

### **Culture, Geopolitics, and Graduate Education in the Global Society**

Driven by competing agendas and inevitably fraught with their high-pitched discord, the post-9/11 debate over terror in general and terrorism in particular rests, nonetheless, on an implied epistemological consensus of sorts: the traditional notions no longer hold water. By “traditional” I mean, of course, “modern.” To be sure, the dictionary definition of terrorism, on which we often fall back mechanically, has been handed down to us by modernity, namely, by the post-Westphalian modernity of sovereign Western nation-states. Along with so many others, this definition too has all but outlived its pertinence.

Underscoring rather abstractly the use or threat of physical, sometimes deadly, anti-governmental and even anti-civilian force for political purposes, this understanding provides little orientation in the contemporary geography of violence. No question about it: the conceptual map we inherited from the moderns is hardly the twenty-first-century territory where terrorism’s contentions, plots, and meanings play out. To come to terms with these evolving meanings and their complex bearings on our lives as students, teachers, and citizens, I propose, accordingly, that we begin with this territory itself. For, it seems to me, what terror—no less than counter-terror—purports and stands for at the turbulent dawn of the new millennium is ultimately a function of this territory, of terror and terrorism’s position, reach, and scope.

If terrorism is, among other things, politics, this politics is fundamentally and sometimes fundamentalistically a politics of location. Terrorism constitutes a territoriality epiphenomenon. Or, more precisely, it did so until recently. Whatever else they may have entailed or impacted, terrorist claims have involved, not unlike the claims laid by the nation, self-determination,

sovereignty, and, in the final analysis, territoriality. Historically speaking, terror, political terror rather than its psychologist counterpart (terror as a “state of mind”) has been *territorialized*, place-bound. Local or, territorial, terror has had a spatial pathos to it. It has bodied forth a “separatist,” hence topological militancy, has been energized (has been “about”) and therefore has been circumscribed by a certain terrain—a *terra*, *tară*, *tierra*, *terre*, and so on in Latin and a number of Romance languages—that is, by a (home)land, country, or domain of the nation-state and its subdivisions or extensions inside or around its ever-contested borders and policies. Thus, terror and its modern enactments have been ordinarily a violent variety of **political teratology in the twofold sense that sets up the familiar-domestic, the territorial, as a stage for the teratological, the monstrous, the “terrifying” (from Lat. *terrēre*)**. Waged by individuals, groups, state-sanctioned military or paramilitary apparatuses of surveillance and repression such as the secret police from the Tsarist CEKA to East German Stasi and the Iranian Basij, or by whole governments during the recurrent “reigns of terror” for which latter-day apologists like Slavoj Žižek still offer cynical encomia, terror has been a non-deliberative, anti-parliamentary formation or malformation *within* the home of the nation, a homegrown aberration inside or alongside the *Heimat*’s body politic.

Not so much in the post-1989 era. Fundamentally symptomatic of the Cold War’s aftermath, the September 11, 2001 attacks as well as the worldwide developments they spurred bear witness to the spectacularly global dissemination of terror. Like anything else, terror has been deterritorialized. Decoupled from a well-marked territory, terror has gone global. Both in its actions and in the counter-actions it has unleashed—as “Jihadism” and “War on Terror” alike—it is now supralocal, transnational, arguably planetary. The nation-state neither contains it topologically nor accounts for it descriptively, as a unit of analysis. Not any more. As before, our

time's terrorism is militarily and politically transgressive, or, as we say these days, "asymmetric," in that it overall bends and even shuns the more or less agreed-upon rules of martial and political engagement. Its geographical asymmetry, its territorial unpredictability, is, however, quasi unprecedented. Practically, terror may originate anywhere nowadays, including "at home," and it can also strike anywhere. In fact, whether the target is (or is "in") Manhattan or Waziristan, and whether the targeting is carried out by isolated operatives or by networked, state-sponsored, or self-described statal agents such as regular armed forces, terrorist acts predominantly and characteristically stem from "elsewhere."

