Discourses That Matter

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Selected Essays on English and American Studies

Edited by

Maria José Canelo, Marta Soares, Marta Mancelos,
Cláudia Pinto and Fernando Gonçalves

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INTRODUCTION

MARIA JOSÉ CANELO AND MARTA SOARES

> A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with performed judgments, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides.
>
> Hannah Arendt

In the past decades, the Humanities have been facing an ever more insidious technologically-driven system, ruled by ideas of relevance, profit margin, productivity, and usefulness, which threaten to reduce this field of knowledge to merely instrumental roles in "scientific" tasks such as measurements and quantifications. The decline is particularly noticeable in the devaluation of this field in academia, as numerous humanities and arts programs are being cut and replaced by technical courses in more "profitable" areas. As Martha Nussbaum notes in her recent study *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, in addition to facing the global financial crisis that started in 2008, we are currently in the midst of "a world-wide crisis in education," one that "goes largely unnoticed," but which is likely to be "far more damaging to the future of democratic self-government" (2010, 1–2).

In spite of this overall devaluation, the truth is the Humanities have long learnt to reinvent themselves: from the 1960s onwards, the ground has been rife for the Humanities to deal with their social relevance. New alliances between literary studies, geography, history, and the social sciences, for instance, have since allowed for the emergence of critical methodologies and vocabularies aimed at the examination of complex cultural phenomena. From new historicism to cultural studies and discourse analysis, disciplines have dug deep into the social and political issues underlying any textual interpretation, as any cultural representation.

In tandem with the emergence of fields such as gender and ethnic studies, deeply influenced by social constructivism as well, the academia assumed knowledge as a larger construction, and opened a productive

dialogue with social movements and the life on the streets. The Humanities assumed their "worldliness," to retrieve Edward Said's compelling formulation regarding literature—"worldliness, circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency" (1983, 39)—, and thereby gained the right to have a word in social change. We take the present "crisis" to be another stage in this history—a moment for reflection and readjustment; certainly not for defeat.

How can English and American Studies be instrumental to conceptualizing the deep instability we are presently facing? How can they address the coordinates of such instability, such as war, terrorism, the current economic and financial crisis, and the consequent myriad forms of deprivation and fear? How can they tackle the strategies of dehumanization, invisibility, and the naturalization of inequality and injustice entailed in contemporary discourses? As scholars of English and American Studies, we know these are fields of a solid interdisciplinary nature, articulating a multiplicity of approaches in their attempt to apprehend the complexities of culture. We are also aware that their ability to intersect different areas of knowledge and transgress intellectual and disciplinary boundaries is matched by their strong concern about the political and cultural challenges posed by a globalized society.

These are the methods and perspectives in English and American Studies we are engaging with, when putting together this volume of essays. The present anthology grew out of an awareness of the need to debate the current role of these two fields of academic practice, a necessity that led us, in the first place, to organize an international conference in 2012. Held at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra, in Portugal, this conference sought to gather graduate students and young scholars so as to explore how the Humanities in general, and English and American studies in particular, relate to the present state of affairs. Our idea was to challenge especially young scholars to position their research concerning the ability of their fields to be *discourses that matter*; in the case in point, to be critical practices that make an active intervention in current debates.

Echoing Judith Butler's study *Bodies That Matter* (1993), the title of this anthology intends to highlight, on the one hand, the ability of discourses to materialize *in*, or *as*, truth, and so support or decry particular constituencies. Drawing on Butler's rethinking of materiality as the effect of power (1993, 2), we locate this anthology at the crossroads of discourse and power. As such, discourses matter—they are important—to us as

products and vehicles of power relations that can be subject to the analytical and interpretative tools of English and American Studies.

Discourses are also historically and culturally rooted, and our preoccupations about power and knowledge could not ignore the debates on the Humanities that have been taking place during the last decades. On the contrary, this is an undercurrent to many of the critical reflections collected here, bearing in mind that the predicament (or whatever other name you choose to call it) of the Humanities is not alien to the financial and economic crisis in place and the societal and intellectual models it endorses. Certainly, English and American Studies take root in the Humanities, that large field of inquiry that has sought to address the world critically, relationally, and creatively, not just in terms of the construction of meaning and the strategies involved in representations, but also of the ideological interests underlying them—and also, essentially, of the social responsibility that comes with them.

