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Copyrights, Copycat, and the Aura of Reproduction:

A Look at Recent American Fiction

"The best way to consider originality," Edward Said argues in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* is "to look not for first instances of a phenomenon, but rather to see duplication, parallelism, symmetry, parody, repetition, echoes of it . . . The writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting." And he goes on to conclude: "The writer can be read as an individual whose impulse historically has been always to write through one or another given work." It bears keeping in mind that what Said is talking does not represent the exception but the rule, the usual if rarely unacknowledged way of doing things. Turning modernist anxiety of repetition into the "ecstasy of influence" Jonathan Lethem talks about in *Harper's Magazine* a few issues back, recycling modernism's defining apprehension as programmatic procedure, the postmoderns render central, and often flaunt, a new creativity code. In classical rhetoric's terms, this formula or principle shifts the emphasis away from *inventio* onto *dispositio* or, from creation as invention onto creation as permutation, ars combinatoria, *inter*textuality.

The new is still the objective here. But recent writers and artists make it by making it anew rather than new. "Get it used," Andrei Codrescu invites us. This is a new not so much novel as renovated and reframed, re-produced rather than produced, which by the same token redefines authorship as deliberate and strategic plagiarism, my topic for today. According to Raymond Federman, the imagination is here still - and fundamentally - in play, and playful, so much so that in his book of essays *Critifiction* he talks about "pla(y)giarism." Yet the

imagination switches openly into the "anew" mode to put forth new worldviews, indeed, to invent. What this mode fosters, in the authors of our time more conspicuously than in those before them, is the consequential realization that the imagination feeds, as Robert Scholes observes, "on previous imagination" and so calls for an understanding of its "whole process . . . in terms of plagiarism," highly mediated discourse where consistently, if oftentimes ostentatiously, ironically and critically, one builds up a textual corpus by writing and working through other bodies of works. This is precisely what one of our time's most infamous plagiarists, Kathy Acker, acknowledges in her volume *Bodies of Work*. "I never write," Acker discloses there, "anything new . . . I make up nothing." For, she explains, "I never liked the idea of originality, and so my whole life I've always written by taking other texts, inhabiting them in some way so that I can do something with them."

Acker's notorious plagiarisms mount an assault not only on literary property but on property and propriety, aesthetic and social conduct broadly as keystones of modern society's institutional structure. It is this aspect of literary plagiarism that I want to stress in my presentation. According to Acker, society is to blame for the public indifference to writing and art in general no less than for their commodification and commercialization. Thus, staving off their own turning into "big business" and resisting "materialism," artistic theft and copyright infringement - real or simulated - are resorted to for their shock value. Indeed, in Acker, they seek to shock, draw attention, and make a political statement in a "careless" age that "marginalizes" its writers. As she further contends in *Bodies of Work*, "the literary industry depends upon *copyright*. But not literature. Euripides, for instance, wrote his version of Electra while Sophocles's `copyright' was still active. Not to mention Shakespeare's, Marlowe's, and Ford's use of each other's texts." "My worries with *copyright*, however," Acker adds, "are not so

academic. My worries concern the increasing marginalization of writers and of their writings in society. Whenever writers are considered marginal to a society, something is deeply wrong, wrong in that society and wrong with the relations between writing and the society." For, she insists, "*to write* should be *to write the world* and, simultaneously, *to engage in the world*. But the literary industry as it now exists seems to be obfuscating relations between this society's writers and this society."

Engaging the world, re-worlding it, means engaging with the world's words, with how it is worded. It implies wrestling with always already preexistent names and representations. If the whole point is not merely to write the world into a new text but to rewrite it into a new sociopolitical makeup, then the aesthetic ability no less than the legal possibility of retextualizing available textual embodiments of the world become crucial to this project in which rewording and reworlding are two faces of the same coin. "Whenever I am engaging in discourse," Acker declares, "I am using given meanings and values, changing them and giving them back. A community, a society is always being constructed in discourse if and when discourse - including art - is allowed." Addressing this very issue, cultural legal scholars from Martha Woodmansee, in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, to Rosemarie J. Coombe, in *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties*, and Alfred C. Yen, in his essay "The Interdisciplinary Future of Copyright Theory" have gone so far as to argue that recent cultural forms bring us closer to considering the notion that "authorship is possible only when future authors have the ability to borrow" and that "if too much of each work is reserved as private property through copyright, future would-be authors will find it impossible to create." For noteworthy in Acker and other recent plagiarists is not only the concern about literary creativity, namely, the production of novelty along the lines of postmodern poetics, but also the stress -