Does this mean that terrorism is not our problem, here and now, in a here and now almost overnight become, after 9/11, more problematic, more replete with problems and questions than ever? Absolutely not. It *is* our problem. Moreover, should it seem otherwise, we must show explicitly that we can make it our problem. It does not mean that this elsewhere is solely a spatial category either. To the contrary, it means, as I will expound in what follows, that terrorism *qua* our problem, as an American problem and possibly as *the* problem of America overall, of U.S. culture and its current place in the world, cannot be tackled apart from the highly charged problematic of elsewhere, of other terrains, cultures, and peoples. If that is true, then let me say a few words about this geoculturally asymmetric elsewhere and its thought-provoking, irregular landscape of otherness, as a preamble to a "provocation" of my own—the post-9/11 higher-education manifesto of sorts that I will offer in the last part of this essay.

"Meaning can happen when you least expect it," Alan Alda writes in his 2007 memoir *Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself*. I certainly agree. The "aha!" moment or place usually catches us by surprise. It may even strike us as "out of place." Why? Because it is just so, out of place and order, inordinate and ex-centric geographically, culturally, or both, displaced

and perhaps *déplacé*, as the French would say; because effective cognition entails a critical displacement, puts to test our habitual takes on things insofar as “getting it” is often not of “this” place, ours, but obtains in places remote or off the beaten path. Like identity, to whose fostering it is key, understanding is not a given but a gift on an other, “*de l’Autre*.” If, as one of Kundera’s novel titles assures us, “life is elsewhere,” there is a good reason for it. This elsewhere and its troubling, perhaps “terrible” if not “terrifying” “otherwise” are vital to us here, in our America. Being and thinking feed off the less conspicuous nearness and seemingly less consequential immediacy of the distant, the strange, and the different. These set in train the requisite, Levinasian *sortie de soi*, the “release from self-sameness,” from the inherited ways and clichés poised to shape our lives and thoughts into mindless rehearsals of previous lives and thoughts. To be sure, we are and understand *with* others and their places; self-identity presupposes them. Admittedly, “being elsewhere,” *être ailleurs*, can betoken “distraction” and “absence of thought,” but they also mark the very place of being and thinking because we ultimately come to terms with ourselves and our world *ailleurs*, “elsewhere,” as Montaigne once remarked. In the heteronomous scene of understanding, the existential, the epistemological, and the ethical intertwine. It is in this arena that comprehension, self-comprehension, and the self itself eventuate, relationally, in relation and thus as debt to an other. It is here that we learn about our own here and now (and their past), from others’ “out there” and their “far-out,” “exotic,” and “implausible” territories, histories, and notions.

So did Alda himself. As he reminisces in his volume’s sixth chapter, “A Passion for Reason,” he had to travel all the way to China a few years ago to “make a personal connection to [Thomas] Jefferson” and by the same token to himself as an American for whom our third President was a personification of America. As the actor told a roomful of Jeffersonian experts

back in Monticello, a rice paddy “on the other side of the world” proved to be the unlikely place where, at long last, he “got” Jefferson.

One wonders, though: are we now offshoring national identity too, how we feel about who we are? Is the postmodern making of Americans, the manufacturing, that is, of our innermost associations and self-revelations going the way most other manufacturing jobs have? More to the point: must we connect with others and their cultures in order to connect with ourselves *as* Americans, Americanists, or otherwise? Must we take the deterritorializing route of otherness, of cultural transit and translation, to be and “find” ourselves? Not entirely new, the questions are more timely now than ever. We must raise them if we really want to find out who we are as citizens of the U.S. and the world, and we must raise them too, I submit, to get a handle on terror’s twenty-first-century meanings. The gist of the answers—and the main tenet of my argument below—is encapsulated by Alda’s realization that Yuan Long Ping, a Chinese biologist, made him “underst[and] Jefferson for the first time.” Yuan did so, Alda intimates, as a “Chinese Jeffersonian” who reenacted an experiment “Jie Fu Sun” had done with rice back in his day. Following Jefferson and running similarly serious risks—the American smuggled rice out of Italy; the Chinese defied the People’s Republic’s pseudoscientific yet “official” botany—Yuan created a high-yield rice hybrid by cross-pollinating two strains of rice. Cross-pollination is, of course, key here, at once a Jeffersonian technique and an American *modus operandi*, driving force of national creativity and code of Americanness on so many levels. More notably, the Chinese Jefferson, himself an incarnation of this methodology, broke the code for his American guest. In other words, it was the latter’s enlightening encounter with his host that enabled Alda to relate to Jefferson, to forge the bond we normally assume we *already have* with those close to us, with kin, relatives, and like relations. What Yuan did and said as well as what he was—a hybrid

