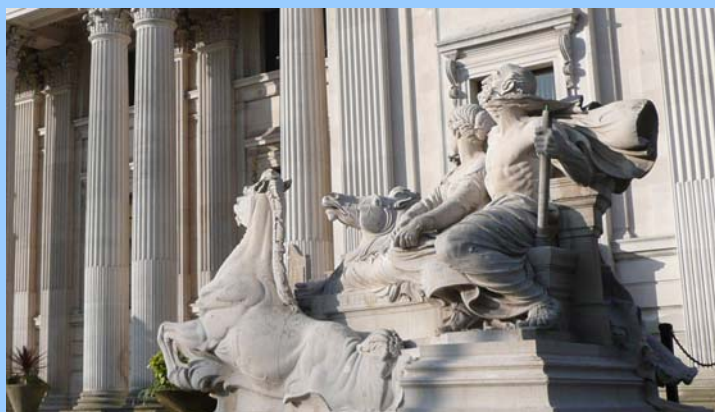




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This Paper's Not for Turning: Derrida, institutions and the ethics of reversibility



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This Paper's Not for Turning: Derrida, institutions and the ethics of reversibility



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Left to itself, the brain, circuiting the world,
becomes a rapid deployment force
and blasts ashore on any troubled sand.

Peter Porter, *Fast Forward*

When does irreversibility become an ethical issue? Who benefits from a decision from which there is no going back? How might it be possible for a 'cut' to be made irreversible? Why does 'turning' seem problematic? What are the conditions that could permit someone never to retreat? These are some of the questions on which this paper is pivoting.

What is at stake in this paper is some notion of reverence, the possibility of *revering* something enough to want to 'keep' it. And so 'regard', 'maintain', even 'dwell' pick up on three etymological meanings of the word 'keep' (ODEE: 502). Otherwise it seems we face a throwaway world in which anything is to be exploited, because everything is already waste. Allegedly nothing is worth keeping - for surely it is to this very notion of 'keeping' that radicals, of both colours and persuasions, object? And yet as much as the word 'keep' conjures up fortification of Norman castles, there is still another meaning - that of 'sustenance' (ODEE: 502); that which is required to sustain life, as caught in the phrase 'you'll have earned your keep!'

Ideas of 'keeping' share an entanglement with doctrines of care, of which feminist reworkings of nurture, from Carol Gilligan onwards, deserve attention. As Goodlad (2006) notes, 'care' situates morality in terms of concrete relationships, whereas 'justice' is deemed to be universal, focussed on the formulation of abstract rights and principles. Yet neither of these paths offers an explanation of how, and when, we might want to keep an *ethos*, revering what 'takes place', as against developing yet another 'ethic', which can be more aimed at keeping us in place. Benhabib (1992) and Young (1997), for example, pick up on 'context and affiliation', not only to get round a putative essentialism to feminist ethics that allegedly fails to encompass race, class and even sexuality, but do so in order to address the embeddedness and embodiment of lived social relations.

Sewn into much of this is the current trend of revering 'reversibility', enough anyway to make an ethics out of it. At least conservationists, embalmers and information theorists (cf Introna 2007) have already undertaken this direction. Philosophically, the work of Derrida, in his consistent pursuit of reversibility effects, might also be considered to have constituted an 'ethics of reversibility':

His reversibles pass into each other, have always already passed into each other, are already inside of each other (without our being able to get a sure footing about what is the reverse of what) Caputo & Caputo (1993 p.200)

Quite what Caputo & Caputo might be doing looking for a 'sure footing' in Derrida seems inexplicable. More of this later.

All this contrasts greatly to the present political and business climate, which eschews matters of ethos in favour of strategies, policies and plans. These adhere to the Machiavellian notion of 'cruelty well used' (Dillon 2008), which remains the ultimate justification for interventions, with an extra zip in the current adage 'no pain, no gain'. For people are thought to be merely creatures of habit, wallowing in an ethos of their own making:

. . the figure of humanity's having emerges for the first time in its simply clarity: to have always dear as one's habitual dwelling place, as the ethos of humanity (Agamben, *Language and Death* 80-81),

This revering of one's habitual dwelling place implies resistance to change. Where people have gotten comfortable, holding dear the ethos they want to keep, resistance is to be anticipated. Even where change, the current logic goes, can be shown to be beneficial. And whenever the argument of force prevails, shock and awe tactics cannot be far behind.

