

Terror: A Speech After 9-11

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These ruminations arose in response to America's war on terrorism.¹ I started from the conviction that there is no response to war. War is a cruel caricature of what in us can respond. You cannot be answerable to war.

Yet one cannot remain silent. Out of the imperative or compulsion to speak, then, two questions: What are some already existing responses? And, how respond in the face of the impossibility of response?

When I thus assigned myself the agency of response, my institutionally validated agency kicked in. I am a teacher of the humanities. In the humanities classroom begins a training for what may produce a criticism that can possibly engage a public sphere deeply hostile to the mission of the humanities when they are understood as a persistent attempt at an uncoercive rearrangement of desires, through teaching reading. Before

1. The first version of this paper was delivered at a conference—"Responses to War"—in the Feminist Interventions series run by the Institute for Research of Women and Gender at Columbia University. I thank Rosalind Carmel Morris for inviting me to participate in it.

I begin, I would like to distinguish this from the stockpiling of apparently political, tediously radical, and often narcissistic descriptions, according to whatever is perceived to be the latest Euro-US theoretical trend, that we bequeath to our students in the name of public criticism. Uncoercive re-arrangement of desires, then; the repeated effort in the classroom. Thus I found myself constructed as a respondent.

A response not only supposes and produces a constructed subject of response, it also constructs its object. To what, then, do most of these responses respond?

The “war” on the Taliban, repeatedly declared on media by representatives of the United States government from the president on down, was only a war in the general sense. Not having been declared by act of Congress, it could not assume that proper name. And even as such it was not a response to war. The detainees at Guantanamo Bay, as we have been repeatedly reminded by Right and Left, are not prisoners of war and cannot be treated according to the Geneva Convention (itself unenforceable) because, as Donald Rumsfeld says, among other things, “they did not fight in uniform.”² The US is fighting an abstract enemy: terrorism. Definitions in Government handbooks, or UN documents, explain little. The war is part of an alibi every imperialism has given itself, a civilizing mission carried to the extreme, as it always must be. It is a war on terrorism reduced at home to due process, to a criminal case: *US v. Zacarias Moussaoui*, aka “Shaqil,” aka “Abu Khalid al Sahrawi,” with the nineteen dead hijackers named as unindicted co-conspirators in the indictment.

This is where I can begin: a war zoomed down to a lawsuit and zoomed up to face an abstraction. Even on the most general level, this binary opposition will no longer stand. For the sake of constructing a response, however, a binary is useful. To repeat, then, down to a case, up to an abstraction. I cannot speak intelligently about the law, about cases. I am not “responsible” in it. I turn to the abstraction: terror-ism.

Yet, being a citizen of the world who aspires to live and prosper under “the rule of law,” I will risk a word. When we believe that to punish the per-

2. This is not as silly as it may sound. In an interesting article in *The American Prospect*, Anne-Marie Slaughter also mentions this as an important reason: “[t]he convention governing prisoners of war defines unlawful combatants as participants in an armed conflict who abuse their civilian status to gain military advantage: those who do not carry arms openly and do not carry a ‘fixed distinctive sign’ such as a uniform or other insignia that would identify them as soldiers” (Slaughter, “Tougher than Terror,” *The American Prospect*, January 28, 2002, 2).

petrators as criminals would be smarter than, or even more correct than, military intervention, we are not necessarily moving toward a lasting peace. Unless we are trained into imagining the other, a necessary, impossible, and interminable task, nothing we do through politico-legal calculation will last, even with the chanciness of the future anterior: something will have been when we plan a something will be. Before the requirement of the emergence of a specific sort of “public sphere”—corollary to imperial systems and the movement of peoples, when different “kinds” of people came to live together—such training was part of general cultural instruction.³ After, it has become the especial burden of an institutionalized faculty of the humanities. I squash an entire history here. Kant’s enlightened subject is a scholar.⁴ In “Critique of Power” Benjamin writes, “what stands outside of the law as the educative power in its perfected form, is one of the forms of appearance of divine power.”⁵ I happen to be a Europeanist, but I have no doubt at all that historically marked intuitions about the importance of the educative moment is to be found in every cultural system. What seems important today, in the face of this unprecedented attack on the temple of Empire, is not only an unmediated intervention by way of the calculations of the public sphere—war or law—but training (the exercise of the educative power) into a preparation for the eruption of the ethical. I understand the ethical, and this is a derivative position, to be an interruption of the epistemological, which is the attempt to construct the other as object of knowledge. Epistemological constructions belong to the domain of the law, which seeks to know the other, in his or her case, as completely as possible, in order to punish or acquit rationally, reason being defined by the limits set by the law itself. The ethical interrupts this imperfectly, to listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit.

Public criticism today must insist that no amount of punishment, legal upon individuals, or military and economic upon states and collectivities—indeed, military and economic *rewards* such as invitation into alliances or

3. Livy, *History of Rome*, bk. 1, 58–60, recalling the founding of the Roman Republic, places it in Lucretia’s fear that she should be represented as having slept with a “man of base condition.”

4. Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58–64.

5. Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 297; translation modified.

entry into the World Trade Organization—is going to bring lasting change, an epistemic shift, however minor. We must also attend upon a preparation for the ethical upon which we must attend. And that is where the public responsibility of the humanities may be situated.

By contrast, the “War on Terrorism” has generated an intense resurgence of nationalism, consolidated by an act of Congress: the Patriot Act. There was an unexamined assumption by academic intellectuals that, because the world economic system acts multi- and trans-nationally, even globally at the top, a seamlessly ideological postnationalism is the contemporary episteme. That bit of irresponsible thinking has been given an indecent burial—an unintended consequence, but a consequence nonetheless.

Women are prominent in this war on terrorism, this monstrous civilizing mission. We cannot ignore the very vocal fresh-faced women, shown by CNN, at the helm of a US aircraft carrier. One of them, unnervingly young, said to the viewers, “If I can drive an aircraft carrier I can drive any truck.” This was in response to the most bizarre example of single-issue feminist patter that it has been my good fortune to hear from the mouth of a male CNN correspondent: “No one will be able to make sexist jokes about women drivers any more.” All women? The “women of Afghanistan” are coded somewhat differently.

Given this gender-prominence, a feminist critical theory must repeat that expanding the war endlessly will not necessarily produce multiple-issue gender justice in the subaltern sphere. The most visible consequences, the exacerbation of state terrorism in Israel, Malaysia, India, and elsewhere, have nothing to do with gender justice at all. If ruined Kabul is an “international city” of a rather different kind from Abd-ur Rahman’s dream at the end of the nineteenth century, with perhaps a UN peacekeeping force in place, and constant access to the globalized version of US local culture, something consonant with US and UN gender politics will again emerge as part of social consciousness.⁶ But these gender-sensitive groups will represent

6. Abd-ur Rahman Khan, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). The issue of “gender,” the abstraction of sexual difference, itself discursive since always posited as a difference, for both dominant and subordinate, is never absent from a society. I say “again” because, as I say in my text, the issue of civil justice for women can be charted along the story of the often-thwarted development of the Afghan intelligentsia. As far as I know, that story has not been put together between covers. One can start from the loss of the Silk Road monopoly, or from Abd-ur Rahman.

the subaltern as little as, indeed possibly less than, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). There is no possibility, in an American protectorate, of gender holding the repeated and effortful turning of capital into social, which is the best of the counter-globalizing struggle. That happened in the era of the seventies' "new" social movements in what we now call the "global South."