in his own right—helped Alda and, through him, Alda’s American listeners back in Virginia get a fresh grip on their individual and collective identities.

The other and the far-flung may speak to us from afar, with an accent if not in tongues, or so we may hear them and their Jie Fu Sunian whispers. But we had better pay attention to what they say because it may just unveil us to ourselves. We need not be—I for one am not—sold on a view of an identity and perception thereof wholly “disembedded,” “offshored,” much less on the economic metaphor itself. Nor should we underestimate the powerfully formative sway of the *hic et nunc*. What we might entertain instead and what I advance here is the hypothesis of a cultural-epistemological “outsourcing” of sorts, with others and their “out-of-place” sites, images, texts, styles, ideas, and *Weltanschauungen* as sources of defining “parts” and junctures of a fairly distinctive protocol of identity production and self-representation. This protocol, I further suggest, is pivotal to a kind of picturing of the self and of its world—to a cultural imaginary—that in the Cold War’s aftermath becomes more typical of American culture than at any time in its history. The logic underlying this imaginary is fundamentally, systematically, and pointedly relational, turning as it does on self and other’s foundational co-relationality with respect to one another. Whatever they are and regardless of how much they care for this situation, both are (stand for, exist) correlatively, in relation with each other. Alda’s little scene is relational because it decisively plays on relatedness, to wit, it premises the self and the self’s own thematization of itself and its culture on the self-other nexus.

With this in mind, let us circle back to our “terror.edu,” to this title masquerading as an Internet domain name. Is it a pun? A play many times over? Yes, but not gratuitously so, for it is also a memento, a reminder beginning with a full stop, so to speak, with the dot that links up in the spurious domain name two legitimate domains otherwise apart if not at odds in the public

imaginary: terror, terrorism more specifically, irrespective of its manifestation, on the one hand, and education, higher-education more exactly, on the other. Giving the lie to the old Ivory Tower cliché, “terror.edu” forefronts the mutual articulation of terror—with its events, policies, and disputes, on one side—and the academy, on the other, so much so that there is no other side, no sides, discrete, or outside domains any more, but a single albeit conflicted continuum of occurrences, implications, and discourses. “No more outside”: this is Hardt and Negri’s reiterated Deleuzian conclusion in *Empire*; within months, 9/11 corroborated this supremely apposite post-Cold War geopolitical observation, and before long, our universities followed suit, finding it increasingly difficult to position themselves outside those events, policies, and debates.

Many of us have deplored the encroachments of counterterrorist measures and regulations on our libraries and computers, and rightly so. But, whether or not the “War on Terror” as such makes precisely for the kind of knee-jerk, unreflective reaction we think it is our job to help students control intellectually and ethically; whether or not this all-out campaign threatens the very freedoms in whose defense it was presumably waged in the first place—either way, what “terror.edu” does, in my account at least, is this: it highlights the intricate, ever-ambiguous imbrications of terror, its territorial or, cross-territorial terrain, rather, and the moral-aesthetic values cultivated (cf. Lat. *cultura*) throughout this globally shifting, counter-cartographic territoriality; it thus reminds us that, while it may no longer be place- or nation-bound, terror remains germane to culture; it suggests, on this very ground, that terror falls under the enlightening jurisdiction of education, viz., can be approached as cultural formation of meanings and of those learning about them.