equally postmodern, I might add - on the politics of such novelty production beyond writing itself, where not just fictional construction but also communal reconstruction, social critique, hinges on the writer's appropriative access to extant discourse no matter who has authored it.

In fact, Acker herself has emphasized the role, textual as well as political, of her "borrowings." Writing-as-borrowing, writing as large-scale *rewrite*, ultimately, is very serious business to her, overflowing as it does the realm of innocent intertextual games. To Acker, this sort of rewriting stands out as an unavoidable method: not a matter of choice, but a matter of necessity. "I have always used appropriation in my works," she acknowledges in an interview with Larry McCaffery, "because I simply can't write any other way." Furthermore, she tells us, "I've never liked the idea of originality, and so my whole life I've always written by taking other texts, inhabiting them in some way so that I can do something with them."

Do what, one might ask. Here is Acker again: "[w]riting *will* change things magically. Magic operates metaphorically. So: I will take one text . . . and change this text by placing another text on top of it." As one can see, rewriting, intertextual practices are not just games. They are, as I note above, about "change," attempting as they do to intervene in the fabric - the "textum" - of society. And this is possible, magically and otherwise, since, as Ackers stresses elsewhere, "when I use words, any words, I am always taking part in the constructing of the political, economic, and moral community in which my discourse is taking place. All aspects of language - denotation, sound, style, syntax, grammar, etc. - are politically, economically, and morally coded."

In an important if not immediately apparent sense, then, "critique" and plagiarism go hand in hand. For one thing, if any community, much like any world, big or small, is more or less worded or, as Benedict Anderson and others have suggested, imagined, and, further, if any re-

imagining must contend with previous images, new communities cannot be worked out from scratch but, as Acker proposes above, only worked through former paradigms of communality. For another thing, this is not "simply" a matter of "intertextuality" and "heteroglossia." Or, if it is so, it is only insofar as the concepts preserve the meanings Bakhtin, Kristeva, and their culturalist followers have assigned them. For these critics, text and context are tightly knit together, and so are self and other. In fact, the former dyad is a version of the latter. Thus, it helps us understand why communalism and the political revisiting of community, on the one hand, and the problematic of cross-textual appropriation, on the other, dovetail so intimately especially when appropriation occurs as assumed plagiarism. According to Lethem, as an artist, I may live out Rimbaud's "I is another" more intensely than anybody else. Yet to project this "I," to write it out and thus body it forth in a literary form, I must turn to other bodies of work. I have no choice but to pilfer the annals of the community, to draw from other texts and others generally and thus incur a debt as aesthetic as ethical. Further, the community is not just textual, the inherited textual and symbolic repository. It is also a project, a social space, perhaps a sodality formation of a new kind. It is through this project that I can pay my debt *by casting the other, through writing and rewriting of the archive, into new roles and positions*.

To show what this means, I will, first, spend some more time on Acker herself. Then, I will move on Matthew Roberson, and his 2002 plagiarism of Ronald Sukenick. I have picked Roberson because Acker and he exemplify two different types of plagiarism. I will call them "competitive" and "collaborative" respectively. While Acker sets out to critique, compete with, and ultimately displace the "model" text, Roberson associates himself to the precursor, rather, aims at a partnership, even though this "symbiosis," as David Cowart would probably term it, is not without complications.

