish national anthem in Finnish and Swedish rather than in their native languages. Apart from the exhibition on the Finnish Independence Day in December of 2012, this installation has been presented primarily in museums and cultural centres. The example Butler provides presents a collective petitioning for American citizenship among illegal immigrants. They sang the American anthem in the streets in Los Angeles in Spanish and English. In fact, as Butler notes, they sometimes sang the Mexican national anthem along with the national anthem of America.

Despite their differences, both instances of singing the national anthem could be read in terms of “performative modes of expression” (Butler 2009, x) that lay claim to visibility and recognition as Finnish and American citizens respectively. Furthermore, both examples highlight the affectivity of the act of singing. As Butler writes in her discussion with Gayatri Spivak in *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, the act of collective singing entails “rethinking certain ideas of sensate democracy, of aesthetic articulation within the political sphere, and the relationship between song and public sphere” (2007, 62). For Butler, singing the national anthem is an excellent example of what she calls performative contradiction. I intend here to unpack Butler's insight on this point, focusing on the installation *Mamme/Vårt land*. First, singing the national anthem is among the most expressive ways of claiming belonging to a nation. As Rainio and Roberts explain, part and parcel of choosing this particular aesthetic form to reflect the political landscape of Finland has to do with the way in which the Finnish national anthem is “emotionally powerful”.¹⁰² Second, the act of singing the national anthem assumes certain racialised norms that condition and regulate the legibility and the recognisability of the singing subjects as Finnish citizens. Third, in laying

¹⁰² <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

claim for recognition of their Finnish citizenship status, they must first submit to the visible and audible normative practices that render these racialised others outsiders in the first place. That is, in order to negotiate and transform what Finnish citizenship consists of, racialised others must first conform to and appropriate certain modes of practices of established norms, such as singing the national anthem in Finnish and Swedish, which they were denied access to or ownership of. This is precisely what makes both the installation *Mamme/Vårt Land*, and the collective petition through singing American national anthem in Spanish, provocative.

Relating to our previous consideration of the juridical notion of power, Butler's account of the performative and the operation of the norm in her reading of the petition will be further engaged in relation to the conundrum of universality and specificity vis-à-vis the problematic of transformation in the remainder of the chapter. At this juncture I want to explain that I begin the reading of the *Mamme/Vårt Land* with Butler's analysis of the singing of the American national anthem by illegal immigrants in Spanish not only because of its clear relevance to my discussion at hand, but also and importantly, because Butler's theorisation of the performative contradiction and its implications for feminist politics of differences has been central to the disputation on the conundrum of specificity and universality, difference and identity. This will be crucial for the engagement with these questions through onto-epistemological dis/continuity. Further to this, as will be discussed in this section of the thesis, the question of the performative, which concerns the how of transformation that is kernel to a critical project on race, is tightly bound up with the questions of power and norms.

To begin again, we could briefly note the ways in which the performative approach that rethinks the notions of power and agency has shifted the terms of debate. Whereas the politics of representation conceives of power in terms of dominance and deficiency (for example the hierarchically privileged are said to have power, in contrast to the powerlessness, or lack of power of their racialised and sexualised counterparts) and grounds political demands in identity claims, the performative approach subjects identity categories such as race and gender, understood as grids of intelligibility that are embedded in heteronormative systems, to scrutiny. In light of this shift, what exercises

feminist scholars' critical attention is whether and how we could circumvent appeals to foundationalism and identitarian essentialism, all the while as we try to acknowledge the political saliency and necessity of mobilising identity categories for claims of recognition and visibility. In other words, the conundrum which ensues from this is: how to make an appeal to identity and specificity (for, by and with marginalised others) through means of representation, if the very identity categories that such claims hinge upon must be critically displaced and differentiated. Clearly, this dilemma has profound political and ethical implications for feminist theoretical and political practices in general. At stake here is the question of norms or the cultural grids of intelligibility that informs what is thinkable and recognisable. This resonates with what Butler has termed a "normative crisis" (2002, 18). In her article "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual", Butler discusses such a normative crisis in the context of gay marriage and kinship legislation. As Butler writes:

On the one hand, living without norms of recognition result in significant suffering and forms of disenfranchisement that confound the very distinctions among psychic, cultural, and material consequences. On the other hand, the demand to be recognized, which is a very powerful political demand, can lead to new and invidious forms of social hierarchy, to a precipitous foreclosure of the sexual field ... thus fortifying ... norms of recognition and eclipsing other possibilities within civil society and cultural life. (2002, 26-27)

Butler thus poses a series of questions, such as: how to reconcile the tension between "maintaining a critical perspective and making a politically legible claim?" (2002, 20); How to construct a political community of "we" even as we concede to the provisional and contestable claims of any "I"? Indeed, what constitutes the contemporary horizon of the political? What do we mean by doing politics? For Butler, to ground politics in a circumscribed matrix of the legitimate and the intelligible without questioning its very terms of operation, risks losing the politics of the political. Does feminist politics necessarily entail a persistent impasse between the "ongoing attempts to destabilize identities and grids ... [and attempts] to mandate and enforce them" (Puar 2007, 63)?

With these questions in mind, in this chapter I bring into conversation

another conceptual turn, often referred to as the “new materialism” (cf. Hird 2004; Alaimo and Hekman eds. 2008; Coole and Frost eds. 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). As Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin note, the term “new” in new materialism is temporally and spatially *transversal*. In their words, it “simultaneously gives us a past, a present, and a future” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 13). Thus, introducing new materialism here as a new theoretical paradigm is not to add objects or perspectives that were somehow left out by or absent in earlier scholarly work, but rather serves to transversally open up from within insights that continue to be “produced” and “anticipated” in these work (see Hinton 2014, 112).

Notwithstanding ongoing debates within the vibrant scholarly field of new materialism regarding its theoretical and methodological orientations, it is generally conceded that new materialism “explores a *monist* perspective” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 85, emphasis in original) and rethinks the nature of dualism, agency, power, language and materiality. This monistic or immanent gesture reconfigures the logic of “and-ness” (see Kirby 2011) that presumes *a priori* temporal and spatial separations that underpin a notion of difference as lack or “different from”. As Vicki Kirby notes, the logic of and-ness inheres in much of the contention about the relation between “significance and substance, thought and matter, human agency and material objectivity” (2011, 77). It needs to be underlined however, that new materialism does not simply reject dualism, but traverses and affirms the perverse onto-epistemological entanglement, in order to displace both attendant terms.