English and American Studies can both denaturalize the forms of knowledge or representations that discourses engage with and locate them proper in their alliances with institutions and other forms of power, even while assuming that English and American Studies, as disciplines of knowledge, are themselves located in institutions and discourses. This in itself poses no conflict, for, as Michel Foucault has remarked, the fact that a discursive formation contains contradictory discourses attests its vitality (1990, 102).

This volume brings to light nineteen different essays that cluster around the previously identified preoccupations. Section I reflects on the relation between language and the world or how language becomes the matter of ideologies and, as such, bears witness to issues of both power and agency. In "Narrative Cartographies in American Novels: A Literary and Philosophical Perspective," Alessandra Tedesco brings to a fruitful dialogue Bertrand Westphal's theory of *géocritique* and Franck Fischbach's critique on alienation, applying them to literary representations of place in order to suggest how the latter potentially allow the subject to understand the world surrounding him/her; accordingly, more than simply representing the world, literature plays an active part in producing it. Marta Soares looks into the power of poetic discourse to question social matters such as the dehumanization entailed by violence, war, and financial deprivation. "What Are Poets For in a Destitute Time?" proposes a comparative examination of U.S. poets Adrienne Rich and Rae Armantrout in their commitment to represent September 11, the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq (Rich), and the global financial crisis (Armantrout). Soares concludes that, although differing in their approach

and use of the poetic language, and deploying diverse understandings of poetry and its social space, both poets claim the responsibility of poetry to speak out and bear witness, particularly in times of destitution.

Also Ana Quintais's essay "Tracing an Absent Memory: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and Susan Silas's *Helmbrechts Walk 1998–2003*" deals with the quest for forms of representation that have witnessing and responsibility at their core, in this case, how language can produce the necessary memory of an unrepresentable—hence, unspeakable—past. Working on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Quintais analyzes Foer's and Silas's artistic attempts to bring to light the trauma of the Holocaust. "Finding Hope through Mourning in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*," by Ana Luísa Pires, focuses on the period of transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa and provides us with another instance in which literature is involved in the creation of a necessary memory. Amidst the violence and chaos created by politics, Mda's novel directly engages memory as an ethics of survival that requires the imagination and artistic sensibility that only literature and the arts can provide.

Section II amplifies the topic of the relation between language and the world by exploring the Butlerian concept of performance, addressing it as a practice of self-representation and emancipation. Marta Mancelos's study of Japanese American poet Sawako Nakayasu's first full-length book, in "'Making Displacement Permanent': Language and Performance in Sawako Nakayasu's *So We Have Been Given Time Or*," explores the contribution of individual performance to the politics of language, along with its power to deconstruct those politics. Mancelos takes Nakayasu's experimental poetics as an allegorical account of the Asian American experience and identity in U.S. society, so that performative poetry is ultimately analyzed here as an experiment towards social integration.

But performance goes both ways and it can be limited to mere illusions of emancipation; this is the conclusion of both Gokce Tekeli's essay, "Hyperreality of Transsexual Performance: A Study of Christine Jorgensen," and José Miguel Moura's, "The Right to Remain Filming. Intimacy at Close Range in American Documentaries." Tekeli resorts to the notion of performance to deconstruct the discourse of transsexuality as an alternative to the norm. By analyzing the identity construction of Christine Jorgensen, the first transsexual celebrity in the USA, and Jorgensen's option for an essentialist defense of identity, the author concludes that Jorgensen's position boils down to a gender performance that is ultimately complicit with heteronormative binary divisions and sexual politics, thus perpetuating the heterosexual hegemonic discourse.

As such, it fails to achieve agency, remaining a mere reflection of simulation in what Jean Baudrillard calls hyperreality. In his essay, Moura calls into question the claim that the performative practices subscribed to by home-made documentaries such as *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003) and *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003), while claiming the production of new visibilities, are not as emancipatory as they want to appear. Moura contests these filmic objects as subjective counterdiscourses, demonstrating instead how their engagement in creating self-empowerment remains a fallacy.