For, no question about it, the dot in question is deceptively terminal. That is to say, since culture does not end where terror begins (and vice versa), the dot is not a terminus, an *ad quem*

point, but the marker of the terms' inherent interplay, for better or worse: for worse, insofar as this imbrication may allow for potentially or effectively censorious intrusions of various government agencies on our work—and, to the extent the counterterrorist suspicions and policies, domestic and foreign, hurt our abilities to recruit international students and otherwise do our job, these infringements should be challenged vigorously, as they have been (see for instance, Hauerwas and Lentricchia's 2003 collection *Dissent from the Homeland*); for better, in that if terror and culture are indeed bound up with one another and, further, if the University continues to be a premier place for the critical production and filtering of cultural definitions, identities, and citizenship, as I think it does, then several points are in order—I would like to think them, if I may, as a pedagogical decalogue for the twenty-first century.

*First*, we, educators generally and humanists especially, are uniquely positioned to intervene in the ongoing, confusing dispute over terror and terrorism. We must understand, and make others understand too, that the confusion will persist unless the controversy and pertaining decisions, policies, and so forth take into account cultural issues.

*Second*, what this intervention might come down to is, in short, a reorientation of the discussion and related public perception away from the crude us/them, “clashist” dichotomy à la Benjamin Barber and Samuel Huntington. This polarity is simplistic, politically counterproductive, and geoculturally fictitious as long as we view it in exclusively adversarial and topologically discontinuous terms. This is not how Alda thinks about his dealings with his Chinese friend. I am not implying either that self and other do not exist in the modality of a distinction that can be deemed, and often simply is, as Levinas stresses, absolute. It is just that, distinct as they are and often insist on remaining, self and other stand after 1989 willy-nilly inscribed into a material world syntax of co-presence and co-participation in the very basic sense

that I and you, Christian and Muslim, white and black (or brown), and so on—whether we/they like it or not—“are in this together.” Being-with-, understanding-with-, understanding oneself-with-an other are forms of translocal and transcultural togetherness that define the transition away from modernity’s disjunctive, either-or, nation-state-based logic to our conjunctive stage. In this post-, perhaps post-postmodern world, to be and mean is to be and mean in relation, to be and signify with others, so much so that you *owe them* who you are and how you see yourself, your own people, history, and the like. More than ever, the problem of culture—“my culture” included—and the problem *with* its analysis no less, is the problem of alterity. Relatedness, more specifically the self-other nexus, is, much like our connecting dot, the logic of Manuel Castells’s network society and in that cuts to the heart of how and who we (no less than “they”) and our world are—once more, whether we/they are crazy about it or not.

*Third*, if this is so, then, once again, the problem of terror is no different from the problem of culture, “mine” and “yours,” “American” and “Pakistani,” of how we think of it and how we might help our students and the public at large think of it. I would propose, then, that this thinking and the teaching and learning based on it are or should be relational, grounded in the kind of I-You relation to which thinkers like Martin Buber have attended so insistently and inspiringly. Similar to the dot knotting together fields and people, this thinking connects the dots too, distinct and asymmetrically positioned as these dots may be or appear. This “mutualist” worldview sets up relations, places things in a participatory context of interaction, exchange, and negotiation in order to make sense of those things.

*Fourth*, this kind of context also defines the pedagogical environment *and* epistemological paradigm of the twenty-first-century classroom. Reciprocally, it is in this context that the defining essence of culture and identity emerges. Both transhistorical and more

conspicuous today than at any previous stage, this essence, what culture and cultural identity are and, consequently, how we think or how we should think about them, ultimately disables a disjunctive-adversarial understanding of the self-other dyad. “Out there” as much as “in here,” across the world and across the street, the other no less than the self as the other’s other are—or, if they are not yet, they ought to become—no longer the monolithically ethno-religious fetish lying behind most acts of terror and anti-terrorist retaliations.