My aim here is not to perform a detailed mapping of the genealogy and lines of debates within this field of scholarly work. Rather, I want to *identify* and *locate* my position vis-à-vis what I consider as informing my analysis. As my previous chapters have argued, the onto-epistemological dis/continuity means that the identity of any entity - be it that of a racial unity, of an accent, or of the fields of the discursive, the corporeal, and even of a division - purportedly separated by an in-between from its other, encounters a trill that destabilises but also reinstalls these entities and divisions, thus radically confounding the terms of their operation. This dis/continuity is a “monistic *and* pluralistic”¹⁰³ (Johncock 2014, 236;

¹⁰³ This is in line with the monistic perspective I mentioned, but I think it also complicates it further. I find it more pronounced in for example Vicki Kirby's, Peta Hinton's and

see also discussions in Hinton 2014; Kirby 2015) gesture that helps in rethinking the dis/continuity of racial differences and the human race. Furthermore, as explained in chapter three, an important insight that I glean from the *monistic and pluralistic* formulation is the diffractive reading practice that is attentive to the im/possibility to abandon (Hinton and Liu 2015) what one is arguing against.

Surely, this diffractive reading practice, a form of generosity, a labour of love, is rather difficult especially in the space of a doctoral thesis. And yet, such a difficulty is precisely the exercise of dis/continuous non/contradiction that informs all the turns and re-turns in the writing. But I hope that I have shown that a generous and diffractive reading helps to open up the possibility for complicating and reconfiguring the terms of a debate so that it productively “rewrites thinking *as a whole*, leaving nothing untouched, redirecting every possible idea according to its new sense of orientation” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 13, emphasis in original). In other words, instead of adding more tensions to the quandary discussed earlier, my intention is to show the ways in which these different foci, or what are often said to be conflicting political and critical demands, do not necessarily persist as impasses but can be more productively engaged with. What motivates my following discussion is the conviction, as succinctly summarised by Kirby, that “academic research, regardless of its content, political temperament, disciplinary formation or scholarly smarts, is driven by a shared desire ... *to make a difference*” (2015, 96, emphasis in original).

Rethinking the Question of Representation

What does this actually mean for the representation of racial identities? I want to re-turn on the dilemma presented earlier. As the prevailing approach to communication practices, the concept of representation is often connected to questions of power and subjectivity, in order to grapple with the ways in which discourses and images of gender, race and sexuality, for example, are produced by and embedded in asymmetrical power relations. The grids of intelligibility – which makes words and images communicable and interpretable – conform to social and cultural norms, that are often conceived of in terms of cultural determination and prohibition. For example, tracing the genealogy of the

Will Johncock's work.

concept of representation, Rebecca Coleman notes its emergence in the late 1960s as a critical tool against the “narrow range of patronizing or demeaning stereotypes through which women were represented” (2014, 32). This was understood as a “dominance and deficit approach” (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2006, 29), that sought to make manifest “patterns of inequality, domination and oppression” (Coleman 2006, 32) and to “help recover women’s voices” (32).

With the discursive and post-structuralist turn, the concept of representation comes to be understood as not simply reflecting but also constructing social reality. Nevertheless, in this strand of thinking, representation is severed temporally and spatially from the represented, i.e., from body/materiality/reality. For example, it is argued that what we perceive as body or reality is actually a representation and discursive construction of it. Indeed, as the argument goes, matter matters only within the circumscribed field of the recognisable. Importantly, this incommensurable gap – “between the literal and the metaphorical, between the body and the sign that represents it... between real and representation, matter and language” (Kirby 1997, 52) – is imbued with transformative potential. In other words, instead of a version of empowerment through giving voice, the primary goal in the post-structuralist turn is to interrogate the normative investments in representation (for example, the definitional constraints that normally find racialised and sexualised others lacking), and the ways in which such representations shape bodies/realities.

Whereas the former position aims to produce counter-identities, the latter often leads to a pluralizing gesture. One thinks here of the significant and most widely adopted feminist methodological framework of “intersectionality” (see the discussion related to intersectionality in chapter three) which is exemplary in its engagement with the question of differences within and between women. As an important critical endeavour to make identity categories more inclusive and more liveable, its importance is indisputable. Nevertheless, theorists routinely find themselves in the unwitting “ampersand effect” (see Kirby 2015, 103), which concerns the risk of what is often conceived of as the endless incorporation of a proliferation of differences. Even though its stated aim is to eschew universality and essentialism, and attend to the situatedness and complexity of embodied specificities, critiques are concerned that

such an incorporation of differences runs the risk of reinstalling the central status of white feminists, and thus diminishing the political impact of an intersectional understanding. As Jasbir Puar (2012) cautions, intersectionality may reproduce the figure of Women of Colour that stands in, for and as difference, and that is simultaneously overdetermined by and emptied of specific meaning. Spivak's conceptualisation of the "strategic use of essentialism" (1990, 109) is an important attempt to grapple with this problem. For Spivak (1990), a political axiology is unavoidably bound, and makes recourse, to essentialism/universalism, even if the very identity categories such as "woman" are fragile under close inspection. Similarly, Butler rejects this need to "'add an embarrassed' et cetera to its catalogue of others, a gesture of acknowledged failure" (Kirby 2015, 103). Taking a radically constructivist and anti-essentialist stance, Butler endorses the Derridean theorisation of language/writing, and asserts that body/materiality (for example race and sex) is always already culture (that is language). As Kirby observes, situated within the question of woman, the difference between representation and the performative approach lies in the materiality/ideality split:

[T]hose who purport to represent real women without recourse to quotation marks will presume themselves to be in receipt of the truth of (the) matter, as if the compelling facts of women's lives simply present themselves. According to this view, signifying practices are the mere vehicles of such truths, having no formulative input of their own. Although they may well be regarded as inadequate, it is assumed nevertheless that they can be corrected. The other side of the debate stresses the constitutive force of signifying practices, concluding that we have no access to an extralinguistic reality because the truth of its apparent facticity is produced in language. (1997, 105)

Despite their differences, both positions concede to and leverage arguments from the temporal and spatial separations and a prohibitive notion of norm underpinned by a logic of opposition. This oppositional mode is often considered as the *modus operandi* of political analysis, so much so that even for poststructuralist frameworks that insist on one system – in which the outside is conceived of as the inversion of the inside (of the subject, identity, normativity, power etc.) – the need to ground politics in oppositional difference seems inevitable. It is here I

want to turn attention to new materialist monistic/immanent gestures in which the riddle of norms and representation could be rerouted.