The most difficult thing as the emancipation of women by the US is celebrated over and over again is an assessment of the Soviet regime. Middle-class women are emerging from where they were before the Taliban sent them underground. Everybody knows the US created the Taliban. Indeed, in these times of quick-fix political education to match the flavor of the week, this is often the acme of left-liberal knowledgeable ability. But why were these women flourishing as professionals under the Soviet regime? There is a singular ignoring of the history of the development of the Afghan intelligentsia and its genuine involvement with the Left.⁷

There is an internal line of cultural difference within "the same culture." The emancipation of women has forever followed this line, and that story is bigger than wars, if anything can be. I comment on it in my forthcoming book *Other Asias*.⁸

Another response to Terror has been to put quotation marks around it—to commodify it, relexicalize it for History and Geography, museumize it. At the soft end of this is the marketing of a sentimentalized 9-11 that is altogether offensive. To this a superficial but scrupulous public criticism of the visual culture industry can surely apply. Contained within it there are arresting metonyms that negotiate the area between the hard and soft:

Behind an adjacent tarpaulin-cloaked fence topped with barbed wire [at Ground Zero] . . . splinters from the soaring television antenna that marked the highest point in New York City—1,732 feet into the sky—sit on their sides, right next to the punctured, debris-choked remains of Fritz Koenig's great spherical bronze sculpture, the former center-

7. Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974); Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism in Afghanistan (1917–1979): An Appraisal* (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1997).

8. I am beginning to chart out this argument in a piece entitled "Gender," initially presented at Womens Studies, University of Pennsylvania (November 14, 2001), and next at Hong Kong University (June 3, 2002) and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University (June 20, 2002).

piece to the trade center's ground-level plaza, interpreted as a symbol of world peace through trade. And nestled against the Koenig globe is . . . a charred and pitted lump of fused concrete, melted steel, carbonized furniture and less recognizable elements, a meteorite-like mass that no human force could have forged, but which was in fact created by the fiery demise of the towers.⁹

An objet trouvé, because "world peace through world trade" is a lie. And the forces are human. The Koenig globe—marked as was Yeats's lapis lazuli—has now been installed as a memorial at Historic Battery Park on the Eisenhower Mall near Bowling Green, adjacent to the Hope Garden. The Sphere, as it is called, is lexicalized into the text of New York as the capital of capital, into a phrase in the imaginary that will contain the signifiers History (Eisenhower, Battery Park), Space (Battery Park, Bowling Green, Garden), and Hope.

Close to the event, there were the conceptual banalities accompanying what is no doubt much more interesting architecturally, at a number of shows, from which I choose at random a show called "A New World Trade Center" at the Max Protetch Gallery in New York.¹⁰ At one end, the most lasting memorial—a response to the time of terror by spacing—the classic model of writing—Stonehenge-model slabs fixing the exact position of the sun during the two attacks, "Zero Zones," designed by Raymond Abraham. At the other end, the typical pomo exhortation to active forgetfulness: "Let's not even consider remembering. . . . What for?" offered by Foreign Office architects for their plioform snakelike towers. In between there were other conceptualities, including a vaguely leftish criticism of the towers as buildings: "Jet(tison) the past, out-of-sync anyway (US=bigness, power). Out of the Tower ruins will emerge generative matter" (Thomas Mayne, Architects). The wildest of them, twin towers of light, representing the inscription of the towers as noumenal rather than phenomenal, was the temporary memorial chosen by the city.

Of all the responses I find this middle-of-the-road trend the most reassuring. Europe has always been good at museumization. The quotation marks neutralize, although here too political art can fuel martial art, and the task of responsibility is never closed. This response is now mired, of course,

9. Eric Lipton and James Glanz, "A Nation Challenged: Relics; From the Rubble, Artifacts of Anguish," *New York Times*, Section 1, January 27, 2002, 1.

10. "A New World Trade Center: Design Proposals," Max Protetch Gallery, New York, January 17–February 16, 2002.

in the conflict between competition sculpture, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, and the conventions of mourning.

I come now to my second question: What response to offer in the face of the impossibility of response.

The stereotype of the public intellectual, from Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek International* to Christopher Hitchens, the freelance British gadfly, would offer statements describing US policy, coming out promptly in response to every crisis. This is undoubtedly worthy, often requiring personal courage, but it is not a response. It enhances the charisma of the intellectual and produces in the reader a feeling of being in the thick of things. This type of cognitive mapping, heavily dependent upon the fieldwork of frontline investigative journalists and humble gatherers of statistics, legitimates by reversal the idea that knowledge is an end in itself, or that there is a straight line from knowing to doing politics as human rights or street theater. But to respond means to resonate with the other, contemplate the possibility of complicity—wrenching consciousness-raising, which is based on “knowing things,” however superficially, from its complacency. Response pre-figures change. Reading Aristotle and Shelley, students typically ask, What is the difference between prediction and pre-figuration? The difference is, negatively, in the intending subject’s apparent lack of precision, in the figure; positively, it is the figure’s immense range in time and space. The figure disrupts confidence in consciousness-raising. That is the risk of a response that hopes to resonate through figuration. When we confine our idea of the political to cognitive control alone, this does not just avoid the risk of response, it closes off response altogether. We end up talking to ourselves, or to our clones abroad. Predictably, on Left and Right, you lose support when you stop us-and-them-ing, when you take away the unself-critical convenience of doing good or punishing.

It is for such situations that Mahasweta Devi wrote, “there are people for passing laws, there are people to ride jeeps, but no one to light the fire.”¹¹ The response is in the fire. You get burned if you are touched and called by the other. If anything in what follows outrages you or seems not political enough, please remember this.

The traditional Left here in the US and in Europe has by and large understood the events of September 11 as a battle between fundamentalism and the failure of democracy. Being Indian, I look more at the Indian press,

11. Mahasweta Devi, “Douloti the Bountiful,” in *Imaginary Maps*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1995), 88.

and the tone on the Left there is less exclusivist. “Nineteen Arab men . . . brought their various frustrations onto four commercial aircraft,” writes Vijay Prashad, “[t]he impoverishment of other languages of social protest leads many young people to adopt the garb of Islam to articulate their alienation.” Prashad’s tone is fairly representative.¹²

By contrast, Noam Chomsky can be read as representing the dominant line on the US Left: “‘globalization,’ or ‘economic imperialism,’ or ‘cultural values,’ [are] matters that are utterly unfamiliar to bin Laden and his associates and of no concern to them.”¹³ If, on the other hand, we think of the actants involved, politicized graduate students, rather unlike Chomsky’s stereotype, we do not have to withhold from them the bitterness of understanding that, as the stakes in the Great Game shift, and Russia and the US maneuver to come together over the black gold of the Caspian, bypassing the Taliban, who were flourishing on September 11, 2001, there was no hope that their cities would participate, to quote one of the innumerable *World Bank Policy and Research Bulletins*—this one entitled “Creating Cities That Work in the New Global Economy”—“in the changes [attendant upon world trade reaching more than \$13 trillion in 1998, that] carry the promise of large gains for developing countries, but [only] expos[ure] to greater risks” to some among them.¹⁴ Why can’t Islam be a liberation theology for radicals from the middle-class elite as a great culture—called “Islam”—continues to get separated from the mainstream toward modernity? I hold no brief for liberation theology. Indeed, in the heyday of the gender-compromised Latin American liberation theology, I would often ask, “Why can’t we have the liberation without the theology?” But the possibility must be granted if one is trying to imagine something different from the sorry stereotype.

I would agree with Professor Chomsky that the hijackers cannot be fully explained by globalization. But I would also agree with Vijay Prashad that 9-11, as it is being called now, is not just about religion. There is neither mourning nor execution without imagining the transcendental, and the transcendental, when imagined, has cultural names. But that is another matter, and, as I will argue in the final section, this set should not be given the blanket name “religion” too quickly. It is also true that a millennial confrontation is

12. Vijay Prashad, *War Against the Planet: The Fifth Afghan War, Imperialism, and Other Assorted Fundamentalisms* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2002), 7, 27.