*Fifth*, while imagining ourselves—teaching the images and histories of America—in terms of our indebtedness to others may not be an instant game-changer, in my judgment it nevertheless is a first step we can and should take as students and teachers of culture. This is a step in the direction of a cultural solution to a problem that, I hasten to add, loud and clear, is not solely cultural but also economic, religious, demographic, political and geopolitical, and so on. However, what we hear time and again from Žižek, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and other self-appointed, global-era terrorism experts is, as Baudrillard contends in his 2002 essay *Hypothèses sur le terrorisme*, that “It all comes from the fact that the Other, like Evil, is unimaginable. It all comes from the impossibility of conceiving of the Other—friend or enemy—in its radical otherness, in its irreconcilable foreignness.” “A refusal rooted,” the philosopher goes on, “in the total identification with oneself around moral values and technical power. That is the America that takes itself for America and which, bereft of otherness, eyes itself with the wildest compassion.” Needless to say—or, who knows, perhaps this needs to be said, given where the terror debate stands *dix ans après*—there is hardly any compassion for terrorism’s victims in Baudrillard, and you would find it neither in Virilio’s technophobe jeremiad *Ground Zero*, where the 9/11 attacks are defined, following Karlheinz Stockhausen’s despicable 2001 statement, as “the greatest work of art there has ever been.” Nor is there any in Žižek’s anti-consumerist-

anti-Hollywood-anti-postmodern-anti-cultural-studies-anti-multicultural-anti-U.S.-anti-Israeli-anti-Pakistani-anti-everything tirade *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. Oddly enough, Žižek fancies himself a sort of iron-fisted Morpheus, not the Greek God of sleep and dreams, of course, but the Laurence Fishburne character in *The Matrix* moonlighting, appalling as it may sound, as “[a] Minister of the Interior or head of the secret service,” which, still in Žižek’s own words, was “the only government [post] which interested me” back “in the early 1990s,” when “I was more involved in Slovene politics” (hey, did somebody say totalitarianism?). Žižek-as-Himmler (or Stalin’s Beria—just take your pick)-as Morpheus, then, welcomes the terrorist occurrence, the “act,” insofar as the act—never mind its mass-murderous consequences—serves as a national wakeup call, in turn welcoming us to the “thing itself,” the Real underneath the media-generated simulacrum also known as the American everyday. In this sense, 9/11’s thousands of deaths and, by implication, the many more thousands of casualties inflicted on others elsewhere after that make for a reasonable “price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality,” that is, for finally “getting” ideology and the spell it casts on us. But the careful reader must be disappointed, I presume, when the Slovene Morpheus lulls us back to sleep by defining, a bit later, the cultural anatomy of the event behind the Real’s disclosure as the very workings of said ideology. Whether you want to know more about yourself or about others, learning about the other’s culture “remains,” he claims, “a gesture of ideological mystification *par excellence*: probing into different cultural traditions is precisely *not* the way to grasp the political dynamics which led to the September 11 attacks.”

*Sixth*, the new pedagogical imperative and the cosmopolitan literacy that I believe must be this imperative’s ultimate objective go of necessity against this a-cultural cocksureness. Cultural “probing” is hardly the compounding problem. Quite the opposite, it provides the