Essential to the operation of oppositional logic, is a conception of difference as an absolute cut/gap, that exemplifies “two characteristics of dualism (sequential negation and a narrative of progress)” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 100). For example, heteronormativity and the anti-normative could be considered as analytical cognates occupying two different temporal and spatial positions vis-à-vis what is understood as the field of the normative. In other words, whereas heteronormativity is thought to be the inside, anti-normativity is seen to fall outside of, to be set against or to come after the established normative field. As Kirby provocatively asks,

If we throw the notion of power into the mix we are confronted with the same difficulty. What is outside power? Is resistance to power internal to power, a torsional re-presentation of power’s own complex identity? From where does power originate and how can we hope to change things if we are mired in its internal machinery? (2015, 105)

As noted earlier, the ways in which power operates is central to an analysis of representation. Most often, power is conceived of in causal terms, and is said to act on things (see Kirby 2015; Coleman 2014). For example, following Michel Foucault’s understanding of discourse and biopolitics, the ways in which power operates via discourse in constructing and shaping bodies in particular ways has been investigated. Foucault’s by now well-known assertion that there is no outside of power and Derrida’s aphorism that “there is no outside-text” ([1976]1997, 158) surely point to something of a radical interiority.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, feminist postcolonial theorists Puar and Chow note the political and analytical fatigue in “poststructuralist signification incarceration”, wherein “[d]ifference’ produces new subjects of inquiry that then infinitely multiply exclusion in order to promote inclusion” (Puar 2007, 55). Note the word “incarceration”, which is again a spatial metaphor

¹⁰⁴ For example, commenting on what he terms the “carceral network” (Foucault [1977] 1991, 301), Foucault makes explicit the ways in which power has no outside. As Foucault writes, “The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside. It takes back with one hand what it seems to exclude with the other. It saves everything, including what it punishes. It is unwilling to waste even what it has decided to disqualify” ([1977] 1991, 301).

accentuating a sense of interiority. Whether via biological essentialism or semiotic constructivism, anti-normative practices that attend to differences and specificities seem to be brought forth from and with/in the field of the norm itself. As Kirby observes, “the ability of a norm to cannibalize all opposition” (2015, 105) provokes considerable anxiety, for it might seem that there is no space for change, for being otherwise. But, as Kirby continues to argue, “this anxiety only arises if we perceive the identity of a norm in restricted terms, a something that can only constrain or prohibit, such that the promise of change that might reroute and overturn this repression must arrive as an anti-norm – an absolute outside” (2015, 106).

Reconfiguring this line that separates inside/outside or identity/difference as a patternment of diffraction/difference within (Barad 2007) or the fault line that is itself breaking open and apart (Kirby 2011), the monistic *and* pluralistic framework – that is the operation of dis/continuity – insists on and pushes to the extreme the radical interiority (which could also be said as consubstantial with the absolute outside). In light of this, instead of starting from the distinctive poles of the “representation/materiality dichotomy” (Colebrook quoted in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 108), we can rework their spatial and temporal coordinates through a radical rethinking of the “literacy” (Kirby 2011) and “agency” (Barad 2007) of matter. Representation matters. And matter represents. In so doing, we could ask further how power actually grips, constructs or acts upon an object that is supposedly outside itself. To push this question even further, if a norm, as power, does not come before/outside and prescribe the limits of the intelligible and the communicable, where is the genesis of repression, exclusion, and more importantly, of any form of anti-normative transformations, and when?

However, it should be noted here, that the affirmation of material agency is not a recuperation of or a nostalgic return to a benign or unitary whole/origin, which is defined against the destructiveness of culture/writing. To do so is to reinstall the speech/writing, matter/ideality split, albeit in its reversed form. In this enlarged interiority, where nothing is excluded, how could one critically approach the universalising tendencies of any categorisation, identity claiming and its associated terms of exclusion and denigration? In what follows, I broach this problematic through returning to the video installation

Maamme/Vårt land by artists Rainio and Roberts based in Finland. My central argument is that a new materialist affirmation of the radical interiority does not relinquish representation and universality, for the line that is drawn between the representing and the represented is simultaneously substantiated and differentiated.

Trilling Norms: Normativity's Performative Anticipation

Following an oppositional logic, the installation of Maamme/Vårt land could be approached in terms of visibility and recognition. Given the symbolic significance of the national anthems for a sense of entitlement and belonging, this installation can be read as a testimony to identity claiming, i.e., as “new Finns”. As Rainio’s and Roberts’ description of this installation makes clear, these participants were once considered as not fitting into the typical definition of being a Finn, because “they were not born in Finland, and do not have Finnish *heritage*”.¹⁰⁵ For Rainio and Roberts, their acquisition of and identification with Finnishness are expressed through the act of singing the Finnish national anthem. Their faces and their voices are repeatedly played and displayed in public, as, for example, at the exhibition in Esplanadin Lava, at the the Finnish Museum of Photography, and circulated on online video-sharing platforms as well as on the artists’ homepages. These scenes of exposure give voice and visibility to the racialised and gendered others in Finland, and evoke consideration of and articulate the need for a more inclusive conception of Finnishness.

Together the images of these participants testify to the changing demographic that shapes in new ways received notions of Finnishness. Yet listening more closely to each participant, tracing their images and their voices as they appear, disappear and reappear in the united choir, one ponders about their individuality. What are their stories behind their migration to Finland? Where do they come from? What are their occupations, ages, sexual orientations, religions? Unlike rehearsed and coordinated group singing, this choir is composed of independent moments from individual participants’ solo and independent singing. In mixing together disparate visual and aural segments to form a united choir, viewers are presented with a vision of Finnishness that acknowledges individuality, and thus diversity and differences among

¹⁰⁵ <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

individual members of Finnish society.

Clearly, one can interpret the participants' visible differences as signifying disparities in terms of race, gender, age, and their individual, and thus discordant, singing as indicating diversity and multiculturalism. But the question remains as to how their differences from each other and from the conventional Finnishness emerge? Why for example are their visible racial differences taken as proof of a multicultural Finland? If we simply define the new-ness of the participants' Finnish identity against the presumed linear, homogenous and unified original Finnishness (as the term heritage and its cultural/biological connotations clearly indicate), then the nature of difference itself would be foreclosed and unwittingly fixed on spatial (in the sense of separated from each other) and temporal (in the sense of the original versus the new) coordinates through which a homogenous and unified Finnishness is identified. This appeal to difference pertains to a notion of race/ethnicity that would recuperate a prescriptive notion of intrinsic biological and/or cultural differences. A reading of this installation in terms of adding in or extending the accepted terms of Finnishness to the otherwise different others leaves intact the racialised (*vis-à-vis* the whiteness of Finnishness) and sexualised (especially in relation to generation and heritage that characterises Finnishness) social mechanisms that (re)produce Finnishness and otherness in the first place.