Section III articulates matters of exceptionalism and power. In "History Hijacked: American Indian Genocide Denial in the United States," Fernando Gonçalves takes issue at different discourses on genocide in the context of U.S. history and Native American politics, namely the discourse of U.S. exceptionalism. The author looks into the latter as a strategy of denial of the effective genocide undergone by Black and Native American populations. Gonçalves names this strategy a holocaust denial and calls for a less biased, or less exceptionalist, comparative reassessment of genocidal events in U.S. history.

The link between superheroes, as U.S. cultural artifacts and global mass-marketed commodities, and U.S. exceptionalist discourse is the pretext for Cláudia Pinto's analysis, in "Superhero Identity in a Postnational Context." What changes, the author asks, when the discourse of U.S. heroicity turns from local into universal—as when Superman renounces his U.S. citizenship? Drawing from Donald Pease's critical revisitation of exceptionalism, Pinto examines how three graphic novels, *Marvels* (Kurt Busiek; Marvel Comics, 1994), *Kingdom Come* (Mark Waid; DC Comics, 1996), and *Marvel: 1602* (Neil Gaiman; Marvel Comics, 2002) employ different perspectives on the past and future of superheroes—and thereby of societies as well. Also Enrico Botta's contribution uses a transnational, post-imperialist critical lens to examine anew how exceptionalism is written in Joel Barlow's epic of the U.S. nation, *The Columbiad* (1807). Botta argues that contemporary American Studies readings based on a transnational and non-exceptionalist perspective can bring to light the universalizing Western discourse underneath U.S. nineteenth-century epic poems. Comparing Barlow's poem to other European epics, Botta takes issue at instances or strategies that construct the United States as the final and exceptional stage of humankind's progress.

Language and power are also at the core of the following section, in which discourses of gender and identity are dealt with and critically considered. In her comparative reading of the representation of female

characters in Raymond Chandler's original crime novels and their adaptation to film, "Chandler's Spider Women: Female Criminality from Page to Screen," Veronika Pituková denaturalizes criminal patterns based on gender as built in these representations. By conveying how the film versions from the 1940s through the 1970s added new dimensions to the representations of women and their crimes (while overlooking and simplifying Chandler's original characters), Pituková shows that these representations upheld discourses of masculinity that necessarily silenced women. In "Representations of the Marginalized: In Search of an Identity in the Poetry of Tara Hardy, Adrienne Rich and Tim'm West," Ana Rockov and Nikola Stepić consider the discursive means writers develop in order to produce their visibility in their own literary space. Poets Tara Hardy, Adrienne Rich and Tim'm West, whom the authors take as representative of particular groups typically marginalized by the canon as a reflection of sexual and social discrimination, resist that condition by writing. The authors propose a deconstruction of the strategies deployed in their poems and their ability to frame alternatives to the world as we know it.

Susanne Kopf, in her turn, resorts to the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to look into "women" as a concept in U.S. society, prevalent gender stereotypes, and the public's gendered perception of leadership ideals in the context of Hillary Clinton's run for the 2008 presidential election. In "A Critical Discourse Analysis: The Representation of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Women in the *New York Times*," Kopf contends that the way Clinton and women are represented by this written media venue involves certain aspects of social practice that are reproduced via such discourse. The discursive construction and representation of identity are also a crucial component of Zuzanna Sanches's essay "Friends and Relations: Deirdre Madden and her *Molly Fox's Birthday*." By addressing Irish writer Deirdre Madden's idea of identity as a fluctuating category between the private and the public spheres, Sanches looks into the writer's perception of identities as complimentary and dynamic exchanges.

Section V deals with discourses of race and ethnicity, following along similar lines to the previous sections, for the essays included here also focus on the representations and the connections between language, literature, and the real world. In "Sexual Difference, Race, and Power: The Autobiography of Black Women Writers," Gonçalo Cholant delves into an African American literary genre with a solid tradition in this community, the autobiography. By examining texts where race, sexual identity, and genre overlap, Cholant seeks for the relation between literature and

agency: can the autobiographical genre, in allowing the subjects to write themselves in literature, work as a conduit for their social representation as agents as well?