solution, in classrooms, agoras, and political bodies alike. Why? Because, if terrorism is, no matter its origin, venue, and rationale, the violent epitome of parochialism, a paroxism of the idiomatic and the ruthlessly exclusive, this is due to no negligible degree to a poverty of the anthropological imagination. Xenophobic, anti-Semitic, racist, jingoistic, and, according to Roland Barthes, “petit-bourgeois” culture is simply “unable to imagine the Other. If [it] comes face to face with him, [it] blinds [it]self, ignores and denies him, or else transforms [it]self into him.” Barthes talks about “class anthropomorphism,” but I would broaden the notion to cover the cultural anthropomorphism of any culturally ingrown self, group, or society, “ours” surely no exception, in which “otherness is reduced to sameness.” On the one hand, such self or group expunges the other from the domain of selfhood; on the other hand, it reduces the other to (the self) itself in the (pseudo)act of self-knowledge. Both are stratagems of negation, denial, and thus self-denial. Historically, they have played out, as Barthes alerts us, in a number of superficially conflicting ways: as outright ignorance; as pseudo-recognition that forces the unknown into the clichés and essences customarily featured by the rhetoric of intolerance and more largely into cut-and-dried categories of intelligibility; as “agnostic” rationalization of the supposedly “exotic,” “irrational,” and “incomprehensible,” which casts the other outside “humanity” on principle—the other is in- or sub-human, demonic, barbarian, unclean, etc. In the West, this exclusive mentality can be traced back to the Greek city-state and its setting itself off against the backdrop of “barbarian” otherness fancied as outlandish, *distinct* in space and culture, that is, incompatible with the local axiology of the polis and thereby im-polite and im-politic, uncouth and uncivilized, in sum, “barbarous.” A barbarian, Greek historians and philosophers enlighten us, is fundamentally a non-Greek, a foreigner. Vice versa, a foreigner must be barbaric, totally different from and adverse to the native in customs and demeanor. *Alius* (“other” for Romans) is

thus understood as *alienus*, “alien.” The self and the barbarian other are not only distinct but also politically discordant and so liable to clash. As a non-self, the latter threatens the self by its very existence. This is how, in the dynamic of self and other as represented by the *socii* of a self-described native community, difference sets itself up as incompatibility, disjunction, contest, intolerance, and finally exclusion. It becomes so, of course, without necessarily being recognized as such. The rationale of this exclusion is reason itself, more precisely, the contrasting irrationality of the other, who is “by nature” prone to brutality, to rude, irrational if not utterly insane behavior (cf. the French *aliéné*). This proclivity is putatively born out by the word’s onomatopoeic root. Accordingly, the gibberish spoken by the *bárbaroi* is nonsensical “bar, bar, bar” (“blah, blah, blah”), an etymology corroborated by the Sanskrit *barbara* (“stammering” and “non-Aryan”). Since presumably *phoné barbariké* serves no rational purpose, it supplies no vehicle to logos, sense-making, communication, and cooperation either, disqualifying its speaker as *polites*, as a member of a linguistic-rational community. In brief, irrationality is both cultural diagnosis and political subterfuge, language used by the “sane,” a priori civilized, and “politic” body to mark and quarantine infectious difference, to control the “pathology” of otherness.

*Seventh*, we have reached a point in world affairs when it is becoming abundantly clear that this symptomatology is endemic to insiders and outsiders alike, to self-described rational communities, languages, and institutions, as well to their supposedly irrational and putatively external exteriorities. Regardless of side, then, among all those unable to imagine others and their “alternate” ways of doing and looking at things, the terrorist individual, organization, or mindset is the worst in that he, she, they, or it cannot picture other people as people, that is, cannot visualize others’ humanity as humanity, as concrete, if “atypical” human life worth respecting unless it mirrors their own type. And if it does not, it does not exist. It falls short not

only typologically but also ontologically, or so the argument goes. Those others may be “out there,” but they are less than human. Further, since they do not fit the bill of humanness, they are not worth our humaneness either, a modicum of compassion that would make the terrorist think twice before blowing them to smithereens.

*Eight*, this compassion is cosmopolitan. Very basically, as a modality of care, of ethical outward projection of the self, compassion “shap[es] the civic imagination” and thus lies at the core of civility, of being “civilized,” a *cives (polites)*. The cosmopolitan *cives*, the *cosmopolites* as the Greeks called him or her, extends or is expected to extend “intramural” compassion to those other “out there” (or, if in here, not like “us”). He or she possesses the rare ability to care about others, and to the extent that this ability is inherent to cosmopolitanism, a phrase such as “compassionate cosmopolite” is arguably a tautology. Conversely, to suggest that the cosmopolitan’s antinomy, the barbarian, is uncompassionate would be equally redundant. Along these lines, the terrorist individual, entity, or mechanism, no matter how rhetorically sophisticated his or its platform, is quintessentially, and no less redundantly, barbarous.