Following a performative approach, Finnishness is understood as enacted, rather than signifying any racial truth. Embodied differences such as the visual differences among participants are understood as appearances/signifiers that are emerged and circumscribed within a larger semantic process of meaning making, rather than the actual physical substance that anchors representation. Devoid of stable terms of reference, the normative construction of Finnishness could be said to necessitate citational practices such as singing the national anthem. In light of this, the visual-aural parody in which racialised and gendered "new Finns" sing the anthem in Finnish and in Swedish, reveals the embodied reiterations that (re)produce and maintain the normative practices of Finnishness, all the while attesting to its instability, historicity and contingency.

Importantly, through this line of thinking, identity categories undergo a profound critique. Whereas the inclusive model unwittingly requires

the fixity of a notion of Finnishness rooted in cultural or biological heritage, the performative approach destabilizes its point of reference and sets it into the chain of displacement. Given the lack of a stable referent, thus the inevitable failure of power/norms to prescribe, regulate and prohibit, the heteronormative conception of Finnishness is forced into an endless loop of maintenance work. Against any essentialising and universalising gesture, a reading that follows the performative approach does not aim to give a “better” or more “accurate” representation of Finnishness, but would reinvigorate it as an open question in order to uncover the definitional constraints and limitations that define otherness as lacking.

As already mentioned, the emphasis of the performative approach is on the hierarchical differences, or which differences matter. As Butler (2009) notes, whereas structuralism regards as impossible all claims of recognition, post-structuralism (within which performativity is embedded) asks why some forms of life are more recognisable, more liveable and more valuable than others. While the inclusive model of Finnishness stops short of asking what exactly contributes to the sense of misfit in this installation, the performative approach delves into this parodic effect that makes viewers pause and consider the definition of Finnishness. Central to this interrogation are the limiting conditions that contour and shape the field of intelligibility – such as the field of the visual-aural in this case. Moreover, and this is crucial for an investigation of communication, these limiting conditions are bound to the process of subject formation and the question of agency.

Consistent with an anti-essentialist stance towards subjectivity, and with the refusal to conflate the exercise of the free-will of a sovereign subject with performativity, Butler has famously stated that there is no doer behind the deed. Put differently, it can be said that subjects do not pre-exist, but come into being/emerge performatively within a field of normativity. As Butler elaborates on this point:

[V]arious modes of laying claims to public space and to citizenship require both translation and performative modes of expression. But let us remember that performativity does not just refer to explicit speech acts, but also to the reproduction of norms. *Indeed, there is no reproduction of the social world that is not at the same time a reproduction of those norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in space and time.* And

by “intelligibility” I include “readability in social space and time” and so an implicit relation to others (and to possibilities of marginalization, abjection, and exclusion) that is conditioned and mediated by social norms. (2009, xi, emphasis in original)

We can glean two insights from this statement in relation to the moment of misfit and the performative force of the installation. First, the subjectivities of both the viewers and the participants could be said to emerge simultaneously within the performative reiteration of the bodily practices of singing the Finnish national anthem in both Finnish and Swedish. In fact, it is only in drawing on histories of repetitions and contextual conventions that a performative act can acquire its socially recognisable meaning. This clearly resonates with an account of power to which one is both subject and object. But this installation of anthem singing on the Finnish Independence Day reproduces and substantiates a Finnishness that nevertheless does not quite fit its anticipated or expected form. It seems that there is an excess, a gap, because of the visual and audible differences this installation materialises. It could thus be argued that this specific performative reiteration enacts a moment of crisis in the production and reproduction of normative understandings of Finnishness.

Nevertheless, pushing this account further, one wonders if this indeed is a crisis of the normative. For isn't it also the case, that racialised and gendered differences, and what is normatively considered as “authentic” and “original” Finnishness, are at once reproduced, and perhaps become more pronounced, even as the racialised and gendered normative constraints of Finnishness are called into question? Does this not pose a new norm, albeit a seemingly more inclusive one, wherein Finnishness continues to be defined by, among other things, a sufficient means of (financial) support and Finnish or Swedish skills with the criteria of for example the ability to achieve at level 3 of the Finnish National Foreign Language Certificate? Butler also voices concerns related to this in her reading of the singing of American national anthem by illegal immigrants:

The monolingualism requirement of the nation surely surfaces in the refusal to hear the anthem sung in Spanish ... Of course, it is possible to be suspicious of all of this. After all, is it not simply the expression of a

new nationalism? Is it a suspect nationalism, or does it actually fracture the “we” in such a way that no single nationalism could take hold on the basis of that fracture? It’s an open question to which I don’t know the answer. (2007, 61)

Importantly, Butler discovers a fissure, a translation, in the inception of the collectivity of a “we”. As Butler makes clear, this is not simply a pluralism that folds in *differences* only to maintain the homogeneity of the nation, but a performative process that is “both as plural act” (2007, 62) and a “translation” (62). The simultaneously plural and translational process is certainly very similar to the dis/continuous monistic and pluralistic gesture I am suggesting here. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, the conception of power as oppressive and the idea that the origin of nature and the nature of origin are inaccessible return Butler’s conception of difference to oppositional terms. This informs the ways in which the question of norms and transformation are approached in Butler’s work. Importantly, what we can glean from the foregoing discussion is that the process of othering is in fact reproduced *with and in* the normative realm, for otherwise how could this misfit/difference be perceived and recognised at all if it is ontologically and epistemologically outside the norm’s performative operations? This is a form of anticipation that Butler (1999, xiv) notes as kernel to the operation of performativity, and in the case here, the performativity of Finnishness. To paraphrase Butler, we could note that the anticipation of the essence of Finnishness produces that which it posits as deviant and outside its normative enclosure.

We are here faced with the complexity of subjectivation, the intricacies of representation, to which an oppositional mode of analysis can give little account. In connection with the first approach that would attempt to make the identity category of Finnishness more inclusive, I want to lay bare the political dilemma we are encountering here. First, the gesture that subjects to scrutiny essentialist and foundationalist claims that feed into various forms of racism and sexism by rendering inaccessible an extra-linguistic referent, at the same time also puts into question the premises that ground identity politics. Second, certain versions of intersectional analyses that draw (perhaps uneasily) on a poststructuralist framework, conceive of identity categories as differing endlessly. In “realising” infinite differences and a long and cross-referenced list of

exclusions, this mode of analysis risks recuperating the centre and uncritically taking recourse to the self-present subject. Third, as norms produce and are reproduced *within* the social world, wherein one is at once the subject and object of power, it seems unclear how an anti-normative politics can be said to be located outside and against the domain of norms. Where would it begin, and when? This is perhaps an urgent and key issue for feminist anti-racist scholarship. If identification with/as a woman and racial subject has become an utterly intricate matter, then how would one ground feminist anti-racist political aspirations?