13. Noam Chomsky, “The Theatre of Good and Evil,” <http://www.zmag.org/chomskygsf.htm>.

14. “Creating Cities That Work in the New Global Economy,” *World Bank Policy and Research Bulletin* 10, no. 4 (October–December 1999): 1.

on record, as soon as Islam emerged out of its tribality, of which I as a Europeanist know the European side rather more. George W. Bush, if he were literate, could tap the *Chanson de Roland*. Was it ever thus? I cannot know. Culture is its own explanations. Sayyid Qutb and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin tap into this too.

If this intuition—that culture is its own explanations—is credited, then anthropological ideas of culture and Marxist ideas of ideology hang out together. That “Muslims” explain things in terms of “Islam” and “Americans” in terms of “freedom” begins then to make a different kind of sense. The fragility of both under stress can then move, perhaps, toward understanding. The impersonal narrative of globalization: capital-formation producing, as much as managing, its crisis, explained as the progression from absolute state → colony → imperialism → empire, is then less persuasive as the rational explanation of 9-11.¹⁵ The explanation is contained rather in the ideology of thinking oneself the proper shadow of the transcendental—hence “global”—in a historical as well as contemporary sense. Thomas Aquinas wrenching Aristotle away from Ibn Rushd at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century is an example of this. This shadowy self-concept, unencumbered by history, but alive to visible injustice—military, political, and economic—is provided a semblance of access, speed, momentaneity by the Internet, producing a collectivity soldered by the intense male bonding of students living together, a political phenomenon well-known by all tertiary educators. It happens to soldiers too, of course, and guerrillas—but I have easier access to the foreign-student phenomenon. Through this access, I am trying to go toward these uncanny young men. If MSNBC is to be believed, the one who actually flew the plane into the tower was eighteen years old! When Terry Castle writes with embarrassment about her fixation on the young soldiers in the First World War, I perceive the risk-taking of a real response such as I too am attempting.¹⁶

No doubt the millennially imagined confrontation was present and communicated among the young men who executed the attack and who lie, unremembered, among the aggressively remembered twenty-eight hundred. Although common sense would tell us that, once embarked upon the plan, it was the dream itself that enchanted them, and the millennial confrontational imaginary became the deepest of deep background.

15. This is the general argument of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

16. Terry Castle, “Courage, *mon amie*,” *London Review of Books*, April 4, 2002, 3–12.

Unremembered, yes. But when, in May 2002, New York presented a memorial, European and military in the spectacularity or visuality of its culture of mourning, it could not not welcome the seven hijackers who lie in that ground into the economy of Nature. There is no apartheid in the transcendental.

I will now quote at some length from the article "Temple Desecration in Pre-Modern India" by Richard Eaton, published in *Frontline*.¹⁷ But first I want to mention a tiny but important detail that Sayad Mujtaba Ali recorded in his unpublished writings, that for centuries the Balkhi Afghans came to India to learn Farsi rather than go to Iran, and the major premise of *Asia Before Europe*, that the Indian Ocean rim was a much more important motor of cultural change than today's "national or religious identity-" based thinking.¹⁸ It is also true that the connections between South Asian Islam, Iran, and Central Asia are historically strong. Thus, even if we want to accept Chomsky's dismissal—they knew nothing of globalization—we can cite a cultural imaginary. Eaton writes of "the sweeping away of . . . prior political authority," and continues: "[w]hen such authority was vested in a ruler whose own legitimacy was associated with a royal temple . . . that temple was normally looted, redefined, or destroyed, any of which would have had the effect of detaching a defeated [king] from the most prominent manifestation of his former legitimacy. Temples that were not so identified but abandoned by their royal patrons and thereby rendered politically irrelevant, were normally left unharmed."

"It would be wrong," Eaton continues, "to explain this phenomenon by appealing to an essentialized 'theology of iconoclasm' felt to be intrinsic to the Islamic religion. . . . [A]ttacks on images patronized by enemy kings had been, from about the sixth century A.D. on, thoroughly integrated into . . . political behavior [in the area]. . . . In short, from about the sixth century on, images and temples associated with dynastic authority were considered politically vulnerable."¹⁹

17. Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration in Pre-Modern India," *Frontline* 17, no. 25 (December 9–22, 2000): 62–70.

18. Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Works*, vol. 7 (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 1974–). Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

19. Eaton, "Temple Desecration," 64–65. To understand why the distinction between "India" and "Afghanistan" is in this context spurious, see Martin W. Lewis, *Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 213, 13, 14. A version of this argument has now been published in *Centennial Review* (forthcoming).

I am not speaking of intended rational choice. I am speaking of a cultural imaginary producing “reason,” somewhat like the repeated marching band arrangement of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the lavish use of African Americans in the preamble to the declaration of this altogether catachrestic “war.” It is possible to add to this by doing a riff on the notion of dynasty displaced into lineages of class-mobility in the US context. I will do no more now than represent the confrontation in September as the destruction of a temple—world trade and military power—with which a state is associated. It may not be a referential message about the inequity of an ideology of trade and arms at all; not an intended rational choice. And it helped that the buildings were tall, a fact not unconnected with the representation of power. It is certainly reflected on the other side in the Stonehenge-type projects, in the project that reflects twin beams of light as tall and thin as the erstwhile towers, “beacons of light as symbols of strength,” or builds a World Art Tower behind an exact replica of Tower One, a hollow square arch flanking the filled one.

If the other side needs a temple, this side needs at least a word: *terror*. Something called “terror” is needed in order to declare a war on it—a war that extends from the curtailment of civil liberties to indefinite augmentation of military self-permission.

Without the word *terror*, this range of things, alibied in the name of women, cannot be legitimized.

I have been trying to open up that abstraction—“terror”—to figure out some possibilities. During these efforts, it has seemed increasingly clear to me that “terror” is the name loosely assigned to the flip side of social movements—extra-state collective action—when such movements use physical violence. (When a state is named a “terrorist state,” the intent implicit in the naming is to withhold state status from it, so that, technically, it enters the category of “extra-state collective action.”)²⁰ “Terror” is, of course, also the name of an affect. In the policy-making arena, “terror” as social movement and “terror” as affect come together to provide a plausible field for group psychological speculation. The social movement is declared to have psychological identity. In other words, making terror both civil and natural provides a rationale for exercising psychological diagnostics, the

20. Former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger did not know what New Social Movements were at the conference “Does America Have a Democratic Mission,” University of Virginia, March 19–21, 1998. The useless definition of terror is quoted in Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 54. Derrida has recently written an entire book on the possibility of rogue states (*Voyous* [Paris: Galilée, 2003]).

most malign ingredient of racism. I have neither the training nor the taste for such exercises. But I must still say that in the case of “terror”—sliding imperceptibly into “terrorism”—as social movement, the word is perhaps no more than an antonym—for “war,” which names legitimate violence, but also, paradoxically, for peace. And here we could wander in the labyrinth where war and peace become interchangeable terms, although the status of war as agent and peace as object never wavers. We have come to accept the oxymoron: “peacekeeping forces.” The United Nations High Commission for Refugees and Save the Children-UK, in a report of February 2002, asked peacekeeping missions to stop trafficking in women and girl children. Feminists agitate against the sexually rapacious behavior of “peacekeeping personnel.”²¹ The scandal of rape within the US Army is now well known. At the same time, Barbara Crossette offers the conventional wisdom, in an article entitled “How to Put a Nation Back Together Again,” that “faster-moving armies are necessary.”²² Here is the usual division between the various spheres of discourse, but they work within the same cultural imaginary, this time almost global: Conquering armies violate women.