Patricia San José Rico's "'It's Black, It's White, It's Hard For You To Get By': Discourses of Race, Color, and Ugliness in Contemporary African-American Novels" deals with self-representation too, but from the perspective of the trauma of shame in physical appearance, namely the shame of racial difference. Rico's essay discusses the symbolism of skin color and how it is built in cultural and social structures and discourses. Combining extracts from contemporary novels by African American writers—Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*, Paule Marshall's "Reena," Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, Walter Mosley's detective novels, and earlier narratives such as George Schuyler's *Black no More* or Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*—, Rico examines the representations of the dilemma of colorism *vs.* self-hatred in the African-American community. Also Tommaso Caiazza's essay, "From the *Prominenti* to the *Leaders*: The Change in San Francisco's Italian-American Ethnicity," works towards a more thorough understanding of the social and cultural bearings of ethnicity, by tracing the history of the Italian American ethnicity in San Francisco. Drawing mostly on newspaper discourses, Caiazza demonstrates that the different components and phases in the invention of this ethnicity correspond to different moments in the history of this immigrant group in America, its relations with other ethnic groups, matters of class, and the position of the mother-country, Italy, in the world.

Susana Amante's and Sylwia Markiewicz Lopes's essays compose the closing section, which approaches issues of literature and interculturality. In "*Enwhisteetkwa: Walk In Water:* The Okanagan Version of the History of the Encounter between Aboriginals and Settlers," Amante takes children's literature, in particular a Okanagan artist, writer, and educator Jeannette Armstrong's picture book, as the ground to denaturalize ethnic difference through Armstrong's counter-representations to the official history of the encounter between Aboriginals and European settlers. And, finally, our discussion throughout this volume is rounded off with a question: "Why Should We Rethink Literary Borders?" in Sylwia Lopes's proposal to reassess Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* according to intercultural coordinates. By de-nationalizing Miller's novel, as it were, relocating it in France as a new context of reception, the author explores the possibilities and challenges posed by what promises to be a new epistemological approach in the field of literary and cultural studies: world literature.

The essays in this anthology pursue the chance to deepen, enlarge, and question both literary and cultural phenomena and their established critical readings, thus exploring the numerous possibilities offered by the discourses of the Humanities, namely their ability to foster critical thought, allowing us to think for (and outside) ourselves, their capacity to test, argue, and question, and their profound imaginative potential. These are abilities which, as Nussbaum points out, are deeply constitutive of a healthy democracy for enabling us "to transcend local loyalties" and "imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person" (2010, 7).

The challenge involved in this project has been to bring the young academics involved to think of their intellectual practice as contributing to a discourse that matters, in the sense of one that, in the best tradition of the Humanities, interrogates reality as given and helps us make sense of it by deconstructing the strategies deployed in representations. We ultimately would like this common, if diverse, reflection to encourage us to answer current challenges in both constructive and consequent ways. To recover Hannah Arendt's prescient words, any crisis "tears away facades and obliterates prejudices" and so provides us with "the opportunity . . . to explore and inquire into whatever has been laid bare of the essence of the matter" (1993, 174).

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SECTION I

LANGUAGE AS WITNESS

CHAPTER ONE

NARRATIVE CARTOGRAPHIES IN AMERICAN NOVELS: A LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

ALESSANDRA TEDESCO

Based on an interdisciplinary approach, this essay examines the dialectical nature of the relationships between narrative texts and their real-world referents. Unlike other literary studies, this essay analyzes the way in which spatial and literary devices build a map of the real word of the reader. In particular, some problems of the contemporary scene in America are being discussed through the exploration of geographic descriptions in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

These two novels, although seemingly very different, both in structure and plot, share some of their themes and aspects. Both indeed, through narrative expedients which denote space and time in the fictional world, attempt to explore the issues and problems of our contemporary world. Through a geocritical and philosophical analysis of the spaces of both works, this essay brings under light how they tend to represent the sense of alienation of the individual and his attempt to find a relationship with a world he does not recognize, and which does not mirror his desires anymore. In fact, we will see the importance, in a critical analysis of literary texts, of the composition of space, of the relationship between the referent and its representation, and of the characters "perceived as entities that shape themselves along with the space, the decor of shares, wit, individual and collective values that transform them into place" (Foucault 1986, 23).