What we have in Acker is possibly the most striking evidence of postmodern plagiarism, pastiche, and deliberate "borrowing," that is, intertextual onomastics. A fairly ignored issue in current debates on contemporary fiction, postmodernism, cultural representation, "theory" in general, intertextual onomastics strikes me as a remarkably widespread practice and as an index of postmodern reduplication and recirculation of available cultural materials. Revealingly, numerous late twentieth-century writers have taken up plagiaristic rewriting of prior stories; here, though, I propose to look briefly at the cognominal aspect of this kind of appropriative rewriting and discussing how the latter operates by "borrowing" names of famous literary characters. As I argue, it is symptomatic that Thomas Pynchon, John Irving, Paul Auster, Joseph Heller, E. L. Doctorow, Robert Coover, Charles Johnson, Samuel R. Delany, Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, or Mark Leyner - to name just a few and only Americans and African Americans - give their own characters the names of famous characters of Dickens, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Heinrich von Kleist, Disraeli, or Proust. In doing so, they cast light, I think, on an essential dimension of identity in our time: its cultural mediation, its dependence on - or "construction"- by the already said, written, expressed, by the already named.

Specifically, I want to look here at the onomastic "genealogy" of the postmodern character and selfhood generally in Acker's work, a work, I have pointed out, fundamentally revolving around the notion of deliberate plagiarism, cultural piracy and "theft." Now, it is true, critics have time and again dwelt on this aspect of her fiction. What they have discussed less is how her manipulation of textuality and language generally conceived involves reckless, in-your-face plagiaristic borrowings of literary names, and, of course, of the stories coming with those names and their bearers. For, notably enough, to "invent" many of her most important fictional figures, Acker goes back to Sade, Mary Shelley, Dickens, Hawthorne, Melville, Rimbaud,

Colette, Lampedusa, and many other classics and famous moderns. More to the point, to baptize her creations - should I say, *re*creations - she raids the onomastic repository of the Western canon from Cervantes to Jean Genet. Lastly, to entitle - to name - her own books, she "comes up" with titles such as *Great Expectations* (1982), *Don Quixote* (1986), or *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), whose name, incidentally, "names" Nagisa Oshima's high-brow erotic movie *In the Realm of the Senses*.

Moreover, in *Bodies of Work* Acker makes a rather complicated if intriguing argument on "naming" and "renaming" as fundamental strategies of cultural appropriation and determining features of her poetics and politics of identity. In a commentary on Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, for example, she talks about her own traumatic childhood, when she first experienced her outsider and outcast status, which, notably enough, she seizes as her *exclusion from the realm of the named*. Being outside the world, a powerless "girl" deprived of self-sufficient "essence" and "form" - and these are, indeed, Platonic notions - she had no name, no being, that is, since, "[f]or me, language was being. There was," Acker's feminist account goes on, "no entry for me into language. As a receptacle, as a womb, as Butler argues, I could be entered, but I could not enter, and so I could neither have nor make meaning in the world." Nonetheless, she adds, "though I couldn't be named, everyone" [society, that is, its institutions, the symbolic fathers and brothers] "was naming me." Naming - her being named by "others" acted, we understand - "to erase her presence." Which is to say, as an individual, in the same sense that the fathers and brothers *were* individuals, presences, she was - and she was being made - absent, erased, "unnamed" in the very act of her naming. "I was unspeakable," Acker explains in a revealing passage, "so I ran into the language of others, . . . [i]nto [their] books."

But these languages that leave her "unspoken," these books are shaped by patriarchy; the

only language outside the latter and its underlying hierarchies and binaries such as male-female, good-evil, rational-irrational, subject-object, and so on is, Acker contends, the language of the body, of her body, her flesh, blood, sexuality, and desire. And what Acker actually sets out to do is to use *this* kind of expressive medium to appropriate, inflect, rework, de-code and re-encode "other" languages and, along with them, their whole set of values, hierarchies, power structures, and beliefs. "I have become interested," Acker thus confesses, "in languages which I cannot make up, which I cannot *create* or even *create in*: I have become interested in languages which I can only come upon (as I disappear), a pirate upon buried tresure." These are the languages, the stories, the plots, the characters Acker-as-pirate, Acker-as-poacher, steals in order to rewrite and subsequentially dismantles in order to re-compose by injecting unbridled, provocative *sexuality - the* language of the body - into their "bodies of work," into those "oeuvres" and their *textuality*. Indeed, as she discloses above by means of a deliberate sexual metaphor, she places the language of the body "on top" of the stolen texts and their own languages, themes, and styles to rewrite and modify, dis-figure and re-figure the latter completely, "repeating" the source-text "terroristically," as she says elsewhere following.