From this, then, the shakiest of starts, my aim is to upset the identity between ethos and ethics while drawing out links between reverence and reversibility. Which might be not so much about maintaining the meaning of 'reversal' as loss, and more a policy of appreciating the work required collectively to keep in place laws such as that of 'equivfinality' and 'requisite variety':

Of not pursuing change 'headlong';
Of keeping 'guard' on the ability to recover;
Of ensuring that radicalism does not turn into erasure;
Of having nothing to do with futures that entail the destruction of the past;
Of putting a 'hold' on an ethics to reversibility, as not something to be pursued for its own sake, so much as providing a safeguard against hegemony.

No turning back

At the time of writing Gordon Brown, the British prime minister, is refusing to reverse the abolition of the 10% tax, despite facing growing hostility to this measure from constituents across the country. Hillary Clinton, it seems, will not abandon the primaries in the US, despite no longer being the frontrunner. And in my university the senior management has embarked on the path of redundancies, having made a decision that one of them claims 'cannot be unpicked'.

This kind of example is all-too familiar to those who study public management and Western government. Albeit it was a speech on which she had to be endlessly coached to give the proper emphasis, the homophony apparently eluding her (Mount 2008), Mrs Thatcher's famous joke 'You turn if you want to, this lady's not for turning' resonated simply because she had no conception of anything but that of 'going forward'. U-turns, for her, were unthinkable and 'wets' were her cabinet ministers like Jim Prior, whom she called the 'False Squire', since he always seemed only too ready to retreat. In an echo of all this, Tony Blair once boasted he had no reverse gear, the folly of which we are still living with in terms of his market philosophy of neo-liberalism as well as the Iraq war.

Let me revert to a Russian example, which comes from the diary of Jonathan Dimbleby as he boards a ship to Solovki, a remote archipelago in the White Sea, renowned for its natural beauty, revered as a holy place, and notorious for the crimes of the Gulag. With the winds getting up to force 8, the boat rolls back and forth to 45 degrees, the other passengers begin to pray and cross themselves. So he goes alone to the wheelhouse to confront the skipper:

“I am a sailor and this weather is getting worse. The boat is overloaded and you are putting our lives in danger” . . . At first – with that infuriating combination of indifference and contempt that I was starting to think was a genetic peculiarity of the Russian people – he affected not to hear me, but looked resolutely ahead at the confused and breaking seas. On my third exasperated attempt he simply said: “I shall not turn back”.

‘I shall not turn back!’ One is reminded here of Barry Barnes’s question about the death camps. Barnes (1998) asks not about those Nazis who, in putting themselves forward, became monsters, but about those who were put in the camps. How was it possible, he asks, for so many people to be imprisoned by a few guards and watchtowers? And with two hundred people on board a ship built for half that number, it should have been easy for the passengers to persuade the skipper of a boat in peacetime to turn back. Especially when the only member of the crew, the ship’s mate, was clutching onto the rail from drink as much as fear. Not surprising that Dimbleby’s anger, when it surges in the relief of arrival, some three and a half hours later, is directed as much at Russians in general for being ‘so intolerably fatalistic’ as at the intransigence of the skipper.

The monastery at Solovki, once the greatest cultural and religious centre of Russia, is the prototype for Stalin’s Gulag empire - the mother of the Gulag according to Aleksandr Solzhenitsin. As early as 1918, Lenin oversaw the publication of a document ‘The Resolution on Red Terror’ which decreed that safeguarding the Soviet Empire from class enemies required ‘isolating them in concentration camps’. Beginning benignly enough by prisoners tending the botanical gardens and library, official files reveal that 40,000 of the 100,000 prisoners sent to the island between 1923 and 1938 had either starved, or been killed by the prison authorities. God knows what the unofficial figures are, but arrivals at Solovki today, Dimbleby records, are greeted by a notice from the administrator to respect the ecology by not picking the flowers and keeping picnics within the designated zones: “Dear visitors, we hope that a keeping of the rules will not be difficult for you . . .” As if. The terrible irony is felt deeply by Dimbleby in consequence of his recent experience, but we can be sure it is lost on the administrative mind.