The American landscape is developed in these two novels through two diametrically opposed perspectives. The world of *Infinite Jest* is based on

the constitution of ONAN, the Organization of North American Nations, a territory that includes the United States, Canada and Mexico. In this way, Wallace creates a geopolitical paradox, a heterotopical place, according to Foucault's description of a "radically discontinuous and inconsistent place, which juxtaposes incompatible worlds" (1986, 24), a territory where different places and cultures are simultaneously represented, contested, or reversed. In fact, Wallace builds a problematic and heterogeneous place, developed to explore the structure and the deviations of the real world. A space saturated with information, places, and details, symbolically represented by the description of Enfield:

> Enfield MA is one of the stranger little facts that make up the idea that is metro Boston, . . . extending north from Commonwealth Avenue and separating Brighton into Upper and Lower, its elbow nudging East Newton's ribs and its fist sunk into Allston, Enfield's broad municipal tax-base includes St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Franciscan Children's Hospital, The Universal Bleacher Co., the Provident Nursing Home, Shuco-Mist Medical Pressure Systems Inc., the Enfield Marine Public Health Hospital Complex, the Svelte Nail Co. (Wallace 1996, 45)

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* shows instead a post-apocalyptic scenario of America, set in an undetermined future. The two main characters of the novel, the unnamed man and his son, wander in a destroyed world, devoid of warmth and humanity, where everything is lost. The only landmark is the long road—without beginning or end—that crosses the desolate territory; all is as anonymous and undefined as are the identities of the characters:

> The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. (McCarthy 2006, 68)

Although there is a different approach to the description of spaces, the characters of both novels are called to reconfigure the territory in which they live. If, on the one hand, the father and the son of *The Road* assume a constructivist approach towards space and time, intending on finding links with the past, the characters in *Infinite Jest* are designed to deconstruct, to strip these categories from their cultural constraints and Onanian economic power.

In both texts there is a lack of accurate temporal coordinates. In *The Road*, in fact, it is not clear what year, month, or day it is: the clocks, along with the traditional conception of time and humanity, stopped forever at 1:17 in the morning. In *Infinite Jest*, there is a different construction of time: there is no longer a traditional progression in years, but the temporal sequence is marked by subsidized Time and various slogans, such as the Year of the Whopper and the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment (ibid., 226). In fact, the loss of time is bound to and produced by consumer society, functional to the sale and purchase of goods. In this regard, Fischbach, in *La privation de monde: Temps, espace et capital*, asserts that one of the main elements that caused the alienation of the contemporary world is capitalism, and that this has led to the unification of space-time to reduce the time to the present (2011, 111). This "present" space becomes the stage of the various economic and social activities that have radically changed the perception of territory. It presents itself as subservient to a global flow, as an evanescent and intangible asset that relates to the spatial setting and the denial of time.

This reconfiguration of the map of America has also led to the establishment of the Great Concavity (or Great Convexity), a heterogeneous space of border, following the perspective of Westphal, which is subjected to the instability and transformation of political and territorial clashes between Canada and the United States: "Concavity to any Particular province . . . Because the map speaks for itself . . . the Concavity—the physical fact and fallout of the concavity—it's Québéc's problem" (Wallace 1996, 532). This shows, in a geocritical perspective, how

> as spaces once conceived as self-defined and stable, they are actually in constant flux, outlined on a surface with boundaries that are often changing, permeable and are always open to discussion. (Westphal 2011, 135)

In *The Road*, instead, the map becomes a symbol of the search for space and time in the novel, as well as the recovery of a link with the past:

> The tattered oil company roadmap had once been taped together but now it was just sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly. He sorted through the limp pages and spread out those that answered to their location. (McCarthy 2006, 36)

The gradual fragmentation of the map, in fact, reflects the loss of its aim to be a "valid" and "objective" means to understand landscape. Lines, names,

and symbols do not refer to the desolate area without borders in which the man and the boy move, but to a social and political order that vanished long ago. Thus the man informs the boy that the black lines on the map represent the "state roads," called this way because "they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states" (ibid., 36).