Commenting on Samuel Delany in her essay titled "On Naming," piece also included in *Bodies of Work*, Acker explains how this intertextual process - again, a process as aesthetic as political - involves an appropriation of others' names. Once named, a name, Acker maintains by following Delany, sets in motion a culturally "metonymic" operation because "a name doesn't tell you what something is so much as it connects the phenomenon/idea to something else. Certainly to culture." Thus, names are the privileged segments of language where language and, by the same token, culture appear as what they fundamentally are, "the accumulation of connections" where, importantly, at first glance we may see no connections. Thus, names also

reinforce, in Delany's and Acker's onomastic poetics and politics, the ultimate certainty that culture is a web of relations, an inter-text, and, more notably still, that by rewriting a "matrix" text, one may intervene in structures of aesthetic, social and political nature alike.

To sum up: names point up a paradoxical situation in culture, society, and Acker's own writing: on the one hand, there are "unnamed" and therefore outcast, marginalized individuals; on the other hand, these individuals, Acker herself as a writer and re-writer, for instance, can take up others' languages, texts, and names. Further, in stealing these names, Acker challanges the larger structures they are part of, making, I might add, a name for herself in the process.

Let me now turn to a particular plagiarism by Acker: her 1978 novel *Blood and Guts in High School*. The more extensive version of the following discussion can be found in my book *Rewriting*. Here, I want to underscore that book appropriates - reworks and renames -*The Scarlet Letler*. As a postmodern, aggressively antiromantic, "punk porn" remake of the Hawthorne romance, *Blood and Guts* invites us to reread the text it steals and works over as a narrative organized around the problematic of naming - the naming, or refusal thereof, by Hester Prynne, of Pearl's father, for instance. But there is much more to Acker's "poaching" of Hawthorne: *Blood and Guts* retells *The Scarlet Letter* to rework it from a polemical, gender-oriented, and politically committed perspective. What comes out of this retelling is a Hawthorne that reads like "fake" Henry Miller, Burroughs, Erica Jong, and Jean Genet. A Hawthorne, that is, reread and rewritten through these uninhibited champions of sexuality and corpo-reality in general, elements that Acker purposefully works back into a narrative and world from which the Puritans had set out to expunge them.

But how are names in general and onomastic plagiarism in particular instrumental to this project? For one thing, Acker uses names as complex markers and intertextual operators to

uncover, instantiate, and set in train, the interconnectedness of culture. At a very basic yet determinant level, it is essentially the names of the characters in *Blood and Guts* that alert us to the fact that Acker's text uses *The Scarlet Letter*; it is through these names that plagiarizing rewriting - of a specific story, of its "culture" and "society" generally - works. Now, for the first sixty pages or so of Acker's book, this massive and violent appropriation is less conspicuous. Halfway into the novel, though, Acker reveals that *Blood and Guts* has set out not only to "snatch" Hawthorne's plot, but also to refurbish it so as to name, with graphic fury, what in the 1850 romance remains unnamed, repressed, faintly hinted at - "unspoken."

One can distinguish two narrative lines in *Blood and Guts*. The first one features Janey Smith and Johnny, her father-boyfriend, both in one, embodiment of Janey's absolute dependence. Mr. Smith is also involved with Sally, the "twenty-one-year-old starlet" - the allusion to *The Scarlet Letter* is pretty clear - who refuses, however, to grant him sexual favors. The second narrative line turns this allusiveness into explicit reference: Janey goes to a New York high school where she ends up captured by a "slave trader" intent upon turning her into a prostitute. Like *Jean* Genet's narrator in *Notre Dame des fleurs* - one of the texts Acker places "on top" of *The Scarlet Letter* - Janey, Janey as Jean, "beg]ins] to write down her life." Her diary is also - and also nothing more than - a "school report": simply put, both outline and reworking of *The Scarlet Letter*. Rewriting the Hawthorne romance, Janey-as-Jean-Genet (a writer who also is a character in *Blood and Guts*) Janey becomes Hester Prynne. In the book's second half, Acker splices the two narratives together, weaving their threads into one and actually doing, at the level of narrative, what one of her models, William Burroughs, does primarily at the level of phrase and sentence. Janey takes Hester's name and Hester comes to live, anachronistically, in a world of hippies, cops, and organic food delis. The stories have become one; "top" and "bottom" can