It seems fitting at this juncture to perform/enact *monistic and pluralistic* concerns. As already noted, essential to this methodology is the diffraction and transversal shift of, rather than simply moving beyond, both poles of the oppositions. In this radical interiority, negation or closure is never final, but is internal to a ubiquitous opening. Insisting on a global scene of political production and a “relational ontology” (Barad 2007, 93), in what follows I approach this “equality-versus-difference debate” (cf. Hinton 2014; Thiele 2014) through “the problem of difference” (Hinton 2014, 101).

As is perhaps already quite clear from earlier discussions, what differentiates the politics of inclusion or visibility and from the performative approach pertains to the presence/absence of the ground that provides the anchorage of representation. To recapitulate, whereas the former foregrounds and secures identity claims in a locatable essence, the latter posits an hermetically enclosed semiotic domain, that is severed from the stuff of bodies and matter, because these are lost and inaccessible. In other words, unlike a politics of representation and visibility, the performative approach eschews description, because the referent – its actuality that is purportedly ahistorical, essential – is understood as a phantasmatic construct or a veiled illusion. Interestingly then, both positions concede to a notion of essence as unitary, fixed and unchanging, and “a model of difference that is synonymous with separation and opposition” (Kirby 1997, 64). Following Kirby, I suggest that in rethinking difference as a “‘becoming entity’ ... not a name for the gap of supposedly dead space and time between pre-given entities” (1997, 65), the question of essence and matter also undergo a qualitative transformation. Here I want to recall the sense of misfit evoked by the

installation. The power of testimony circulated in public through visual media representations is to “make moral and emotional appeal to a ‘witnessing public’” (Kennedy et al. 2013, 51). It follows that to think about the nature of the misfit must include a consideration of the ways in which it is affective. It needs to be noted here that this account of affectivity differs from certain strands of thinking in the recent affective turn, especially the ones that hail affect’s freedom and autonomy. Whereas affect’s freedom means its unpredictable and random attachments to objects (see Sedgwick 2003), affective autonomy posits affect an ontologically separate order that defies the paranoid logic of poststructuralist deconstruction and the problematics of biological essentialism (see Massumi 2002; Hemmings 2005). Instead, what I am proposing is, following Kirby’s conceptualisation of “corporeography”, to consider “representation as ‘sensible’ in that biology is not a supplementary ingredient to be included or excluded” (1997, 154). In other words, it is not that one is first bodily affected and then comes to terms with the feelings through terms of intelligibility informed by a semiotic web of meaning making. The temporal progression that informs the position of “world before language, the thing (or referent) before the sign, matter before the idea, and the sensible before the intelligible” (1997, 90) is, as Kirby points out, “a decidedly sexual and racial diacritics whose evolutionary logic works to naturalize political asymmetries” (90). The perception of the misfit is telling of such a sensible representation or affective communication. For this reason, I want to linger over the question of the how of perceiving the misfit.

Visually, these squared frames/grids with white backgrounds resemble passport photos. These images are placed adjacent to one another to form a whole in some scenes. In other scenes, a single frame is placed in a different part of the screen. In still other scenes, the screen is covered by parallel frames positioned further apart from one another, thus making visible the hollowing black background. The sharp contrast of the white frame and the black background highlight participants’ different appearances, as well as their facial expressions and subtle bodily movements. On one level, these rigid frames symbolise the phenomena of racial and gender profiling – in terms of grids of intelligibility – as well as the tightened border control, symptomatic of current immigration policy. On another level, it expresses Rainio’s and Roberts’ vision of

multiculturalism, which is a whole consisting of disparate parts understood as atomic entities which cannot be reduced to each other. Furthermore, when the black background is more visible (for example as the second picture shows), the reflections of the images on the ground give the impression that these participants are uprooted, thus making palpable the physical and emotional displacement of bodies through migration.

Aurally, we hear a male sonorous vocal introducing the first line of the anthem “Oi maamme Suomi, synnyinmaa” (“Our land, our land, our Fatherland!”).¹⁰⁶ This vocal is then joined by another on the second line. As the singing proceeds, we hear and see the (re)arrangement of voices and images. In this discordant united choir, we hear differences in terms of accent, pitch, and rhythms. The emergence, disappearance and weaving together of various voices blur and traverse the boundaries that are purportedly made static by the sharp square frame. This can be read as a deterritorialisation of parameters that differentiate individuals from each other and from the whole/social/collective. However, the notion of deterritorialisation, much like Derrida’s theorisation of breaching, is not destruction pure and simple, but simultaneously involves processes of rupturing and creation, writing and the gravity of identity. I want to highlight its implications here, as this is important for my overall discussion. The counter-intuitive suggestion of this breaching is that, as Hinton writes, “an identity which assumes its place, its ability to *be* located, is still made available ... at precisely the same time as its claim to self-presence is displaced. The privilege of identity is not removed, but neither can it be assumed” (2014, 109, emphasis in original).

Consistent with the account of onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race, and this clearly relates to the question of identity in general terms, breaching proves an effective way to approach perceptual modalities in terms of non/locatability (i.e., the spatial and temporal coordinates that define identity), kernel to the perception of misfit. Poststructuralist criticism has taught us that our perception of race and gender is not self-evident, but regulated by and enacted within normative regimes. Nevertheless, as already noted, this approach forecloses the sensible and the corporeal, and conceives of norms and power as prohibitive and

¹⁰⁶ Translation provided by <http://rainioroberts.com/maamme/>, last accessed 29 June 2015.