The ethics of reversibility

As I am running ahead, let me quickly turn back to the issue of reversibility. For might not the idea of reversibility, on first meeting, strike one as a ‘good’ thing? After all, there are a number of considerations that suggest that reversibility should be part of the architecture of management. In no particular order these might include:

1. ‘Events, dear boy, events’. If the future is uncertain, not all directions taken will work out. And if mistakes have been made it is surely useful to unpick them? Indeed, what is the point of seeing reality as socially constructed, à la Berger and Luckmann (1967) if we are simply to be determined by the past?

2. 'Through a glass darkly'. We live in occlusion. Although we treat the world as if it is self-evident, it is far from transparent. Far from knowing 'what the devil others are up to', as Geertz (1970) phrases the issue, this is something we are always attempting to find out.



Arakawa and Gins, Reversible Destiny Community (1989)

3. 'The sum is greater than its parts'. Interconnectedness is a fact of life, whether or not there are wholes on the scale of society as anthropologists and sociologists used to presume. As Russell Ackoff notes, 'we found that we could improve part of a corporation and destroy the whole by improving the part'.
4. 'The means become the ends'. The story of administration and bureaucracy, in which the need to control takes over the task of direction. Santayana helpfully defines a fascist as 'someone who redoubles their efforts having forgotten their aim'.
5. 'Waking up to our assumptions'. Given Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness', it should be a commonplace that much dwelling is a process of 'working backwards' to discover which truth regime we inhabit.
6. 'The best laid plans aft gang agly'. The doctrine of unintended consequences may well be a catch all for the other matters above, but the mathematics of catastrophe suggest the wisdom of keeping one eye open for matters that have something of a 'butterfly effect'.

Let me make clear that I am not disputing there are processes that are, for most practical purposes, irreversible. As anyone stirring the jam into the rice pudding knows, there is no going back. No amount of stirring the other way round can ever turn the glutinous pink back into a red glob in a pool of white. What I am proposing instead is that institutions can be 'other' than carceral. While keeping us in place, they can also foster matters like mutual cooperation, such as holding open a door for each other, or by making an 'occasion' out of cleaning (Garfinkel). And institutions like 'civil inattention' (Goffman 1959) and 'repair work' (Scott and Lyman 1968) can help us either overlook, and even undo, mistakes or infractions.

The mood of aphorism

To get us deeper into the mood of reversibility, let me start again with some thoughts by the Australian-born poet Peter Porter, who found himself at first antagonised by the aphorisms of the Greeks. This was less from the logical sequences they pursued, he suggests, and more from a sense that their very premises were arbitrary, even meaningless. However, he has since developed a fondness for the more aphoristic philosophers, whose 'assemblies of non sequiturs' he likens to the 'end-stopped mood-pictures' of the Chinese T'ang poets.

According to Porter, aphoristic philosophers play a game of anti-dominoes, as if their motto is 'never connect'. His examples include Nietzsche: 'Arrogance in persons of merit affronts us more than arrogance in those without merit: merit itself is an affront'; a motto that could serve for the promotion of managers and celebrities. And the Marquis of Halifax: 'The third part of an army must be destroyed before a good one can be made out of it'; a motto for any reconfiguration that lacks a rationale. If these examples sound as arbitrary as Chinese poetry, they also seem to Porter philosophical in looking hard options in the face, to accept cruelty as part of the way of the world.

An aphorism, suggests Porter, can startle by being like a voice, speaking out of the air, a sort of unprepared utterance. 'The means become the ends' . . . 'The best laid plans aft gang agly'. To which might be added the current mantra of reversibility: 'Use it or lose it!' It is this self-sufficiency, this styptic certainty, which characterises the aphorism or epigram and which, for him, is its greatest aesthetic attraction as well as its Achilles' heel of untrustworthiness. As he goes on to remark, Pope's 'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed' appears to be reversed and becomes 'What seems so true may never have been felt'.