no longer be told apart - and, simply put, it is precisely this unification and con-fusion, the deliberate mix-up of situations, places, ages, languages, and styles within the general framework of Hawthorne's plot that Acker employs to indicate how intolerance and oppression carry over across times and take new shapes. More importantly still, not only does Janey rename herself Hester; she also calls herself Pearl. In effect, she does become Pearl while, analogously, Pearl becomes in her turn "wild," wilder than Hawthorne may have imagined her. While Janey-as-Hester yields to the slave trader much like, according to Harold Bloom, Hester Prynne ultimately yields to the society condemning her, "falling back into herself," as Acker writes (100), Janey-as-Pearl carries on, and upgrades, Hester's initial rebellion through her unbridled, "antisocial" sexuality. To be sure, Janey and her Hawthornian alter-ego reject both Roger Chillingworth, whom Acker names as such in the book, and Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, whom Acker rebaptizes Dimwit. But this rejection does not entail utter rejection of sex and, by implication, of the masculinity that makes heterosexuality possible. "At this point in *The Scarlet Letter* and in my life," Janey the character and Hawthornian reader tells us, "life [and] politics don't disappear but take place inside my body." While Puritan politics worked by controlling the feminine body, its sexuality, Janey-as-Pearl refuses to distinguish between culture and nature, politics, and physiology. In doing so, she uncovers the body as a "wild" locus where the two territories overlap only to render physicality a political instrument in the hands - in the body - of the feminine subject. In Janey-as-Pearl, Hester finally *becomes woman* in that femininity no longer functions as an annex, social, economic, sexual, emotional, of the male presence, whether the latter is the demonic, cynical Chillingworth or the symbolically half-named Dimwit. Stealing Hawthorne's book and names - much like Janey steals Genet's books and thus reenacts, towards the end, episodes from Jean Genet's biography - *Blood and Guts* is Acker's memorable *Journal*

d'un voleur: another *Thief's Journal*, indeed, to recall Genet's 1949 fictionalized diary. *Blood and Guts* is Acker's own literary theft, an act, to quote from the novel itself, of "terrible plagiarism" where annexation, repetition, and mutilation of names both signal and carry out a culturally and politically intriguing project.

Let me now turn to Matthew Roberson's 2002 novel *1998.6*, but not before saying a few words about its "victim": Ronald Sukenick's novel *98.6*. Sukenick's book was, in 1975, when it came out, and to an important degree has remained, compellingly "new" in the particular sense discussed here: not only formally innovative but also socially inquisitive, that is, a challenge to the late 1960s - early 1970s social routines and routine ways of imagining sociality both inside and outside mainstream venues, affiliations, and groupings. The writing of adventure (of plot, of "what happens") and the adventure of writing - to recall Kristeva's play - are here one and the same, virtually impossible to pry apart because they inherently share the same space and means, with the reinvention of communality as the overarching goal (*98.6* 68).

This novel communality, though, is, like in Acker, to be carefully distinguished from commonality. What is or may in the long run become communal and positively so may not coincide with things "common," (widely) accepted, with taken-for-granted representations and habits. As a matter of fact, it is only through the unwriting/rewriting of such commonalities and their linguistic-textual packaging that the "potential" for thought-provoking communality à la *98.6*'s "Palestine" chapter can be brought to fruition. This communality or textual-social shared domain is "inoperative" à la Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community*. It cannot and must not be one, "whole," or a whole, but an evolving, ever-provisional Deleuzian assemblage occupying a fluid, half settled half u-topian topology at equal distance between solidified, socially jading *sensus communis* and non-sense, provocatively imaginative "Bjorsq"-like language (Sukenick