Where “terror” is an affect, the line between agent and object wavers. On the one hand, the terrorists terrorize a community, fill their everyday with terror. But there is also a sense in which the terrorist is taken to be numbed to terror, does not feel the terror of terror, and has become unlike the rest of us by virtue of this transformation. When the soldier is not afraid to die, s/he is brave. When the terrorist is not afraid to die, s/he is a coward. The soldier kills, or is supposed to kill, designated persons. The terrorist kills, or may kill, just persons. In the space between “terrorism” as a social movement and terror as affect, we can declare victory. Although civil liberties, including intellectual freedom, are curtailed, and military permissiveness exacerbated, although racial profiling deforms the polity and the entire culture redesigns itself for prevention, and although, starting on September 28, 2001, the UN Security Council adopts wide-ranging antiterrorism measures, we can still transfer the register to affect and say, “We are not terrorized, we have won.” And the old topos of intervening for the sake of women continues to be deployed. It is to save Afghan women from terror that we must keep the peace by force of arms. I want to distinguish the suicide bomber, the kamikaze pilot, from these received binaries.

21. UNHCR and Save the Children-UK, *Note for Implementing and Operational Partners on Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*, February 2002.

22. Barbara Crossette, “How to Put a Nation Back Together Again,” *New York Times*, Week in Review Section, November 25, 2001, 3.

Single coerced yet willed suicidal “terror” is in excess of the destruction of dynastic temples and the violation of women, tenacious and powerful residual.

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These comments on suicide bombing have provoked so much hostility that I include here some words of explanation that I offered to Dr. Michael Bernet, in response to a specific query:

I believe responsible humanities teaching strives at uncoercive rearrangement of desires in the student.

An extreme violation of this responsibility is seen in groups such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad, which coercively rearrange desires until coercion seems identical with the will of the coerced. I, like many others, think that the conduct of these groups is tied to the extremist politics of the state of Israel. It must, however, be admitted that these groups are now out of control, not a little because it is not possible to credit any offer of “peace” as reliable.

Those whose desires are rearranged so as to undertake suicide bombing are invariably the young, whose attitude to life is peculiarly vulnerable to such coercion.

I am a pacifist, I cannot and do not condone violence, practiced by the state or otherwise. I therefore also believe that violence cannot be brought to an end by ruthless extermination. I believe that we must be able to imagine our opponent as a human being, and to understand the significance of his or her action. It is in this belief—not to endorse suicide bombing but to be on the way to its end, however remote—that I have tried to imagine what message it might contain. Of course this does not mean each suicide bomber has these specific thoughts in mind! Here, too, I think things are out of control and whole generations have been affected. Mine may therefore be seen as the counsel of despair, but certainly not as an endorsement of violence.

It is convenient for the laws of war to distinguish between civilians and soldiers. It is just that there be law, but law is not justice. In view of justice and the discourse of the ethical, human life cannot be marked for death by positive law.

Single coerced yet willed suicidal “terror” is in excess of the destruction of dynastic temples and the violation of women, tenacious and powerful residual. It has not the banality of evil. It is informed by the stupidity of belief taken to extreme. It is we, who can no longer die young, who are banal, albeit with the banality of the merely quotidian. The Kantian sublime is, strictly speaking, and from the point of view of the spectator, for whom alone the sublime “is” sublime, stupid. The sublime is mindless. We bring it under something like control because “the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty” kicks in.²³ If in what I now say you feel distaste, even rejection, you will be tasting the *risk* in response. But do not mistake this for Stockhausen’s aesthetic gush.²⁴ To legitimize the largest number killed by diagnosing “evil empire” is no good either way. That too is to close off response.

I am not suggesting that violence or the exercise of power, legitimized or delegitimized, is sublime in the colloquial sense. For me the word “sublime” (more than the German *Erhabene*, such is the force of English) has been forever marked by Kant. It names a structure: the thing is too big for me to grasp; I am scared; Reason kicks in by the mind’s immune system and shows me, by implication, that the big thing is mindless, “stupid” in the sense in which a stone is stupid, or the body is (*OED* sense 2). I call the big mindless thing “sublime.”

I am also not suggesting that political analyses and resistances and, on another level, aid and human rights, are unnecessary. I am suggesting that if in the imagination we do not make the attempt to figure the other as imaginative actant, political (and military) solutions will not remove the binary which led to the problem in the first place. Hence cultural instruction in the exercise of the imagination.

Even within this suggestion, I am not describing all the acts of September 11, 2001, as “sublime” in the Kantian sense. It is an imaginative exercise in experiencing the impossible—stepping into the space of the other—without which political solutions come drearily undone into the continuation of violence. To paraphrase Devi: “there are many to offer political analyses and solutions, but no one to light the fire.” Cultural instructions through the imagination in time of war is seen, at best, as aestheticization and, at worst, as treason. But that too is situational.

23. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 141. The Analytic of the Sublime goes from 128–212.

24. It was widely reported that the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen had, days after September 11, made remarks to journalists in Hamburg to the effect that the attack on the World Trade Center was a work of art. “Attacks Called Great Art,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2001, Section E, 3.

Suicide bombing—and in this case the planes were living bombs—is a purposive self-annihilation, a confrontation between oneself and oneself—the extreme end of autoeroticism, killing oneself as other, in the process killing others. It is when one sees oneself as an object, capable of destruction, in a world of objects, so that the destruction of others is indistinguishable from the destruction of the self. The scary thing is that the destruction of the royal temple can be referenced as so transcendental a task that mere human lives become as nothing, theirs as mine. This is the moment one cannot, in principle, imagine—but no use covering that inability with that word again. We have no idea if these men had killed before—they don't seem different from foreign students anywhere. We hear from those phone calls from the planes that one of them cut a passenger's throat. It is a horrible detail. Was it to bring the aura of death into this "licensed lunacy," not merely to think it and have it happen, but to pretend to have control over that *peu profond ruisseau calomnié la mort*?

Whatever it was, this act of global confrontation was neither resistance nor multitudinous. There is no such thing as collective death. It cannot be punished, despite the efforts at due process. It cannot be condoned as a legitimate result of bad US policy abroad, as in the usual US-centered political analyses. Such a gesture matches the media overkill to "mourn" the dead with every possible sentimentality and thus attempt to contain the sublimity of Ground Zero. Many of us saw the second plane hit the second tower live (if that is the word) on that morning of September 11. That enclosed object, moving across a sunny sky quickly, with no special effects, hitting the tower and bursting into thick fire is "beyond Ate"—beyond "the limit that human life can only briefly cross."²⁵ Its unremarkable progress contained a collection of heterogeneous personal terror, connecting so desperately to transcendentality, that cannot be grasped. I am a pacifist; I cannot support violence rationally. But we must acknowledge the sublimity of terror, as in the inadequate name of a human affect beyond affect, rather than the catch-all name for any act of violence not authorized by the state.

The second plane, hitting, as seen live, can be imagined within the structure of the Kantian sublime conceived as a limit to imagining. On May 21, 2002, on *Late Show with David Letterman*, Diane Sawyer kept saying, "Charlie [Charles Gibson, the other anchorperson] and I were in denial as we were commenting"—and that denial is the moment in the structure described in the Analytic of the Sublime when the subject feels "displeasure

25. Jacques Lacan, "The Splendor of Antigone," in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: Seminar Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Routledge, 1992), 262–63.

from the inadequacy of the imagination.”²⁶ I was watching that channel. I have no memory of their “denial,” and that too computes. Commenting on the May 30, 2002, memorial for the removal of the last standing column of the World Trade Center, Richard Meyer said, “The moment I saw the second plane, I knew we were at war.” That too can be a moment in the structure of coping with the sublime. It is the moral will at its most restricted: I can destroy the thing that scares me by force of response: war is a caricature of what in us can respond. I have suggested that suicide bombing undoes the difference between the bomber and his or her enemy. And I have suggested that, behind the smoke screens, the definitive predication of terrorism was “violent extra-state collective action,” that a “terrorist state” disqualifies itself for stateship.