To underline the absence of any way of assuring the truthfulness of this sort of statement, Porter has devised a series of what he calls Mutant Proverbs. As these examples illustrate, they turn the smugness of some dubious proverbs back on themselves:

It's the early worm that gets caught by the bird.
There's no police like home.
The family that prays together slays together.
By their frights ye shall know them.
Love at first slight.
Once more unto the beach, dear friends.
Damn relaxes, bless embraces.
Tomorrow is another delay.

Seeing his squibs to be as complacent and automatic as the proverbial statements they seek to mock, Porter adds that something too hard to take as philosophy can always be made to go down better if served up as an aphorism: syntactical skill and verbal audacity provide the necessary 'spoonful of sugar'. And yet who would deny the wisdom of Chekov's aphorism 'If you are afraid of loneliness, don't marry'. Or the salty truth of Kafka's 'One must not cheat anybody, not even the world of its triumph'.

The palimpsest of history

For all the humour in Porter's mutant aphorisms, there is a darker side to the notion of reversal. This is caught well in Orwell's masterpiece *1984*. Winston Smith, it will be remembered, is employed in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth precisely to reverse out details from *The Times* when these no longer accord with current policy.

This work of 'reversing' includes rewriting Big Brother's prediction of a Eurasian offensive in North Africa. As the Eurasian High Command launched its offensive in South India, this entails Smith rewriting the 'malreported' paragraph in such a way as to make Big Brother predict what actually happened. Again, since a statement of the output of consumption goods in *The Times* implies that the official forecasts for the fourth quarter of 1983 (the sixth quarter of the Ninth Three-Year Plan) had been wildly wrong, this requires Smith to rectify the earlier 'misprints'.



Arakawa and Gins, Critical Resemblances House—Magnetic Floor Plan (1987)

As soon as all the necessary corrections are assembled and collated for any particular number of *The Times*, then the edition is reprinted and all originals destroyed:

Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record (Orwell 1954/1949: 35).

All history is 'a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary'.

The case of Big Brother having once singled out a prominent member of the Inner Party for special mention and decoration, required considerably more work. Winston does not know why Comrade Withers has now been disgraced. Perhaps it is for corruption or incompetence. Possibly Big brother is merely getting rid of a too-popular subordinate. Or perhaps – what is likeliest of all – the thing has happened because purges and vaporisations have become 'a necessary part of the mechanics of government':

Withers, however, was already an *unperson*. He did not exist: he had never existed.

Winston decided it would not be enough simply to reverse the tendency of Big Brother's speech. It was better to make it deal with something totally unconnected with its original subject (1954/1949: 40).

The solution Winston comes up with is to insert into the offending article a person who has never existed before. Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar.

For all his skills, though, Winston doesn't know the half of it. As Syme, one of the countless people working on the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak dictionary, points out, far from his job being to invent new words, it is to destroy words, hundreds of them every day. In 'cutting the language down to the bone', the whole of language is being put into reverse:

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. (1954/1949: 45).

For Syme there is no point in 'keeping' waste. In thus ridding the world of language, even thought, the paradigm case is around the word 'good'. Ungood replaces 'bad', since it is the exact opposite of good. And in a similar vein, as Syme happily points out, the 'whole string of vague useless words like "excellent" and "splendid"' can be covered by the terms 'plusgood' and even 'doubleplusgood' if something stronger is needed.

A quality audit's dream, you might think, until you remember that academics were ahead of Syme, having already evolved this sort of language for marking their students, with A's being parsed to A plus, even A doubleplus when 'something stronger was needed'. Until the vagaries of the system were exposed and replaced over the latter part of the last century by adoption of the Likert scale. Consider how much easier students find it to rate you as 3 or 4, say, for interest; or for your colleagues to see you as a 2, if you are lucky, for the quality of your publications.

Refraining

Although deeply influenced by Levinas's reversal of ontology and ethics in *Totality and Infinity*, what Derrida eschews is the affinity to the other which Levinas sees as obligatory. Yes, Derrida agrees that the sustained privileging of the ontological in Western thought has 'totalised' the other. Yes, he sees how this totalising posits the other as a knowable phenomenon when - as his appeals to Leibniz attest - she or he is anything but. Yet when it comes to declarations of affinity, Derrida will not go there.