also uses an invented language called "Bjorsq."). If so, then Palestine is an apt topos and tropos simultaneously, a locus of received communal imagings as well as their transformative forum. Quite appropriately, "Mosaic Law" is the underlying principle of the novel itself and of the alternative, utopian world it unfolds in the end: the rule of *necessary* collage, of new ("new") bodies of work and social bodies inevitably made of existing body parts, where discriminate agglutination ("psychosynthesis") of the incorporated pieces precludes the ensuing mosaic's rising into another totality within which self and other would be one more time organized disjunctively or hierarchically. According to the "law of mosaics," the textual/communard archival detour of Sukenick's u-topia is unavoidable. To move forward, one must retrace one's steps first, "monstrous" as it may seem. In an age of instant obsolescence of (and hence decreased sensitivity to) the new, a process for which DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* remains the unsurpassed chronicle, this monstrousness may not be right away visible, for few occurrences are likely to make us stop and pay attention, "look at" (see Lat. *monstrare*).

Responding to this shortage of cultural "eventfulness" (something DeLillo has also reflected on) is in *98.6* the mosaic/monstrous poetics of body parts and other Frankensteinian cutups. Nor does this recycling cycle end with the 1975 novel. Inside the Sukenick corpus, it continues, largely speaking, with *Mosaic Man* and, more recently, the 2005 novel *Last Fall*. Outside yet in close relation to what happens on the inside, it has been extended spectacularly by Roberson's plagiaristic tour de force *1998.6*: what goes around comes around albeit in new ("new") shape. For, to be sure, Roberson's is a superb inside job, a sublime theft rendering aggression and devotion, necrophilia and hagiography quite indistinguishable. I think few people have a clearer sense of Sukenick's literary, cultural, and political significance than Roberson. *Musing the Mosaic: Approaches to Ronald Sukenick* and "Ronald Sukenick's Topography"

(which Roberson has worked into the 2002 book) are among his solid credentials. But *1998.6* certainly comes first, and not just because *imitatio*, the plagiarizing rewrite in this case, is the most thorough *aemulatio* but because understanding, as Georges Poulet tells us, works itself out in a moment or as a ritual of identification with the object, where the subject is just a sympathetic site for the latter's reenactment.

Speaking of which: in *Last Fall* Sukenick does reenact - without cannibalizing - himself. Autoplagiarism is probably too strong a word for the book, but, otherwise, *98.6* is all here, complete with its community master theme and the very subjects of plagiarism, larceny, theft, and forgery. Very briefly, *Last Fall* retrofits *98.6* as a sort of post-9/11 communalist venture with the non-urban California/Palestine "Monster" house refurbished as a no less fictional Manhattan Museum of Temporary Art. The Brownian motion of the "Children of Frankenstein" is also restaged by the alert couplings and recouplings of those directly and indirectly associated with the Museum (employees, donors, art experts, artists). The fall of the house of Frankenstein and the crisis of the community under its roof (which leads to the "Palestine" utopia of self and other) are both acted out and accelerated by the collapse of the Twin Towers, for which the Museum becomes a resonance box of sorts. This "last fall" may well be the true postlapsarian event. Jarring in and of itself, it shakes up, literally and in all senses, the Museum's foundations, more exactly, not only what the endowment stands for as an art "foundation" set up by one Fynch but also as an implicit communal project. Yet again, the two components are hardly "discrete." For The Book of Genesis's Fall marks the onset of history, hence of human communities, which the 9/11 "fall" may be said to re-mark, tragically quote, as much as it also parenthetically plagiarizes the other biblical fall - of the House of Babel - the historical and social upshots of which are arguably similar. As an event, the Fall demarcates the *ad quem*, the

inception of all eventuality, of temporality itself as both stage of occurrences and occasion for historical formations, for human associations. In short, the Fall, either that of "Man" or of the Babel Tower's, was the fall into time and communality, into a time as scene on which communality can be given various bodies but where, no matter the embodiments, the dynamic of self and other underpins them all. As Emmanuel Levinas urges us in *Time and the Other*, we should remember that the two elements in his book's title are intimately and crucially interdependent given that death, which obsesses Sukenick all the way to the last page of his last book, is, as a "future of the event, . . . not yet time. In order for this future, which is nobody's and which a human being cannot assume, to become an element of time," Levinas clarifies, "it must also enter into relationship with the present." "What is," the philosopher asks, " the tie between two instants that have between them the whole interval, the whole abyss, that separates the present and death, this margin at once both insignificant and infinite, where there is always room enough for hope?" And he answers:

> It is certainly not a relationship of pure contiguity, which would transform time into space, but neither is it the élan of dynamism and duration, since for the present this power to be beyond itself and to encroach upon the future seems to me precisely excluded by the very mystery of death.
>
> Relationship with the future, the presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face with the Other. The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship. The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history.