oppressive in the first and last instance. Given the poststructuralist attention to any forms of essentialism, it is curious that the essence or identity of perception and norms are exempt from critical scrutiny (see further discussion on this in Kirby 1997). As presented in the installation, the boundary between perceptual modes cannot be straightforwardly marked or secured. For example, the misfit, the perceived difference is materialised (and it is especially thought provoking here to read this with Butler's deployment of matter as meaning making) when our visual perception of participants' phenotypically and sexually differentiated bodies diverge from what we expected to see in hearing the singing of the national anthem. In other words, it is as if the aural perception already recalls, anticipates, implicates and perhaps *is* a visual representation. Approached in terms of corporeography, the essence/body/corporeality is not understood as undifferentiated anchor of performative possibilities, but reads and writes itself, and thus significantly confounds the received atomic, linear and causal view of perception that underwrites the foundationalist logic of racism and sexism. Crucially, if norms are prohibitive in the first and last instance in rendering the racialised sexualised other as outside the norm, and if norms regulate and enable the recognition of perception as Butler and others have argued, the question arises as to how it is possible to perceive and recognise this misfit at all. Importantly, we get a sense of the "duality of kind" (Durkheim quoted in Kirby 2015, 101) of both power and of norms that simultaneously differentiates and affirms itself to itself. Moreover, in accordance with new materialist monistic terms, norms are understood as material-discursive phenomena, rather than as signification, opposed to the matter of matter. In the saturated and self-differentiated field of the sensible and the perceptual, a norm re-members, anticipates and opposes itself. It follows then, that what is outside the norm is reconfigured as the inversion of the inside. More provokingly still, and situated in the context of the discussion at hand, we can venture to consider that the internal fracturing of normative Finnishness (as whiteness for example) is generative of and hailed by the specificity/difference of its outside. I want to propose the neologism inside/outside (the slash follows Baradian indeterminacy) to accentuate the convoluted scene of a "global embrace" (Kirby 2011, 119). In this sense, even this misfit is strangely fitting.

To think through corporeography, or representation as sensible, is to

qualitatively shift the dilemma of the representational and performative approach from within. Attending to the tissue of the corporeal “knitting signification within representation within substance” (Kirby 1997, 55), we encounter a perverse force field wherein “body as nature as woman as other involves a *différance* for which oppositional logic can give little account” (55). Difference is itself breaking open and apart, it “witnesses *and produces*” (2014, 10), to borrow Hinton’s description, the specificity of racialised and sexed embodiment. In other words, racialised and sexed identities/essences are displaced and fractured at the same time as they are located and made specific. This is where one can diffractively shift the debate and read the two opposites of the dilemma. The visual-aural differentiation that gives rise to perception, and which is regulated by and remakes norms, evinces “the process of essence” (Kirby 1997, 98) that is “an integral expression of the performativity of language in the general sense” (98). In this radical interiority, the oppositional logic that grounds the politics of anti-normativity is transformed. For if the economy of differentiation is what drives and enables perception as conception as sensitive representation, then it can also be said that norms are essentially incoherent and dehiscent, all the while persistently constant. Following on from the above discussion of norms as material-discursive phenomena, I want to turn my attention to the question of universality and specificity, as it is another major issue within the debate at hand. The *re-markability* of individuals’ singing is simultaneously a differentiation process that is conditioned upon, rather than in spite of, a condensed and self-differentiating perceptual realm. In other words, this differentiation is not a closing off or quarantining of the individual from his or her environment (i.e., other faces, other sounds or the black backdrop). Instead, the environment, the whole, already inhabits the individual. For example, we can consider the implicatedness of the ways in which the black background and the edge of the white square frame are implicated in this. Where does the boundary between the background and the edge begin and end? As Kirby writes, the “individual is both single and plural” (2015, 102). That is, an “I” is at once a “we”. This may generate concerns as to whether such a postulation returns to a logic of phallogocentrism with its totalising and reductionist gestures, and against which the revision of objectivity through a notion of situated knowledge production has been posed. Butler’s assertions about

individual agency and collective political action express such a concern. She writes, "To be a participant in politics, to become part of concerted and collective action, one need not only make the claim for equality, but one needs to act and petition within the terms of equality. The 'I' is thus at once a 'we', without being fused into an impossible unity" (Butler 2009, vii). Through a logic of the performative, Butler depicts the process of subject formation of , that is, as Kirby succinctly summarises, the ways in which "a culture's specific signature of place and time, the very texture of its identifiability, get under our skin and inform our individual experiences with felt significance" (2015, 98).

Intriguingly, there is a sense of generality at work in Butler's careful manoeuvre to eschew any appeal to unity, whole, universality. In thinking with and pushing further Butler's endeavour, we could venture to ask what unity or wholeness can actually mean if it is never static and cannot be defined against, but is articulated through and animates, the individual. Following Kirby, we could think of the structure of the hologram, where "every appeal to the specificity of a unified perspective returns us to a fractured differential that is at once a particularity that again involves 'the whole' differently" (1997, 65). Importantly, this whole ruptures and rewrites, for "even the 'fragment's perspective' is, in its turn, another differentiated whole" (Kirby 1997, 65). It follows then, as Kirby argues, that "The separation of part from whole, or the hierarchical subsumption of difference from unity, is not simply made. ... [U]niversalizing discourses are never monolithic or unified, any more than a so-called situated, or particular, perspective is singular in either its focus or location" (1997, 65). What is needed is a rethinking of the nature of feminist politics and ethics, even if it also raises the discomfiting question of the nature of essence and difference. As Hinton writes, a responsible feminist politics is "called on both to situate feminist practice and to acknowledge that it is dislocated in the same gesture" (2014, 111).

Conclusion: Part Three

This part continues the exploration of different aspects of the onto-epistemological dis/continuity of race, such as, for example, the questions of identity/difference, whole/part, universality/specificity. In fact, the ways in which power and norms are understood has significant implications for the crucial question of how to transform racial thinking.

The main argument that arises in this part is that race always arrives, but its arrival always founders. This is not to say that origin is irretrievably lost, but that even origin itself is never simply present or absent. Given this, why is it necessary to shy away from the question of origin or the essence of race? Related to this, I argue that the polyvocalities and multiplicities of polyglots' accents and cyborgs' noises need not, and cannot dispense with the wholeness of the mother tongue, because each is constituted through, with and as the other. Furthermore, there is no simple overturning of and moving beyond the problematics of race. Instead, taking into account and giving an account of the how, where and when of the location of race is the most pressing concern for a responsible feminist political and ethical practice of knowledge production.

Conclusion

Approaching the border control at the airport, I felt slightly anxious. Normally I expected a long queue at the non-EU passport line. This time, it was an open road, so to speak. Far away I saw the border guard, sitting in uniform behind the window, looking straight ahead at the oncoming passengers (namely me). This could go quickly, I chuckled to myself. "See you soon on the other side", I joked to my partner. I had always been jealous that he rarely needed to wait. The gate for Finnish passport holders always looked so wide and open. This time would be different, I thought, planning what to do on the other side. Even though the other side was just a departure hall, artificially demarcated and separated from this side, it always held a fascination for me. Being trapped and confined on the other side instead felt like freedom and movement – the lightness when walking through the gate, the excitement of hearing Mandarin or Sichuan dialect (my mother tongue), and the very idea of going home – all converged into an excitement as well as an anxiety about passing through the gate.