Where others, such as the Caputos mentioned earlier, find themselves confounded by Derrida's endless reversals, Hillis Miller takes a different tack. In a sustained and astute analysis, he likens Derrida's reversals to the notion of 'refraining'. Refraining is the term used for a horse when it refuses, for example, to be put in a horsebox. Notoriously horses do not like going backwards and so, to avoid going forward, it recoils, rearing upwards as much as back. In this reading, Derrida's reversals can be understood as refusals to be 'boxed in' by notions of affinity.

And Derrida does insist on this otherness, not just in the way cultural relativists might insist, but as each of us being 'infinitely other in its absolute singularity':

. . . each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, nonmanifest, originarily nonpresent to my *ego* (Derrida 1996: 78)

Each singularity is an island. The crucial reference for Derrida's assumption that each singularity has no direct access whatsoever to the interiority of any other singularity, for Miller (2007), is the section on our 'analogical apperception' of the other transcendental ego, in Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation: we can only guess, by analogy and by a perception without perception, an apperception, that the other has an interiority like my own.

We are back on the ground of the problem of 'other minds'. Miller (2007) claims it is on the basis of a double postulation, the postulation of the radical isolation and singularity of each "I" (as well as the postulation of a wholly other, a "God" who is "there where he is not there"), that Derrida asserts, in an earlier passage in *Taste*, that he is not one of the family, that he refrains from belonging to any institution, regular or counter. Derrida, Miller adds, also tells us why he refrains, what he, Derrida, is keeping back from. He tells us what precious value, a price beyond price, is protected by this non-belonging, this refraining.

Miller's analysis pivots on the citation of a remarkable passage, in which Ferraris asks Derrida why he is fond of echoing Gide's indictment of the family and why he gives as his 'own private translation,' 'I am not one of the family' ('je ne suis pas de la famille'):

. . . let me get back to my saying "I am not one of the family." Clearly, I was playing on a formula that has multiple registers of resonance. I'm not one of the family means in general, "I do not define myself on the basis of my belonging to

the family,” or to civil society, or to the state; I do not define myself on the basis of elementary forms of kinship. But it also means, more figuratively, that I am not part of any group, that I do not identify myself with a linguistic community, a national community, a political party, or with any group or clique whatsoever, with any philosophical or literary school. “I am not one of the family” means: do not consider me “one of you,” “don’t count me in” . . . (*Taste* 27)



‘Don’t count me in’! Miller sees this as the most violent and total expression of Derrida’s fundamental gesture or speech act or refraining that he knows anywhere in Derrida’s writings. Not only *is* Derrida an island, a windowless monad without access to God as third (if God does indeed exist as more than a placeless place or an unprovable hypothesis). He *wants* to be an island. As Miller says, with considerable feeling, he defines himself as an island by refusing to belong to any community, group, or institution (counter or otherwise) whatsoever, including, for example, the community of deconstructionists or that famous “Gang of Four,” the so-called Yale

Mafia. Like Melville's Bartleby, Derrida just says no, or rather he says no without saying no, or yes either. 'He doesn't say no and he doesn't say yes.' He says, like Bartleby, politely but firmly, 'I would prefer not to' (*Taste* 27).

This is not the moment, though, to throw up our hands and say 'That explains it!' As if peculiarities in Derrida's biography explain why he so resists affinity. As Miller (2007) insists, we are, in Derrida's view, all in some form or other 'of Derrida's situation':

His situation was no more than a singular form, his form, of the general human situation of not having to be one of the family, of having an urgent obligation not to be one of the family. My obligation to respond without mediation to the wholly other means I must refrain from responding to any institution's demands. I must respond rather to an infinite demand for justice, as opposed to right or law.

On Miller's interpretation, Derrida must refrain from responding to *any* institution's demands. This call, Miller adds, comes from no existing institution or counter-institution.

Derrida calls this 'a messianism without the messianic', and sees his move as a fidelity to the 'democracy to come'. Presumably, then, his only fidelity? The implication, for Miller, who has followed Derrida step by step, is clear:

While taking account of the context in which I find myself, my response enters the context to change it in response to a call from the future, the to-come, "l'à-venir" (Miller 2007).