*Ninth*, cosmopolitan compassion, the capacity to feel-for across differences in space and culture, is—and here too I follow Nussbaum—the one that puts indifference, injustice, aggression, and ultimately murderous violence onto an other out of gear. Yet I cannot feel-for if I cannot feel-with, if I cannot associate myself authentically to the ways in which others see and take in the world, without necessarily buying into their world pictures, in brief, if there is no empathy. But there can be no empathy for others, no emotional connection with those who are *not* already my relatives, without the basic ability to relate to them cognitively—cognitively and, I insist, ethically at once—that is, if I make no attempt to know them in their often radical, hard-to-know and sometimes unknowable otherness. In this sense, the “impossibility of conceiving the

Other” in his or her “radical otherness,” in the specific, time- and place-bound configuration of his or her humanity, is indeed the problem we are all facing today whether we talk about terror or about culture, about 9/11 or Orientalism (or Occidentalism, for that matter). At the dawn of the twenty-first century more than ever in our history, this history and the culture produced across it appear to us, with supreme clarity, as a domain of relationality.

*Tenth*, as has been noted, but, apparently, also forgotten repeatedly, it was cultural studies that moved “others” to the center of our view of ourselves. “Bereft of otherness,” to invoke Baudrillard again, America makes, indeed, no sense analytically—I suppose this is what most of us tell our students more and more these days. Made possible by a number of philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists who have taken the first steps in opposing cosmopolitanism, its cultural epistemology, and ethics to the new, state-sponsored or freelancing barbarianism of terror—and more largely cosmopolitan “conversationalism” to parochial “confrontationalism”—the whole point of what I would call cosmopolitan literacy is to drive home this notion of being and making sense in *sine qua non* relation with an other’s singular humanity. Our charge as humanists eager to honor the plurality embedded in the humanities to which we are so dedicated, and also the main task of education in general at a time self and other have drawn so close in space to one another, is indeed this literacy understood as a systematic, cross-curricular, and methodologically apposite effort to help our students see others—and with them, ourselves—in the their material, particular humanness. For this materiality, I contend, is the very site and vehicle of cultural-existential difference. Difference, then, is no longer a hurdle, an obstacle to communication, as classical humanists and critics from Žižek and Badiou to Nussbaum herself tend to think, but a bridge, a window into the other’s humanity and implicitly an apt instrument with which to handle and possibly mitigate the frictions, tensions, frustrations, and confusions of

twenty-first-century worldly togetherness. To think twice, to spare a life, to think a life worth sparing, is not just thinking but also feeling. Yet, it bears reiterating in closing, you cannot feel for, or feel like, others, nor can you empathize—let alone be compassionate—if you cannot relate, and you cannot relate outside the immediate circle of kin and kind if you do not get to know those others in their most humanly individualizing routines that, at the end of knowing, must remain as human as individual, “different,” unique, and, yes, mysterious. On this account, Baudrillard is wrong: while terrorism may often be logically “asymmetric,” what it actually accomplishes does nothing to “restore” the world of singularities threatened by Nike billboards. To the extent that any asymmetric claim is the purview of cultural behavior, asymmetry is in reality hardly the terrorist individual or state’s posture; this is precisely what makes terrorism “immoral” and its posture a *de facto* imposture, its asymmetric claims or appearances notwithstanding.

It is the cosmopolitan cultural analyst and teacher, whose methodological self-positioning, object, as well as objective are all unconventional, that is, one last time, asymmetrical: unpredictable, slippery, undisciplined, and otherwise little beholden to available cognitive grids. Still, we need to remind ourselves and our students this: if, much like self-knowledge, our knowledge about others passes the test of this asymmetry, then we have known them in their unyielding otherness and thus have also not known them, as it were, in the Levinasian sense in which relational rather than rational knowledge honors the mystery of others and the common world their elusive presence makes possible.