Insofar as the United States makes its own rules as it expands its war on terrorism, it allows “terrorist states” to concentrate and legitimize their policies. I am thinking, of course, of Israel and India, but so-called preventive antiterrorism now spans a good part of the globe. It would be out of place here to offer accounts and analyses of such state terrorism. I hope you remember that I was lukewarm about the potted analyses that accompany each crisis. I will comment in closing on one isolated point for each case, points that relate to the question of public criticism—the training for ethics in the humanities.

First, then, Palestine. If 9-11 was a boy thing, in the struggle against Israel in Palestine we encounter female suicide bombers. I do not think this is a gendered phenomenon. Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other, where you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on, with the implication that there is no dishonor in such shared death. It is only the young whose desires can be so drastically rearranged. I have no sympathy for those who train the young in this way. It is the extreme case of cultural instruction—coercion at the full, simulating choice, imagination represented as revealed truth. And this is where the dialogue must start—between a humanities training trivialized here and in extremis there. It is the *history* of this failure of cultural instruction, recoded as triumph, that we must question, not the instruction itself. For that history, leading now to apartheid and unspeakable violence in *their* homeland, can be so narrativized as to persuade the young to die.

The female suicide bomber, thus persuaded, does not make a gendered point. Put them over against those female warriors on CNN and you

26. Kant, *Power of Judgment*, 141.

will see that in suicide bombing there is no recoding of the gender struggle. When the dust settles, and at the moment it does not seem likely that it will settle over anything but the ruins of Palestine, the gender divisions will perhaps settle into the same or similar lines. Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, the subaltern in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” was a woman who used her gendered body to inscribe an unheard message; the bomber who died with Rajiv Gandhi, also a woman, did not.²⁷ (It is interesting that in the male imaginary, the female suicide bomber is gender-marked by the reproductive norm. I am thinking of *The Terrorist*, a film made by an Indian Tamil about Sri Lanka, and of *The Cyclist*, the brilliant novel by Viken Berberian, a brave attempt to imagine the inner world of the suicide bomber.)²⁸

Even though I am trying to imagine suicide bombing without closing it off with the catch-all word “terror,” the real lesson for the young potential suicide bombers may be that their message will never be heard. Even if a terrifying number of children become suicide bombers, they will remain exceptional, even as suicide is always an exceptional death—an impossible phrase. The most pathetic and most powerful thing about suicide bombing is that, like the ghost dance, its success is that it cannot succeed. In the face of this, public criticism can only repeat, taking the risk of responding with the utmost banality: it is not worth the risk.

I come, finally, to India. The conflict that emerged in the visibility of our everyday, in the context of the War on Terrorism, in the summer of 2002, was Kashmir. But if, in the Palestinian case, no one ever mentions that the West Bank is occupied territory, in the Indian case, the state of Gujarat, where genocidal violence against Muslim citizens is condoned by state and police, never makes it into the visualization of international public culture. Indeed, *The Economist* calls the Hindu attacks on Muslims in Gujarat “true but irrelevant.”²⁹ In closing this section, I want to cite these few words from a poignant piece by Harsh Mander—a former government official who resigned after writing this piece, which is available on the Internet.³⁰

“I have never known a riot which has used the sexual subjugation of women so widely as an instrument of violence as in the recent mass bar-

27. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

28. *The Terrorist*, directed by Santosh Sivan, 1998; Viken Berberian, *The Cyclist* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

29. *The Economist*, June 1, 2002, 11.

30. Harsh Mander, “Cry, the Beloved Country: Reflections on the Gujarat Massacre,” <http://www.sabrang.com/gujarat/statement/nv2.htm>.

barity in Gujarat,” Mander writes. He then goes on to comment on the rule of law:

As one who has served in the Indian Administrative Service for over two decades, I feel great shame at the abdication of duty of my peers in the civil and police administration. . . . The law . . . required them to act independently, . . . , impartially, decisively. . . . If even one official had so acted in Ahmedabad, she or he could have deployed the police forces and called in the army to halt the violence and protect the people in a matter of hours. No riot can continue beyond a few hours without the active connivance of the local police and magistracy.

My piece describes the long-term effort that subtends such necessary and immediate decisions. At the end of his piece, Mander invokes the ethical by way of a story:

I recall a story of the Calcutta riots, when Gandhi was fasting for peace. A Hindu man came to him, to speak of his young boy who had been killed by the Muslim mobs, and of the depth of his anger and longing for revenge. And Gandhi is said to have replied: If you really wish to overcome your pain, find a young [Muslim] boy, just as young as your son, . . . whose parents have been killed by Hindu mobs. Bring up that boy like you would your own son, but bring him up in the Muslim faith to which he was born. Only then will you find that you can heal your pain, your anger, and your longing for retribution.

If so far I have urged the humanities to train the imagination so that the ethical interruption can postpone the attempt merely to know the other—even in Cultural Studies occupied with one’s “own culture”—here the tables are turned. What is offered as the identity of the subject must be accessed in the imagination when every impulse is to repudiate it. It is no use saying, with the reverse fundamentalists, true Hinduism is not like this; or to exclaim, with the secularists, I am a secularist, I do not vote with these people. The toughest task is to imagine myself a Hindu, when everything in me resists, to understand what in us can respond so bestially, rather than merely to show cause, or to impose rules that will break, in every polity but a police state, unless prepared for by a sustained and uncoercive rearrangement of desires with moves learned from the offending culture.

As the humanities instruct us to instruct, critical theory distinguishes the discriminations of a global culture dominating our pitifully local mind-sets.

2

I taught at the University of Hawai'i–Manoa in the spring of 2003. Part of the job was to deliver public lectures. I had proposed “Terror” in advance of arrival. By the time I spoke, Iraq had broken. The university was profoundly politicized. There was a small enclave of native Hawai'ian students and faculty, there was Pearl Harbor and the military base—what one of them described as “weapons of mass destruction under the Turtle[-shaped island].” The protest carried a peculiar poignancy, since the military base was one of the largest employers of the Hawai'ian underclass, in this place that had been forcibly annexed by “the Bayonet Constitution” of 1887.³¹ I could not recycle the initial script. I have attempted to indicate its embedding in this short second section.

In the midst of what seemed to be a disastrous engagement with Iraq, I went back to reading Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Beyond Vietnam,” the 1967 speech he delivered at Riverside Church in New York, a minute's walk from where I live now. Again and again in the text of the speech, I found Dr. King exhorting us to “speak for those who have been designated as our enemies,” because “the human spirit [does not] move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world.” “How do they judge us?” King asked. “When we ask why they do not leap to negotiate, these things must be remembered,” he said. It was first in Hawai'i that I was able to connect my efforts to imagine the suicide bomber with these exhortations. I spoke there of the fact that this resonance with Dr. King's effort had received hostile responses from various persons and journals and this in itself was cause for alarm. I referred to the speech given in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on April 30, 1967, which contained these powerful words: “Don't let anybody make you think that God chose America as His divine messianic force to be—a sort of policeman of the whole world. God has a way of standing before the nations with judgment, and it seems that I can hear God saying to America: ‘You are too arrogant! If you don't change your ways, I will rise up and break the backbone of your power.’” I wondered—even as I repeated the apologia offered to Dr. Michael Bernet—if these words applied to the curtailment of civil liberties, including intellectual freedom, the exacerbation of military permissiveness, the deformation of the polity through racial profiling, and the re-

31. On the Bayonet Constitution, see Jon Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui: The History of the Hawaiian Nation Until 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

designing of the entire culture for the prevention of autoimmunity, of which I spoke in section 1.