But the Museum "lies" outside history. As ex-Temporal as Temporary, it stands completely

outside time. It is a counterintuitive concept twice. That is, it purports to hold the immaterial

essence of artworks devoted to change, hence ever-changing, fluid, impossible to contain or held;

therefore, such items refer back to the same thing over and over again, and in so doing make up,

in their identical non-existence - for the place has no material objects on display - one big

selfsame show. What is more, the aesthetic predicament has an (un)ethical analogy in the kind of

community those tied to the Museum (and its selfsameness) form: this too, as one may imagine,

rules out others. As it turns out, the Museum's personnel and habitués are all related and have

been carrying on, in various, ever-changing configurations, incestuous affairs. The endogenous

return of the same (to itself) within the never *altered* circle of kin and kind de facto blocks

change inasmuch as alteration, alternative, and such presuppose the presence of others (*alteri*)

within. In their absence, change and, with it, time do no happen at all while, as the WTC

buildings' collapse suggests, anything can happen at any given time. "Frozen" as they are in an

eternal present, people and art objects in reality fall not only outside time but also in

extemporaneity altogether, so it is only befitting that the institution's new administration changes

its name to the "Extemporaneous Arts Museum" and plans to feature installations and

happenings revolving around the impromptu, the sudden, and the unexpected. Spelled out in the

end, the collusion of the "Extemp" and "Fundamental"(ist) agendas implies that the new

aesthetics does not cultivate the unrehearsed and the spontaneous, which would only be in line

with Sukenick's ideology of defamiliarization/renovelization through language plays and

intertextuality. Quite the contrary, the alliance hints at how everything cancels out everything

else, casting us into a "pure present" where, because everything takes place at the same time,

nothing - that is, death - happens. In it, history comes to a standstill. Or, to put it otherwise, this

is where people and things "escape from history" itself but only to "fall" out of human time and

space into a definitive achronic a-topos, a "negative," post-social chronotope in which neither transformation nor fellowship are imaginable.

I wanted to provide all this background to help us see that, in rewriting *98.6*, *1998.6* sets out to rescue Sukenick's utopianism from its atopian fall. The plagiarism is both conspicuous and critically geared toward a communal politics of renewal intent on "renewing" the "tutor" text by repeating it with a difference and thus relaunching the "Palestine" project. I have called Roberson's book a tour de force, and I do not think it is an exaggeration; I would also describe it as a tour of *forces* or, a detour, rather, through the Deleuzian field force of Sukenick's discourse where traditional idioms, phraseologies, and textual references are deployed, taken apart, and reshuffled so as to form that new ("new") linguistic order in which the "Extraordinary" can arise and become rule ("run-of-the-mill") in response to the "problem" Sukenick poses throughout his career. The problem or at least one problem is the dullness of the world, what above I identify as social and semiotic routine, the clichés of life and images. Roberson thinks there is a way out of this routine yet not into ahistoricity and atemporality but into a distinct form of communality, and he also thinks - rightly to my mind - that Sukenick points to it.

Rewriting the "master" and by the same token outwriting him too? A contest disguised as devotion, as sublime theft, as I said earlier? I would answer with a tentative "yes." The Sukenick aficionados will undoubtedly identify a wholesale reproduction of the "original," from narrative parallels to character and theme repertoire to textual transcription to stylistic pastiche. They will probably appreciate the cultural update too, as *1998.6* rewrites *98.6* into the Internet era of visual literacy, video cams, and real-time connectedness. But it does so on purpose, and the purpose is to recentralize the issues of human contact and relatedness, without which the problematic of communality remains unthinkable. *98.6* is about writing a number of people into a community