Arriving at the security check, I handed my passport to the border guard. 'Hi', I smiled, and anxiously looked at him scrutinising my visa.

"Do you speak any Finnish", he suddenly asked.

"No?", I responded. I did not know why I responded to his question with a negation that was also posed as a question. I was probably confused about what exactly he meant by that. At the same time, this response felt like a defence - "do you think I should?" - rather than an apology, "unfortunately I have not mastered Finnish yet". Feeling confused and uneasy, I heard him asking another question.

"Not a single word?" he pushed further his question, threw at me a quick glance from the corner of his eyes and flipped through the pages of my passport.

"Well, a little." I started to feel panic, and almost began to believe that he suspected that I was indeed travelling with a fake passport or invalid residence permit.

He ignored my answer, and continued to check my visas. My heart raced. I felt a lump in my throat. Should I say something? Maybe he found me suspicious because I claimed to speak poor Finnish, even though, according to my visa, I

entered this country two years ago.

"Nå, Jag talar svenska" (well, I speak Swedish), I said, tried hard to get a decent Finland Swedish accent.

This time he raised his head, looked at me. "Ok" he said, and returned my passport to me with his left hand, meanwhile lifting his right arm to show me the way through the gate in a well rehearsed movement.

In the end it went fast, I thought, walking through the gate and towards the other side.

"Huu" I sighed, somehow with relief. My partner was happy to see me on the other side of the gate across the border.

"What happened", he asked, looking concerned.

"Huu" I sighed again and found my totally blushed face reflected on the tax free shop window. It felt like burning.

Presented is a scenario at the border control at Helsinki airport, in which I was asked about my ability to speak Finnish while having my passport checked. In fact, similar scenarios take place almost every single time I travel to and from non-EU countries. The question is often asked in Finnish "Puhutko suomea?" (do you speak Finnish?). Interestingly, I was never asked if I happened to speak Swedish. My response to this question has changed from "I speak Swedish" to "vähän", a Finnish word meaning a little. This is not so much because I have actually grown more confident about my Finnish skills compared to two years ago when this incident took place, but rather because, given the routine questioning, I have learned to rehearse the simplest ways to respond without using too many Finnish words, but with which I could also confirm that I can communicate in Finnish.

It needs to be mentioned that this border control is situated between the departure area for EU destinations and its non-EU counterparts. In this scenario, even though I had a valid residence permit, I started to feel that my legitimacy as a resident in Finland was fraudulent. The question "do you speak Finnish?" for me sounded like an expectation. That is, "you should be able to speak Finnish". Interestingly, unlike the stated language skill requirements for the Finnish citizenship application, the residence permit I hold does not actually entail such a requirement. Why then was I asked over and over again about my Finnish skills? What reiterative cutting does such a query perform? What boundary does it enforce? Which racialised bodies does it reproduce? What inscriptions

and ascriptions does it mark on the specific language?

The question “do you speak Finnish?” becomes integral to the border control practices. Or one could say that it performatively substantiates a border that feels. Where and when does this border begin and end? Is the border made manifest on my blushing face, at the border control gate, or by the stamp that was about to mark the dates of my departure from Finland, or by the border guard’s right arm that showed me through the gate, the border of the nation’s body, the border of the inter-subjective social body in this particular encounter? Or is it marked in the very question “do you speak Finnish?”, in my anxious response to it, or in my accented Finland Swedish pronunciation as an attempt to prove my otherwise legible status as a resident in Finland? The *location* of the border that feels is both instantiated and yet indeterminate, because consubstantial with the whole chain of signification that is corporeal through and through. In other words, the conversation between and conversion into and of the individual body and the social body is the generalised process of performative translation that is pluralistic and monistic.

Returning to the the installation of Finnexia, similar inquiries regarding the ability to use the Finnish language skill instantiated another kind of space, in which Finnish language learners who were interested in the advertised effect of the fictitious drug – faster learning, better pronunciation, and less anxiety when speaking – came together to share their experiences in learning the Finnish language. Similarly, the Finnish for foreigners courses I have participated in provided excellent spaces for meeting other language learners. The enabling force of power - which underpins social and political norms - isn’t so much only in the service of a suppressing intention, manifested in the ways in which it “subordinates so effectively that it even ‘activates’ (produces) its object *as an object to be subordinated*” (Kirby 2006, 114, emphasis in original). Rather, it is enabling because the onto-epistemological dis/continuity means that power’s self-affirmation, a process of splitting and self-encountering, generates an “essential incoherence and productive proliferation” (Kirby 2015, 114).

Power as expressed in the assertion of norms insists, only through trilling itself. In the light of this, we can consider the question of capacity for capacity. The slogan of the fictitious drug Finnexia, “learn Finnish *faster*” at once speaks of the ways in which a deficiency in Finnish

language skill functions as a hindrance, and generates an urgent need to acquire the capacity. As has been mentioned, this is in fact a capacity for capacity, foregrounded in the distinction between life and death, continuity and discontinuity. These are questions that pertain to the question of race. We could consider capacity in terms of capital, whose only goal is to perpetuate its regeneration. For Rey Chow (2006) and Jasbir Puar (2007), this is precisely what whiteness is. In other words, it is the moment-um of exchange and reproduction, which is the dynamism of life itself, as opposed to the discontinuity and passivity that death is.

Whereas Chow and Puar focus on whiteness as capacity/capital, Jared Sexton notes the ways in which "Race is a production of meaning or a form of value and hence operates as communication, an element of exchange" (2008, 29). In a similar vein, Fred Moten (2003) observes the ways in which Ferdinand de Saussure attempts to open up the possibility for revaluation through a chain of signification, which excludes and abstracts value from the materiality and sound of speech. That is, precisely because objects and realities do not have intrinsic value, any valuation proves provisional and arbitrary and is subject to the process of revaluation. Significantly, in configuring the Saussurean chain of signification as the political economy of racialisation, wherein racialised others are objectified and fetishised (see also Ahmed 2000), Moten (2003) suggests that the ultimate resistance of the racialised others ensues from the noisy breaking out of and from the confinement of meaning, from a place where racialised others may shriek and scream. Pushing still further the edge of refusal, Sexton advocates a notion of social death, which is a radical unmappability that falls outside of the process of exchange and valuation. This is a pessimism that is insistent upon questioning, thus unasking and unmaking the affirmation of being and of social life, and thus also of whiteness itself.