Although the man tries to project himself and his son on the surface of the map, he knows that this desire to find their position cannot be retrieved from the surrounding territory. In fact, the amorphous, cold, bitter and empty space exacerbates his anxieties. The two protagonists consult the map with a maddening and progressive despair, and this will be more evident when the coveted coast seems to be more and more distant:

> They were some fifty miles west of where he'd thought. He drew stick figures on the map. This is us, he said. The boy traced the route to the sea with his finger. How long will it take us to get there? He said.
> Two weeks. Three.
> Is it blue?
> The sea? I don't know. It used to be.
> The boy nodded. He sat looking at the map. The man watched him. He thought he knew what that was about. He'd pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything in its place. Justified in the world. Come on, he said. We should go. (Ibid., 153–54)

This projection reflects his growing disorientation and the importance of the map to alleviate these fears. It is a world with a still recognizable social and spatial space where "everything [is] in its place" (ibid., 153). In fact, the equivalence between the human and the spatial orders is emphasized by the phrase: "Justified in the world" (ibid., 154). This expression suggests a state in which each individual existence and each action is confirmed by others, and the position of the individual is easily traceable. Thus, the protagonists of the novel look at the map as an emblem of a moral and spatial order that is no longer perceptible in the world in which they live. The gradual dissolution of the map not only reflects this lack of sense of the past, but also the inadequacy of visual forms and abstract space through which it develops. The past has become distant and inaccessible, so that the loss of memory slips into the darkness of oblivion. Similarly, any attempt to look to the future is useless: "there is no later. This is later" (ibid., 155). In fact, the man's fragile and tenuous sense of space and time is constantly challenged by a moral vacuum of space, and it is described by terms that express darkness and blindness:

> The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening. Often he had to get up. No sound but the wind in the bare and blackened trees. He rose and stood tottering in that cold autistic dark with his arms outheld for balance while the vestibular calculations in his skull cranked out their reckonings. An old chronicle. To seek out the upright. No fall but preceded by a declination. He took great marching steps into the nothingness, counting them against his return. Eyes closed, arms oaring. Upright to what? Something nameless in the night, lode or matrix. To which he and the stars were common satellite. Like the great pendulum in its rotunda scribing through the long day movements of the universe of which you may say it knows nothing and yet know it must. (Ibid., 13)

The imbalance that the man is experiencing in this quote shows the importance of the visual and spatial representations in the human experience. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan says, "the organization of human space is uniquely dependent on sight," and the other senses are used to "expand and enrich visual space" (1977, 16).

Although the dominance of sight is a natural part of the human experience in the perception of space, this can increase the abstraction and the distancing of man from the world in which he lives. This may happen because the map reduces the visual experience to mere symbols, names and meaningless elements. In this regard, Paul Rodaway states:

> Landscape and map [reduce] the visual experience to exclusively visual symbols—in the case of landscape, excluding the visual from its nesting within the matrix of other sensuous experiences and establishing a practice of detached contemplation, and the transition, in the case of maps, from picture-like representations to schematic representations, a system of signs—and abstraction in the sense of detachment of visual worlds (or representations) from the actual visible world—the breakage of the sign reference link, the replacement of representation by resemblance; that is, an order of simulation. (1994, 159)

In *The Road*, the map becomes an important figure in the order of the postmodern simulacrum, an image without depth, dimension or reference. In the next section, language has become "shorn of its referents and so of its reality" (McCarthy 2006, 75). This is also true for the map that the man and the child study in an obsessive and desperate way—the boundaries, cities, and other icons do not have "contact" with the real world, but exist only on the surface.

Since scanning maps and telephone books during his childhood reassured him that he was "justified in the world" (ibid., 154), the man searches for the "right" points of human ethical values in geographic

terms. In the novel, these certainties are a metaphor that expresses the human search for spatial fixity. While wandering in the dark, the protagonists want to place a fixed point in the universe that would provide both religious and scientific certainties. In this world, however, "the right" spatial and moral references cannot be defined in absolute terms, only relatively.

While the characters in *The Road* are thus trying to find a key for interpreting the world, although it has lost all connection with referentiality, Wallace's characters are forced to deconstruct the "map," to dismiss the ubiquitous culture, the political space represented by the ETA Academy and Ennet House. These two specular spaces illuminate the relationship between the individual and society, and the influence of the institutions in the construction of the relationship between public and private space, leaving the individual, just as in *The Road*, devoid of any spatial reference:

> But someone sometime let you forget how to choose, and what. Someone let your peoples forget it was the only thing of importance, choosing. . . . Someone taught that temples are for fanatics only and took away the temples and promised there was no need for temples. And now there is no shelter. And no map for finding the shelter of a temple. And you all stumble about in the dark, this confusion of permissions. The without-end pursuit of a happiness of which someone let you forget the old things which made happiness possible. (Wallace 1996, 541)

The influence of ONAN's cultural and territorial reconfiguration is well expressed through the ETA Academy, based as it is on a culture that "sponsors" the alienation of the individual, and on the national "real" map that is symbolized by the game on the tennis courts: "Players themselves can't be valid targets. Players aren't inside the goddamn game. Players are part of the apparatus of the game. They're part of the *map*" (ibid., 366).