and winds up on a utopian note that *Last Fall* brings into question. *1998.6* still acknowledges "failure" as a possible outcome - "failure" is its last word quite literally - but establishes a relation to its pre-text so as to plug itself into Sukenick's utopia, refuel its writing machine, and crank it up for another run, yet not out of history, oppositional as that exit might be, but into the very bowels of the "contemporary." Reworking the "Palestine" epilogue into his own closing chapter likewise titled, the narrator discloses, like Ron in *98.6*, that he is actually writing a book, namely, "a study of life in what might be the contemporary world," which necessarily began as a study of Sukenick's oeuvre. Where the pre-text sublates its world into "Palestine," the post-text emendates its own as "Televisrael." Symbolic on several levels, the name of Roberson's utopia alludes to a potential, mutual and multiple accommodation of self and other, sameness and difference, community and individuality, object and sign within the sociodiscursive framework of the Levinasian "face-to-face conversation." "[A]ll dramas begin," we learn in Roberson's "Palestine," with "human connection," but it is also with it that we can begin to imagine a solution for, indeed, the space of connectivity - the place of the "face-to-face" - "energizes" mind and body, prompts people to overcome physical and intellectual "apathy" and enter that "Phase of Imagination" where things can be seen *other*wise. A "collective" kind of "assemblage" insofar as it moves forward by steeping itself into the past of "Ron's book," which, we saw, in its own time made a similar move, *1998.6* is so ideally positioned to project, within, another collective - its Televisrael – and outside, itself as pre-text to future appropriations, as member of a plagiarizing collective to come. This virtually endless cross-textual sequence founds a literary-historical utopia of sorts, a (re)writers' community across styles and times. In the "honest position or place" Roberson opens up in his book, the authors, himself included, "facilitat[e]… discourse" rather than originate it. They depend on others to understand themselves and the

world because "It is only in coming to know another person that you come to know about the world around you." It is on this "alter-nate" epistemology, on the other's participation in discourse and proximity in space that both the understanding and the renewal of the world are premised.

Let me close by drawing from all this discussion to offer the following generalities. First, not all writing plagiarizes. But all writing appropriates, writes with the ink of otherness, more or less. One way to define postmodern writing and postmodernism generally is to say that it regularizes, upgrades, and forefronts this condition, thematizing in the process questions such as: What is property? What are the self's properties? What is self and what is other? What does it mean to own, to possess, to originate, and what is origin? What are originality, origination, individuality? What is the dynamic of individual and collective property, on the one hand, and propriety, on the other? What kind of values do we organize our lives around? How do we treat the canon and tradition generally?

Second, postmodern plagiarism must be obvious or detectable - "flaunted" or "forefronted," as I say above, disclosed somehow. Plagiarizing is no trivial theft but appropriation aware of its complex agenda, operating principles, stakes, and ramifications. Plagiarism of this sort depends on its being recognized as such as much as its success hinges on our ability to identify what ultimately makes appropriation different from the appropriated. Usually, it is the postmodern plagiarist who gives himself or herself away, clue us in.

Third, but related to my first point, plagiarism is not mere copying, reproduction, but frequently modification through critical rewriting, hence dissent, subversion, critique. With critique, with critical intention, we come close to putting our finger on the apparent paradox of plagiarism as a writing practice that repeats, becomes like a precursor text only to differ and

subvert, creates a tactical sameness, a dependence, in order to proclaim its distinction and independence - after all, to read Acker and understand her, one must have read her "victims."

Fourth, and also deriving from what I have just said, it is this sameness, the thoroughness of textual mimesis, that makes plagiarism distinct from other forms of intertextuality such as echo, allusion, hint, pun, quotation, parody, pastiche, narrative parallel, retelling, remake, and so forth - and it is the same thing that usually gets the plagiarist in trouble.

Fifth, and last, let me just reiterate an idea I started out with: all these procedures, preferences, and implications in terms what plagiarism is and what it can achieve beyond textuality itself, while they are not new, become dominant, defining, and are rendered obvious, often ironically, in postmodernity. With postmodern literature, plagiarism becomes both ostentatious and characteristic, an explicit meditation on cultural identity and identity generally in the age of multi-, inter-, and cross-subjectivity.