Concurring in the main with their observations of the political economy of racialisation, I am puzzled over the investment in noise, in the extra-linguistic, as well as the inaccessible field of social death (the spatial metaphor here remains subject to debate). As we have seen, the conundrum about value and the referent in Saussure's work manifests the im/possibility of exclusion of the substance of matter (cf. Kirby 1997) and of reality. In view of this, the shriek and noise, as radical discontinuity and partiality, are not so much outside, thus overturning

the structural imposition of meaning, but embed and transform from within the general economy of racialisation. And if we approach whiteness, understood as the capacity of and for life, through the onto-epistemological dis/continuity, then its seeming continuity, its lineage and generation, relies precisely upon the discontinuous splitting, cutting and self-encountering, that is copula-tion. Interestingly, the cut as the genesis of life, of individuation, is also associated with death. That is, it marks the end of a life lived, and “divides that life ... from life” (Kirby 2009, 120; see also Hinton forthcoming). What does it mean then if what marks death is also discovered at and of the origin of life itself? As Jacques Derrida reminds us, “pure life or pure death: it is always, infinitely, the same thing” (2005a, 291). Similarly, we could ask what is the essence of whiteness, of Man, and the question of capacity as the exceptional condition of humanness, if its integrity and continuity, its life, is affirmed and sustained only through the discontinuous self-encounter, through which racialised and inhuman others are *discovered outside* its human milieu?

Rather than simply opposing life to death, capacity to disability, whiteness to racialised others, human to inhuman others, I use the notion of trilling race to suggest ways of rethinking the sociality of these binaries in the racialised political economy of visual-aural encounters. The onto-epistemological dis/continuity means that neither of these opposing terms can be self-present, but must, in the form of obligation (Wilson 2004) emerge through, with and as each other. And it, must be noted, such an emergence remains just that: a dis/continuous emergence, for its identity is never finally achieved. It follows then, that a critical project of race does not mean that we should simply invert the hierarchy, and reevaluate the underprivileged, or perhaps abandon notions such as capacity, Man, whiteness. If dis/continuity is originary, such an abandonment remains im/possible. The abandoned would surreptitiously reassert themselves (see Hinton and Liu 2015), despite, and because of their being condemned and excluded. The task at hand is to be attentive to the historicity, the how of the arrival of any entity, which includes me, us. Such is the process of trilling, a gesture that “punctuates” (see Derrida [1976] 1997) and at the same time destabilises the reiterative inscriptions of hierarchical power relations – its sexual and racial ascriptions – through which whiteness, as the exceptional condition

and the capacity of the Man, emerges.

In *Quantum Anthropology*, Vicki Kirby (2011) encourages us to consider, not only how speech is writing, but how writing is speech. That is, how culture is nature all along. In conclusion, I would like to end with another question: how does writing trill? If as Sexton maintains, in the political economy of racialisation, the becoming of race is a form of writing – “the scratch, the mark, the line” (2008, 29), which produces racialised bodies as “*living images of race*” (29, emphasis in original), then how is the writing already race’s trilling itself into being/becoming (its other)?

Svensk Sammanfattning

Denna avhandling undersöker frågor om ras i en kontext som utgörs av språkkurser i finska för vuxna invandrare i Finland. Avhandlingen undersöker materialitet av ras, samt hur ras får betydelse och ett affektivt värde. Utgående från ett auto/etno/grafiskt perspektiv undersöker jag hur det är som deltagare att lära sig det finska språket på kurser avsedda för invandrare. Avhandlingens övergripande syfte är att problematisera och ifrågasätta ontologin och epistemologin av ras: vad ras är, hur det förstås och vad en analys av ras innebär. Inspirerad av övningen av "drillande r" föreslår jag att begreppet "drillande ras" fångar den onto-epistemologiska dis/kontinuitet som markerar ras och processen hur ras blir till.

Frågan om dis/kontinuitet omorganiserar distinktionen mellan kontinuitet och avbrott. Den ifrågasätter processen av identifiering: till exempel hur, var och när identitet formas och omformas. Mitt intresse för frågan om identitet relateras till ett viktigt problem i rasstudier, nämligen: hur ras kan omformuleras. Det behövs en grundlig granskning av "representationernas tyngd" (Puar 2007, 191), det som betydelsesätter begreppet ras, eftersom det även återupprättar rasism. Dessutom behövs forskning som på allvar uppmärksammar hur rasifierad verklighet upplevs och levs i vardagen.

Det är kanske inte självklart att en studie om inläring av värdlandets språk ansluter sig till frågor om ras. Till exempel, vad betyder resonemanget att processen av inläring av språk rasifieras? Betyder det att ras, som en process av rasifiering, en pågående process bestående av uppsättningar av maktrelationer, utövar makt på en annars neutral språkinläring, sas. utifrån? Eller betyder det att ras som en identitetskategori är ett bland de analytiska perspektiven, såsom till exempel kön och klass, i en studie av språkinläring?

I ljuset av dessa frågor inleds denna avhandling med en analys av konstinstallationen Finnexia av Lisa Erdman. Finnexia är ett fiktivt läkemedel som sägs stödja inläring av finska och minska på ångesten att tala finska. Konstverket Finnexia synliggör föreställningen om att "problemet" med integrering i det finska samhället ligger i bristen på

finska språkkunskaper hos invandrare. Språket är tröskeln som skiljer mellan in- och utsidan av samhället. Installationen problematiserar begreppet skillnad och ifrågasätter skillnaden mellan det individuella och det samhälleliga, mellan realitet och fiktion, och mellan natur och kultur. Dessa frågor är avhandlingens drivfjäder och behandlas i kapitel ett av del ett. Syftet i kapitel två är att undersöka problemet med ethnisme/ethnicitet och ras. Kapitel tre handlar om den metodologiska innebörden i dis/kontinuitet av ras. Del två problematiserar den politisk-ekonomiska processen av rasifiering i visuell-ljud-form. Del tre ställer frågor om möjligheter och begränsningar i att omforma ras. I korthet, avhandlingen hävdar att ras drillas: dess identitet/olikhet är både möjligt och omöjligt.

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Xin Liu

Trilling race

The political economy of racialised
visual-aural encounters

This thesis investigates the matter of race in the context of Finnish language acquisition among adult migrants in Finland. Drawing primarily on an auto/ethno/graphic account of learning the Finnish language as a participant in the Finnish for foreigners classes, this thesis problematises the ontology and epistemology of race, i.e., what race is, how it is known, and what an engagement with race entails. Taking cues from the bodily practices of learning the Finnish trill or the rolling r, this study proposes a notion of “trilling race” and argues for an onto-epistemological dis/continuity that marks race’s arrival.



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