In fact, during a game of Eschaton—a game of war strategy built on a map that covers four tennis courts—, it starts to snow. The players wonder whether this condition also affects the climate map of the game, or whether it is necessary to decrease the range of nuclear warheads because of the snow. This confusion regarding the difference between map and territory, between reality and representation, and how it may affect the representation of reality, is clear from the following quote:

> It's snowing on the goddamn *map*, not the territory, you dick!
> . . .
> Except is the territory the real world, quote unquote, though!
> . . .

> The real world's what the *map* here stands for! (Ibid., 334)

The significant ambivalence between real and represented space is highlighted by the expression "The real world's what the *map* stands for" (Wallace 1996, 334); but, as philosopher and scientist Alfred Korzybski affirms, "the map is not the territory" (1958, 257), because a map (real or metaphoric) is a symbolic representation of something else, an abstraction that filters human experience away from the perception and understanding of actions.

In fact, the obsessive presence and de-contextualized motif of the map will bring the characters of *Infinite Jest* to a great divide, not only between real and represented space, but also between signifier and signified:

> Happiness, joie de vivre, preference, love are stripped to their skeletons and reduced to abstract ideas. They have, as it were, denotation but not connotation. The anhedonic can still speak about happiness and meaning et al, but she has become incapable of feeling anything in them, . . . or of believing them to exist as anything more than concepts. Everything becomes an outline of the thing. Objects become schemata. The world becomes a map of the world. An anhedonic can navigate, but has no location. I.e. the anhedonic becomes, in the lingo of Boston AA, Unable To Identify. (Wallace 1996, 278)

The breakdown of this relationship causes the deprivation of human identity; in fact, their feelings and emotions are reduced to mere signifiers devoid of contents—objects devoid of any human feeling or deep meaning. In this regard, Jameson says:

> The connection between this kind of linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a twofold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present; and second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. (1991, 132)

The characters try to fill this "emptiness" of meaning through various kinds of addiction, and their stories revolve around Ennet House, which is also a symbol of Onanian power control. One of the protagonists and heroes of the novel is Don Gately, a thief and Demerol-addict, who, like

the other patients of the clinic, abuses substances to find the missing pieces in his life, his numb mind, his perceptions, and his own existence: "Substances start out being so magically great, so much the interior jigsaw's missing piece, that at the start you just know, deep in your gut, that they'll never let you down; you just know it" (Wallace 1996, 420). But this evanescent panacea to the sicknesses of man's existence vanishes, leaving the individual without this "map":

> A fuckin livin death, I tell you it's not being near alive, by the end I was undead, not alive, and I tell you the idea of dyin was nothing compared to the idea of livin like that for another five or ten years and only then dyin . . . it's you, the Substance has devoured or replaced and become you. (Ibid., 416)

So Don Gately, at first, accepts the rules and requirements of the rehabilitation center: its recovery program exemplifies one of the greatest Alcoholics Anonymous slogans, "One Day At A Time," which promotes a division of time into micro-units, "the primary need not to absorb a Substance today, just today, no matter what happens" (ibid., 475)—which will affect, as a result, his perception of time: "Living in the Present between pulses . . . Living in The Moment completely . . . But this inter-beat Present, this sense of endless Now" (ibid., 477). Subsequently, these instructions on how to perceive time during the period of hospitalization assume the space-time semblance:

> Pat in counselling keeps telling me just to build a wall around each individual 24-hour period and not look over or back. And not to count days. Even when you get a chip for 14 days or 30 days, not to add them up. (Ibid.,698)

This image of "taking days individually" is key to understanding how the addict and the postmodern character perceives a series of independent, ahistorical presents highlighted by Jameson as an escape from historical time, near the Bachtinian horizontal axis:

> Time is divided into isolated, self-sufficient segments, that mechanically arrange themselves in no more than single sequences . . . the novel gives us two or three different images of the same individual, images that have been disconnected and reconnected through its crisis and rebirth. (Jameson 1991, 135)

This perception of temporality can be useful to explain the attempt of the individual to regain a unitary sense of space-time coordinates in

postmodernity, linked to the Jamesonian conception of time. A contemporary time where the chain of signification between past, present, and future is broken. Thus, Don Gately can only escape from an "eternal present" and a capitalist spatial vision after becoming aware of the complex Onanian structure of time and space. In this scene, in fact, Gately, seriously injured and lying semi-conscious in a hospital room at St. Elizabeth, rejects any analgesic or painkiller despite the pain he feels, and is ready to feel his body:

> Gately starts to short-term recall that he was offered I.V. Demerol for the pain of his gunshot wound immediately on admission to the E.R. and has been offered Demerol twice by shift-Drs . . . Gately was showing tremendous humility and willingness sticking to his resolution about nothing stronger than non-narcotic painkillers. (Wallace 1996, 634)

In fact, only through the perception of one's body in relation to the surrounding space is the individual able to reconnect to a more "direct" space. Westphal says:

> The perception is conveyed by all of the senses, which receive information (kinesthetic sensation or biochemical) and process it through the mediation of a mental process (identification, association). It is from this that the senses allow the individual to join the world. It contributes to the structuring and definition of space. (2011, 159)

And Rodaway adds: "In the experience of the present as in the past, senses are geographical as they contribute to navigate in space, aware of the spatial relationships and the uniqueness of the different places" (1994, 98).

This novel asserts *sensuous* geography, a way of building space that highlights the interaction and interdependence of the human body with the surrounding area. Wallace, in fact, through the sensory perceptions of the character, re-establishes the relationship between the individual and space. Therefore, Gately can understand the importance of self and freedom as a difficult path of self-consciousness and liberation from the cultural dictates: he will think spatially and figuratively in order to feel his body in relation to space and to have a new perception of things; to "feel" as he had never felt before:

> Don Gately suddenly started to remember things he would just as soon not have. Remembered. Actually remembered's probably not the best word. It was more like he started to almost reexperience things that he'd barely even been there to experience, in terms of emotionally, in the first place. A

> lot of it was undramatic little shit, but still somehow painful. (Wallace 1996, 897)

The sensory understanding of his body thus helps to restore the relationship with the world that had been overshadowed by the addiction of power and culture, so as to say: "It was impossible to imagine a world without it in Himself" (ibid., 986). So the last images of a Gately "flat on his back on the beach in the freezing sand" (ibid.) assume the metaphorical meaning of rebirth: the ocean is represented as a belly, which means that Gately, at the memory of his initial simplicity or upon admission of his injuries, has finally been reborn from the womb of addiction.

Even the main characters of *The Road* must return to a more personal geography, human or sensory, in their attempts to draw a map of the world, past and present. The map is used here to explore the distinction between space and place, and to represent the characters' attempt to move in an area that is now alien, and has lost all of its likeness and recognition. In the post-apocalyptic world of the novel, however, the maps are associated with a visual understanding of what is objective and what is abstract, an understanding that is both illusory and inadequate. Instead of a traditional cartography, as in *Infinite Jest*, *The Road* affirms the rising of a *sensuous* geography. The author, in fact, through the vivid descriptions of places and sensory perceptions of the protagonists, makes sure that the reader can hear the noise, can feel the cold and the rain, and smell the scents and fragrances.

Nature is depicted without colors, in black and white shades: black shades for the traces of fire, white for the snow falling relentlessly and chilling the bones, grey for the rain, and even for the sea. The synesthesia of these descriptions refers to a multisensory experience of space, reinforced by the subsequent reference to the "vestibular calculations" in the man's inner ear, which helps to maintain balance (though a weak balance) in darkness. The growing importance of multi-sensory mapping of space will become more apparent later in the novel, when the man says to the bandit, who is pointing his gun at him, that he would not have been able to hear the shot that would have alerted his companions:

> Because the bullet travels faster than sound. It will be in your brain before you can hear it. To hear it you will need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you won't have them anymore. They'll just be soup. (McCarthy 2006, 55)

Without the frontal lobe (motor control), the colliculus (which receives information from the eyes and other senses and creates a topographic map