One important feature of his or her context, for an academic like Miller, is the circumambient institutions already in place, including counter-institutions that have been installed. The latter then, Miller sees, become also part of the context: 'I must, with the utmost urgency, refrain from belonging to any of these'.

Let me repeat this implication iterated above, knowing that Derrida, above all others, understands that the act of repeating has the power to undo repetition (cf Miller 2007). Well, nearly repeat. For when I repeat it for myself, I find I cannot 'keep' all the words. So what I hear is the call given in its universal form:

While taking account of the context in which each of *us* finds ourselves, *our* response enters the context to change it in response to a call from the future, the to-come, "l'à-venir."

Being unable to put myself entirely in Derrida's shoes about the future-to-come, I find, unlike Miller, that I cannot say 'I'. This would be bad faith on my part. Instead I hear Miller's analysis above as a call passed onto me *from* Derrida. And I hear it with all the distance that Derrida himself, in his talk of monads and islands, argues for.

Possibly this reversal to the universal is illicit for some reason. Nonetheless I want to say, Who is this 'us'? Without institutions, how is any 'us-ness' possible? What possible ground has Derrida left himself from which to issue instructions to others? For Derrida's gesture of refraining, Miller claims, is his fundamental and defining act, his ground without ground. *An endless deferral, perhaps, in a bid to keep difference in view*. But why *must* Derrida's response be 'our' response? His deferral, be our deferral? And, with Big Brother in mind, whose future is it anyway?

‘Where Liberals Fear to Tread’

Whereas Derrida’s motto might, in retrospect, be viewed as that of ‘Disconnect!’, famously E. M. Forster’s is ‘Only connect!’ As Lauren Goodlad explains, ‘view’ also refers to a literary technique. The Forsterian narrative point of view, as Trilling first suggests, enacts a ‘double turn’, simultaneously affirming and contesting norms in its ‘respect for two facts co-existing’ (Trilling 1943: 17).

For Goodlad (2006), the novel-with-a-view not only portrays the ethically desirable stance of favoured characters. It actively promotes keeping these stances in view. To accomplish this, Forster deploys a narrative technique that is not so much omniscient and all-seeing, as it is multi-perspectival. As Goodlad points out, Forster’s narrators not only put several viewpoints into play, subjecting each to varying modes of irony and assessment. Forster keeps them in play in ways that mean irreducibly different perspectives cannot, finally, be synthesized, balanced, or reconciled.



Arakawa & Gins, Site of Reversible Destiny, Yoro Park. Copyright © Liao Yusheng

Forster’s novels thus enable readers to understand and connect ‘worlds which are opaque to each other’ (Armstrong 1992: 375). In so doing, Goodlad argues that Forster’s novels express skepticism toward a key aspect of Benhabib’s feminist ethics: the ‘reversibility of perspectives’ which, Benhabib believes, is integral to cultivating a universalizable ‘moral point of view’. As I understand Goodlad’s argument, she is eschewing both the ‘god’s

eye view' and the 'view from nowhere' and pointing, instead, to the ability for both the author and the reader to keep different, potentially irreconcilable, views in play.

In Forster's terms, one cultivates one's view by learning to listen and communicate 'across distance' (168n). And I would add, that some of this 'distance' to be crossed by the reader lies necessarily within the novel itself. For, far from his narrative 'unwriting' events as it goes along, reversing out the past to make way for the present, as if history was merely one damn thing after another, Forster's technique of writing depends on the reader 'keeping' all that has been said, or happened, *in view*. In this respect, Forster's novels articulate themselves in a very different way say to the 'headlong' pace of a John Bunyan or Rider Haggard.

Goodlad suggests that Forster's novels 'affirm the more modest ethical practice of moral humility' described by Young (1997: 49). From this last stance, 'one starts with the assumption that one cannot see things from the other person's perspective and waits to learn' (49). This description of moral humility, in Goodlad's view, precisely captures Caroline's 'abashed' response in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, when, during her encounter with Gino and the baby, she abandons the civilizer's standpoint and wishes 'to exert no more influence than there may be in a kiss or in the vaguest of the heartfelt prayers' (134, 128).