I pointed out that we are now so used to the idea that it is the United States' responsibility as the new Empire to police the world that we quibble over containment or war, war over oil as opposed to a just war, assassination as opposed to regime change. I shared with that audience my comments, made to the then provost of Columbia University, after listening to a crazy debate on Iraq between Alan Dershkowitz and George P. Fletcher:

I felt that I could not actually ask only a question—to an extent the response could not come from what the debaters had presented. It was pretty unsettling to hear “It is sometimes better to do the right thing rather than the legal thing.” This is of course the grounds for civil disobedience, but precisely because it is civil. We cannot speak of states operating in this way. When it comes to state practice, it turns to vigilantism, precisely because there is no authority to “disobey.” I was also a bit unnerved that there were hands up in the room for condoning the right “to kill.” Even one hand up for this is unnerving—since we were not speaking of capital punishment, which I do oppose, but which at least can be discussed within an idea of law. It is not correct to think that, because “inalienable” rights have been again and again violated, they do not exist. Surely, the difference between having torture warrants and having an individual policeman decide that torture was okay is that the latter can be punished if discovered! The problem with deciding in favor of legalized targeted assassination is surely that if a covert targeted assassination is discovered, then, at least, in perhaps a utopian vision of the rule of law, such a thing can be retroactively punished? It was troublesome to see how a debate presumably on our right to invade Iraq turned into such a rhetorical tirade against Palestine. (Here I would want to use stronger words.) The repetitive condemnation of Palestinians showed no ability to imagine them in a material context where Israel figured as anything other than “a good figure.” This is where George Fletcher’s idea in *Romantics at War*, that romanticism was simply a variety of irrationalism, may be questionable.³² We must call the glass half full rather than half empty. Romanticism was a strike for a robust imagination—for me, it is summarized in Shelley’s remark, precisely

32. George P. Fletcher, *Romantics at War: Glory and Guilt in the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

in the context of the beginnings of capitalism, that “we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know.”³³ It is the ability to imagine the other side as another human being, rather than simply an enemy to be psyched out, that is the greatest gift of romanticism. What I was saying the other day about the humanities comes in here, because this is the terrain where a solid grounding in the humanities allows one to think the spirit rather than the letter of the law, and not think of the imagination as mere unreason. Although I do think that Mike Davis, in his new book *Dead Cities*, is somewhat over the top, he certainly does have a good deal of documented material that would not allow us to think that we are above the law because we will never be irresponsible with weapons of mass destruction.³⁴ Not to mention Agent Orange! I grant that I am somewhat outside the grounds of the debate because historical experience makes me very uncomfortable with the pre-comprehended assumption on both sides that America should think of itself as having an imperial mandate. I admit that George Fletcher’s repeated assertion that there are no good or bad states, but equal states, can be read as a questioning of this pre-comprehension.

It troubled me then that there were student hands up in that Law School auditorium condoning murder, albeit to be carried out by the state. This too is a coercive rearrangement of desire. And such a possibility makes it necessary to call upon the robust imagination, once again, to undo the binary opposition between bad cop and good cop—and remember that they are both cops. The impulse to help by *enforcing* human rights, by giving things, giving money, commodifying literacy, ignoring gender-consciousness, has a relationship with the impulse to kill. I quote Kant: “Although . . . there can still be legally good actions, [if] . . . the mind’s attitude is . . . corrupted at its root . . . the human being is designated as evil.”³⁵ Today, with the endorsement of the assassination of Sheikh Yassin, the backbone of the rule of law is broken.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christian, “the field of his moral vision”

33. Percy Bysshe Shelley, “The Defence of Poetry,” in *Shelley’s Critical Prose*, ed. Bruce R. McElderry (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 8.

34. Mike Davis, *Dead Cities, and Other Tales* (New York: New Press, 2002).

35. Immanuel Kant, “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78. Hereafter, subsequent pages are cited parenthetically in the text.

was religious, and he was by profession a man of God. It was his reliance upon the transcendental that gave him his strength. In "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason," Kant investigates if a secularism is possible without some intuition of the transcendental that cannot be reasonably enforced. His answer is "no," because mere reason is by nature unwilling to a moral working through (*Bearbeitung*) (95). It merely likes to patch a minus with a plus, push legally good actions with no attention to the mind's corrupt attitudes.

Kant has the courage, in this text, to compare the bloody violence of the Aboriginal to the bloodless malice of the academic scene. In the house of mere reason, he cannot allow himself to move from determinant to reflexive judgment, to philosophize without the Aboriginal as human example, as he had done in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, two years before.³⁶ In the same way, we would say that the heavenly rewards, sounding so medieval in English translation (as a translator I have something to say about this), that we associate with Islamic "terror" may be compared with the calculative or carrot-and-stick push-and-pull with which the management of peace and war is undertaken by the new imperial interests: here a human rights violation, there an economic sanction, as it were. Kant calls this tit-for-tat approach to salvation *Nebengeschäfte*, generally translated "secondary tasks," relegating the work of the ethical state to the moral will alone. I believe Jacques Derrida is right in suggesting that a persistent critique of these *Nebengeschäfte*, calculative reason standing in for moral labor, must be taken as a primary task in a multicultural and multifaith world.³⁷ This task is absolutely crucial today. Those sanitized secularists who are hysterical at the mention of religion are quite out of touch with the world's peoples and have buried their heads in the sand. Class-production has allowed them to rationalize and privatize the transcendental, and they see this as the welcome telos of everybody everywhere, without historical preparation for this particular class-episteme.

Radical alterity, an otherness that reason needs but which reason cannot grasp, can be given many names. *God* in many languages is its most recognizable name. Some have given it the name of "man," some "nation," "nature," "culture." Kant's good faith was reflected in his acknowledgement that mere reason "needs" the transcendental. It is this good

36. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 26–29 n. 32.

37. Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2001), 42–101.

faith that allows our more stringent position, recognition of a repeatedly de-transcendentalized radical alterity, to coexist, however discontinuously, with faith itself, always watchful for the calculative.

These are untimely words in a world of urgency. But times are always urgent and cultural preparation—now reflected in the teaching of the humanities—is always for the long haul.

3

I had begun making the connection to Kant and that led me to secularism. The disclaimer in the paragraph below is a continuation of the unwillingness to recycle that had set in in Hawai'i, I think. Our session at the MLA had been set at the same time as a memorial panel for Edward W. Said, who had died three months earlier. I was unhappy to be absent from that session and realized how much my comments were a supplement to Said's magisterial work on the secular critic, who resembles the scholar, the *Gelehrte*, the hero of the Kantian Enlightenment, in being "oppositional" to every system, the individual who resists systems.³⁸ I wanted to look at "ordinary people." Here, then, is that third text, with its recalcitrant opening:

This is not a polemic against the current state of war. There are others more capable of offering informed polemic. It is also the case that, given the indifference and arrogance of the war-makers, the recitation of polemic in non-policy-oriented conferences has limited usefulness. Further, I do not believe stockpiling of details about what is obviously true—that politics is misrepresented as religion by war-makers when the occasion suits—will do anything for secularism. Secularism is not a mind-set—it is an abstraction that must be protected. It is no use thickening it with affect, like narrative "new math." No. Located as we are at the university, it is both the university and the secular that we need to rethink.