Although Young helps elucidate the ethical relations that Forster's novels valorize, Goodlad suggests that neither she nor Benhabib fully explores the powerful tensions in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. In a line of reasoning that takes off from Gilligan's notion of care, but generalises it away from simply being feminine, Goodlad's analysis picks up on how care can be sensitive to *affect*, as well as to the local and situated experience:

Caroline's impulse to suspend judgment and withhold influence represents care in its most attentive aspect: "She was in the presence of something greater than right or wrong" (134). (Goodlad 2006)

Gino's passion for his baby, though it awakens the ethical encounter, is itself, as Goodlad remarks, 'quaintly narcissistic'. Yet it is possible to see here that Caroline is doing more than 'refraining' in some ethical sense. Instead of plunging headlong into taking away the baby as she has intended, and has been planned, this is a moment of 'recoil'; a moment in which she can suddenly see that this is a place in which even angels would fear to tread.

As Goodlad emphasises, so far from grounding ethics, parental love exemplifies care in its most asymmetrical form: the 'wonderful physical tie' that binds parents to children is, according to Forster, rarely reciprocated (136). Similarly, Caroline and Philip's passion for Gino, Goodlad argues, springs from their openness to his 'strange refinements.'

Yet, for all its affective power, their encounter with otherness neither erases the underlying perception of Gino as a "cruel, vicious fellow," nor neutralizes their ingrained reflex to equate middle-class British morality with civilization (134).

So something 'crosses', without necessarily changing ethics. Affect, as I have expressed it elsewhere (Belova & Munro 2008), turns us over, without necessarily turning us around; without us having to come over to the other's point of view.

As is so often the case in Forster's fiction, the emotions that stir us the most, Goodlad (2006) suggests, the most precarious, are the least ethically reliable. In a prescient turn on previous arguments, Goodlad thinks that however one may valorise moral humility and openness to difference, cultivating one's view by way of surpassing rigid standards of 'right or wrong', in the end, one's perspective remains attached to, if not absolutely predicated on, those very standards. Only in moments like these from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, does ethics, in all its stuffed up conformity, comes face to face with ethos. And finds itself wanting.

Conclusions

It is true institutions have become interpreted recently as 'machines of government', but this might be as much due to our neglect of their nature *as* nurturing. Preferring to see them as incarcerating, we fail to recognise how and when institutions are perverted; either by being given over to patronage, or by themselves being incarcerated into bureaucracy. Or, more recently, abandoned as the creatures of management in the name of the market.

Much harm here has been conducted theoretically in the name of Foucault. According to Lazzarato, for example, power is to be understood in terms of the capacity to control – to constitute and define – the ways in which others conduct themselves. And he goes on to argue that we need new rules that 'increase the liberty, mobility, and reversibility of power games'. As if new rules might give us liberty? For him these offer relations:

. . . a reversibility assured not by the transcendence of the law and of right, or by categorical statements on equality, but by the action of mobile and nomadic institutions such as coordinations (2007: 105)

Dream on!

And some do dream. Arakawa and Gins are the architects of The Garden of Reversible Destiny, whose pictures interrupt this narrative, including the Critical Resemblances House, constructed at Yoro Park, Japan in 1994. Among their writings is a thought experiment in which we are to imagine ourselves as bodies falling from the Empire State Building. The idea, according to Jeff Byles, is to seek a sense of space-time so radical that it will jar us out of what the authors call the 'tawdry little steady-state of having an identity.' In mid-leap, all that is solid about our 'socio-historical matrix' melts into air. To recreate this flailing freedom on a renewable, sustainable basis is what Reversible Destiny is all about. No one, adds Byles, said radical kinaesthetics were for the faint of heart. It's going to feel a bit like a heady dose of wonderland. 'That's the effect of living backwards,' as the Queen reminded Alice on one of her journeys through the looking-glass. 'It always makes one a little giddy at first.'

Institutions, in my view, *are* the 'keep'. They not only keep us going through moments of despair (Murdoch 1981/2). They are what keep us together. They are indeed what we need to keep, to look after and even (can you believe I am saying this) nurture! Disposed of as a throwaway, we can too easily forget that the bathwater might be as precious, and as worth keeping, as the proverbial baby.

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