The university is in the world. And the world's universities are, no doubt, of the "European model [which], after a rich and complex medieval history, has become prevalent . . . over the last two centuries in states of a democratic type."³⁹ Yet that structure does not operate everywhere with the same degree of efficiency, the same degree of informed consent or critique,

38. Edward W. Said, "Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1–30; "Gods That Always Fail," in *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 120.

39. Jacques Derrida, "The University without Condition," in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 202.

with the same quality or connection with the state. As the best in the United States think more and more of world governance, in the name of sustainable development and ethical globalization, and human rights—to oppose the murderous collusion of the military and the economic—in the context of *world* governance, then—we must think of all of these different *kinds* of universities, rather than just generalize from the universities we know, as if the world were one. If we move through the spectrum, the ideas we will see circulating among students and teachers will be “cultural identity,” “cultural difference,” “national sovereignty,” “minority politics.” More often than not, these issues shade off into varieties of religious freedom. I hasten to add that this is not invariably the case.

The historical place and nature of state religions are of course important. But since an active culture is the least tangible part of human behavior, the signs that spell “culture” for a mobilized collectivity are often indistinguishable from signs that can easily spell “religion.” Religion in this sense is the ritual markers of how we worship and how we inscribe ourselves in sexual difference. These are performative gestures of being-human, needing no referential “evidence,” being between nature and super-nature, a precarious place that needs such semiosis constantly. It is a place that captures and controls the possibility of the transcendental by writing it as that which is worshiped. We have seen that Kant dismisses this ground-level institutionality of religion, synonymous, as it were, with the automatic negotiations of culture, as *Nebengeschäfte*. This eighteenth-century point of view is still around in those who preach “the true religion has been hijacked into something terrible” or “a few bad examples are corrupting the whole.” There is nothing necessarily wrong with those sentiments. But if we are thinking secularism, we must come to terms with this perennial level of something that we might as well call religion, but just as well call culture, which is always ready to bite because it *is* a species of proto-public sphere, in Said’s word an “affiliation-in-filiation,” for brothers and sisters of brothers, honorary brothers. It is neither possible nor desirable to be precise here. And Samuel Huntington is so wrong because he performs a precise identification between religion and culture.⁴⁰ In this imprecise and imbricated normality, it is not a question, strictly speaking, of belief, but of something *like* linguistic competence. And the competence is called on, demanding different levels of semantic negotiations, in different psychopolitical situations. Gendering

40. Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

plays a strong role here, with different levels of acquiescence, even consensuality. Indeed, it can be said that this is the groundrock of the semantics of gender, the weave of permissible narratives. The preparation for secularism is political: to work for a world where religion can shrink to this mundane normality.

In order to sustain such a world, assuming its establishment, it is the skills we teach in the humanities that we need. I am speaking, of course, of the skills of reading, of catching the generic difference between registers of language, with the hope of a “setting to work” to meet the world in which we live, in order to read Martin Luther King Jr.’s example of one who so loved his enemies that he died for them as a narrative, singular and unverifiable. It should be clear from my description of the situation of religion that secularism—which I will define in a moment—is a persistent critique; a persistent setting to work to recognize language as system rather than ground for belief. If we are to keep working for such a world, we must partially (only partially) undo the lesson of the last few European centuries and massively redo the program of disenfranchised histories. It sounds pretty scary put this way. But if we think of it as a collective enterprise that we undertake in the classroom, it need not work that way.

If the signs that spell “culture” for a collectivity are often indistinguishable from signs that can easily spell “religion,” this can also be true of a “culture” that fetishizes mere reasonableness. In its most sublime mode, Kant shows this in “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason.” I have spoken of this text in passing. Let me spend a few moments on it now.

Although he made an attempt to show that all religions tended toward dramatizing the role reason must play in order to ensure an ethical collectivity, there was no doubt in Kant’s mind that Christianity is “the first true *church*” (181).

This conviction, that the judeo-christian is *the* secular religion, is the prejudice that still rides us and is only legitimized by reversal, as in Sayyid Qutb’s work on Islam. If the judeo-christian is seen as the religion of reason, de-transcendentalized into secularism, that is *also* a description of capturing and controlling the possibility of the transcendental as that which is worshiped, the characteristic of religion-as-culture that I advanced above.

My point is that, whatever your politics or your religion, the place of reason in whatever secularism might mean remains implacable. If reason is to be our ally, and there is no compromise on that one, it cannot be fetishized, as in the most common version of secularism, laundered judeo-

christianity. Today's soft option, "teaching tolerance," is of course a good thing. But as Kant's real effort at tolerance two centuries ago, at the end of "Mere Reason," shows us, tolerance allows you to de-transcendentalize all other religions but the religion-culture language that governs your own idiom. Basically, it is the same problem as with cultural relativism. Tolerance, such an easy virtue in theory, is difficult to practice. It is, at best, a private virtue. A "tolerant" state is a secular state. We are talking the juridico-legal, not the psychological. It flourishes best when religion is de-transcendentalized into something like linguistic competence, which is most easily done in the absence of the need to mobilize, not when it is privatized by a particular class.

It is clear, in other words, that the two pieces of machinery bequeathed to us by the European eighteenth century—the separation of church and state and the separation of the public and the private—are too race- and class-specific and indeed gender-specific to hold up a just world. Privatization of the transcendental works for a handful. Our world shows us that secularism is not an episteme. It is a faith in reason in itself and for itself, protected by abstract external structures—the flimsiest possible arrangement to reflect the human condition: under the circumstances, I invite you to think of secularism as an active and persistent practice, an accountability, of keeping the structures of agency clear of belief as faith. Secularism is too rarefied, too existentially impoverished to take on the thickness of a language. It is a mechanism to avoid violence that must be learned as mere reasonableness. It is as thin as an ID card, not as thick as "identity."

What role can we play in promoting the practice of secularism rather than simply "being secular"? Think of the role religious belief has in fact come to play in the contemporary multicultural university, and you will see that "being secular" is often a matter of preserving the letter of secularism. What I am going to suggest is not going to insist that there is some enlightened spirit of secularism for which we ought to initiate new conversion rites, but that we ought to acknowledge that secularism is only ever in the letter, and that we ought to train fiercely to protect it as such. No religion has a special privilege to it.

(At the 2003 Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association, I was fortunate enough to receive many proofs of resonance. One of the most important came from my old friend Phil Lewis, who commented that this was my most important contribution to the thinking of a broad-based secularist practice: that it was only ever "in the letter." "But," said Phil, "it will be difficult for people to understand, Gayatri." I think the training that is

now required is for the sake of this understanding, that secularism is a set of abstract reasonable laws that must be observed to avoid religious violence.)

At this point, it should also be clear that any assertion of the “universalism” of reason-based secularism is suspect for me because it finesses the fact that such assertions are based on the assumption that the university—the place designated for the training in deep subjective change—is not only an institution of class-mobility, but of a specifically European-style class-mobility. However European the model of the modern university may be, our commitment to multiculturalism resists that scenario. Indeed, even the description of the forum at the MLA reflected that in its goal of presenting “visions of the contemporary university that go beyond the Europe–North American axis.” It is precisely the figure of “the universal secular intellectual” that will no longer suffice for what the university must produce today.

It is in order to think the alternative that I turn to Kant, for he was the philosopher who gave the best articulation to the universal secular intellectual as produced by the university: it is when a scholar writes for all times and all places that he is enlightened. For singular individuals of our generation, that is still a noble ideal, and that is where I have placed Said’s thinking of secular criticism.

Yet accompanying Kant’s wonderful statement about publishing comes exhortations to be obedient on the job where we would expect a statement of public freedoms. If we look at Kant’s philosophical writings, especially “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” written at the end of his life, we will see that Kant’s idea of a common ethical life—a *gemeines Wesen* for which the translation “public sphere” would be altogether inadequate—is based not on the separation of the public and the private but on the fact that all human beings have the *same* reason and therefore the goal of humanity is collective. (The church, which is a public institution, also messes with the private.) As I have tried to argue, it is upon the universality of reason that the promise of secularism is also based. Because Kant was deeply aware of the limits of reason, he asked himself if it was possible to forge a species of what we might as well call secularism, which would incorporate intuitions of the transcendental. Let us see how he solved his problem and what we, who must be fair to our debt to Kant and yet must undo him, can learn from him.

To begin with, although reason is one, and indeed that is the ground of ethical commonality, Kant fractures that unity, rather more than we do when we put our blind faith in secularism as we understand it. (Kant himself always asserted that the various reasons were different forms of appear-

ance of the same reason. What I am describing here can take that on board.) Between the fractured functions of reason, Kant establishes a skewed relationship. Pure reason, of which Kant is most suspicious, is the highest function of reason. And mere reason, which is what we work with every day and which can only be accountable—*zurechnungsfähig* rather than responsible—is inimical to moral labor. Therefore, in describing how we would philosophize the moral in pure reason, Kant asks us, literally, to make room for—*einräumen*—the effects of grace.

If this is too Eurocentric, it is because I need to question the reading of Kant that is used to justify world governance.⁴¹ There is a certain degree of self-confidence in such justifications, whereas Kant's relentless honesty makes him shackle reason.

In the spatial institution of pure reason, then, we must make room for "the effects of grace." And, in the last section of this last "critique," where he is speaking of world governance, with repeated theological references (since he is fighting the theological faculty), he insists that a global institution based on ethical commonness of being is impossible. The ethical cannot be immediately institutionalized.

I learn many of my ways of reading the past from Marx, and this is where I want to read Kant as Marx read Aristotle, with admiration but with the historical acknowledgement that he could not imagine the value-form. Even within his brilliantly fractured model of the oneness of reason, Kant spoke of "effect of *grace*" because he could not imagine a European-style university where the theology faculty was not dominant. We have to run with the revolutionary force of the word "effect," clear out of the theological into the aesthetic. "Effect" comes as close as Kant can get to de-transcendentalizing Grace. Grace is caught in the figure of something like a metalepsis—the effect of an effect. Since pure reason—or indeed any kind of reason—cannot know the cause, all that is inscribed is an effect.

Hannah Arendt commented on the political potential of Kant's thinking of the aesthetic.⁴² What I am proposing links up with that thought. Most of us are familiar with the slightly off-key English translation of the aesthetic:

41. It would require a great deal of space and time to support this statement adequately. Suffice it to refer to the close of the document signed by Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* on May 31, 2002. Derrida's position on Kant is altogether more nuanced, as evidenced by his many writings on Kant throughout his career.

42. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

purposiveness without purpose. We know that Kant tells us that the aesthetic gives practice to the faculty that can represent without objective concepts. Then, ever the thinker of checks and balances, in the Third Critique, Kant straps in the tendency of the imagination to shoot too far by emphasizing the task not of reason but of understanding.

In “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” Kant implicitly, and to a large extent without acknowledgement, shifts the task of representation-without-concept—figuration—to the figuring of Grace as near-metalepsis—unverifiable effect of an effect—to a parergon or outside-work of pure reason. It is not understanding that is now a check on the Imagination, as it was in the Third Critique. It is figuration that supplements mere reason’s calculative moral laziness.

I apologize for the abstruseness of this last paragraph. Universalist multiculturalism would go down much better. But bear with me for just a few more pages.

In support of my reading, I offer the fact that “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason” is an extended allegorical or dis-figuring reading of the New Testament—a species of liberation theology. And I am now going to make a suggestion that I hope won’t rattle you. We will go back to suicide bombing.

Liberation theology works because it literalizes the metaphorology of a religious culture. Suicide bombing works the same way. I am not equating the two, nor am I endorsing either. The only thing they share is bad gender politics. Over the past few years, I have been trying to imagine suicide bombing because I am convinced that to dismiss it as pathological, murderous, or aberrant is to speak from the positions I have already discussed. Have you ever heard Palestinian mothers lament the transformation of their sons and daughters to suicide bombers by the current situation? This is what I was speaking of at the outset when I said that the ever-accessible bilinguality between religion and culture as idiom becomes mobilized in situations. If liberation theology mobilizes by literalizing the metaphor, in the case of suicide bombing we see the recoding of religious narrative as referential in the narrowest sense.

But training in the humanities does neither of these two moves—it teaches us to learn from the singular and the unverifiable. If the university is to be secular, it requires a sustained epistemic effort that can only come from the humanities. The idea that secularism can be supported by training in political science and law alone belongs to privative disciplinary formations, where the subject’s control is customarily left unquestioned. It

is the humanities that can provide continuing practical instruction in de-transcendentalizing the radically other—re-inventing grace as necessary metalepsis—a lesson learned by undoing the prophet of that earlier style.⁴³ The humanities must learn to de-trivialize themselves and to stake their suitable place at the university of this troubled century. I am utterly appalled by conservative young colleagues who insist with amazing insularity on teaching “only literary skills”—what are they?—because the students arrive untrained; as the world breaks around them.

If we want to take up the challenges of the twenty-first century, we must also learn languages. The simplified reading I have offered of Kant would be impossible from even the best translations into English. And we must not look for the vicissitudes of the translation for the word “secular” as applied to states and societies in “the rest of the world.”

No. The task is to find something like the “secular/transcendental” binary in the many languages of the world rather than offer abstruse translations of the English or the metropolitan words. *Din aur dunya* and *jagatik o pamarthik* are the two I work with as candidates for undoing: the two major religions of India. Indeed, I came up with the definition of *religion* as ritual markers of how we worship—*ki korey thakur pujo kara hoy*—as I was speaking to a rural woman in West Bengal on December 16, a barefoot teacher who was completely incapable of explaining the lesson on religion written in the elementary school textbook.

I close as I began, exercising my institutional validation as a teacher of narrative. I open *Baby No-Eyes*, a novel by the Maori writer Patricia Grace.⁴⁴ My friend and colleague Carolyn Sinavaiana helped me teach this book and gave an impressive account of the Maori worldview that acknowledged not the distinction between public and private but rather a circulatory commonness among all its members. I mention above Kant’s notion of the ethical common being and the oneness of reason. As I argued about Buchi

43. Derrida had warned in “Différance” that an effect without a cause would lead to a first cause. Kant’s near-metalepsis of grace still has God in the offing, although Kant is careful to bind this possibility in every way, one of the most important being the discussion of the hypothetical use of reason (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 590–604). Derrida’s argument would be that to locate the effect of grace in texts would not necessarily invoke a causeless cause (Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 17). This, put another way, is the de-transcendentalization of the radically other, the causeless cause, the persistent effort of a training in the humanities.

44. Patricia Grace, *Baby No-Eyes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 293.

Emecheta's rewriting of the Enlightenment some years ago, these characteristics of Kant's thought allow it to be pliable outside its European provenance.⁴⁵ But what it remained for me to point out was that the last chapter of the novel ended at a university where the newest Maori learns to "Try Opposite," the most succinct lesson in the imagination moving away from identity as reference. If Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel about the shift from Africa to African-America, this novel is on the cusp from the move from Aotearoa to New Zealand. It is upon such historical changes that the persistent effort at keeping the university secular—by persistently de-transcendentalizing the radically other into a space of effect, persistent acknowledgement of religion/culture as idiom rather than ground of belief—is placed into the hands of the pedagogy and scholarship of the humanities.

45. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Interview with Jane Gallop," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).