RADICAL WORLDS: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability

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■ **Abstract**   This essay seeks to provide an overview of the anthropology of radical alterity and social commensuration. I begin with critical theoretical discussions of incommensurability and undecidability in the context of radical interpretation. I then resituate these theoretical debates in liberal ideologies of language-use and public reason in order to suggest the delicate and dramatic ways in which institutionalized conventions of risk and pleasure commensurate social worlds. How do incommensurate worlds emerge and how are they sustained? In other words, how is the inconceivable conceived? How are these new ethical and epistemological horizons aligned or not in the complicated space and time of global capital and liberal democratic regionalisms and nationalisms? How do publics interpret and decide between competing social visions and practices in the shadow of the seemingly incompatible frameworks of post-foundationalist and fundamentalist enlightenments?

INTRODUCTION

Street-dwellers in Mumbai and ferals in Australia (Appadurai 2000, Rajagopal 2002), indigenous activists in São Paulo and queer activists in Vienna, Cape Town, and Jakarta (Bunzel 2000, da Cunha & Almeida 2000, Boellstorf 1999, Hoad 1999); new religious fundamentalists in the Christian and Islamic worlds (Mahmood 2001, Lattas 1998, Asad 1993, Harding 2000, Crapanzano 2000)[1]—a

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[1]And their complex interactions, "Another and significant gay & lesbian area centres around the suburb of Newtown in Sydney's "Inner West". This is an area just west of the CBD. Newtown is an area of old Victorian terraces, either under-going renovation, or falling down due to neglect! It's an area in transition. There is a slow gradual process of gentrification. As a result, fags & dykes, ferals, aging hippies, old conservatives, young families, and yuppie professionals are all neighbours. A healthy mix really." AUSTRALIA Out and About in Sydney: Queer Capital of the S Pacific John—*Canberra Australia*. <http://www.viajartravel.com/travsydn.htm> See also http://www.ferals.com.au/

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significant portion of anthropology now focuses on what Charles Taylor has called the emergence of new social imaginaries and Nancy Frazer calls subaltern counter-publics, but what I will call the emergence of radical worlds in the shadow of the liberal diaspora (Taylor 1999, 2002, Fraser 1993; see also Warner 2002, Negt & Kluge 1993). We might say that anthropology has now complemented and complicated classical social questions about how actual social worlds are reproduced and ruptured, by asking: How do incommensurate worlds emerge and how are they sustained in their incommensurability? In other words, how is the inconceivable conceived? How are these new ethical and epistemological horizons aligned or not in the complicated space and time of global capital and liberal democratic regionalisms and nationalisms? How do publics interpret and decide between competing social visions and practices in the shadow of the seemingly incompatible frameworks of post-foundationalist and fundamentalist enlightenments?

The topic of incommensurability and interpretation has occupied a wide range of scholars and artists outside of anthropology, including political scientists, economists, jurists, and artists in the literary and plastic fields (Cage 1992, Simon 1999, Knapp & Michaels 1997, Flagg 1996, Chang 1997, Posner 2000, Perloff 2000). Studies include such disparate topics as indeterminacy and investment adjustment costs; intentionality, linguistics, and the indeterminacy of translation; and romanticism and intimacy. And the authors of these studies include everyone from the US Federal Reserve Board members to postclassical musicians to political theorists of multicultural nationalism.

This essay seeks to provide an overview of the anthropology of radical alterity and social commensuration. I begin with critical theoretical discussions of incommensurability and undecidability in the context of radical interpretation. I then resituate these theoretical debates in liberal ideologies of language-use and public reason in order to suggest the delicate and dramatic ways in which institutionalized conventions of risk and pleasure commensurate social worlds—how they make radical worlds unremarkable.

RADICAL INTERPRETATION

Scholars in the philosophy of language have understood incommensurability to refer to a state in which an undistorted translation cannot be produced between two or more denotational texts. The concept of incommensurability is closely related to linguistic indeterminacy. Indeed, they are sometimes used interchangeably. Indeterminacy is also used in a more narrow sense to refer to the condition in which two incompatible "translations" (or, "readings") are equally true interpretations of the same "text." In other words, if indeterminacy refers to the possibility of describing a phenomenon in two or more equally true ways, then incommensurability refers to a state in which two phenomena (or worlds) cannot be compared by a third without producing serious distortion. W. V. Quine used as an example

of this kind of problem the translation into the Arunta language of a theory first formulated in English. Assuming that English sentences have "their meaning only together as a body, then we can justify their translation into Arunta only together as a body. There will be no justification for pairing off the component English sentences with component Arunta sentences, except as these correlations make the translation of the theory as a whole come out right. Any translations of the English sentences into Arunta sentences will be as correct as any other, so long as the net empirical implications of the theory as a whole are preserved in translation. But it is to be expected that many different ways of translating the component sentences, essentially different individually, would deliver the same empirical implications for the theory as a whole; deviations in the translation of one component sentence could be compensated for in the translation of another component sentence. Insofar, there can be no ground for saying which of two glaringly unlike translations of individual sentences are right" (Quine 1960, p. 80).

Philosophers such as Gadamar, De Mann, and Derrida have vigorously argued about the degree of distortion in translations (and interpretations) across incommensurate semantic fields; about the risk of assigning and acting on these translations in ordinary life; and about the social productivity of foregrounding indeterminacy/undecidability as a progressive social ideal (Wittgenstein 1969, Quine 1969, Kuhn 1966, Putnam 1978, Steiner 1975, Gadamar 1982, De Mann 1979, Derrida 1985, Caputo 1993, Connolly 1999). The stakes of translation seem high, given, as Jim Hopkins has argued, that the ability to "spontaneously, continually, and with remarkable precision and accuracy" interpret one another "seems fundamental to our co-operative and cognitive lives" (Hopkins 1999, p. 255).

But, as Quine suggests above, analytic philosophers seem haunted by much more than the ordinary stakes of ordering and getting a coffee. The ability to commensurate two textual (and thus social) fields without distortion or the ability to decide between these two translations on the basis of truth and accuracy puts more than metaphysics at risk (though as Derrida and Spivak have noted, it also puts metaphysics at risk by dislocating it from its foundation; Derrida 1982, Spivak 1999). Indeed, Quine's student, Donald Davidson, has hinged the philosophical problem of truth and incommensurability to representations and understandings of colonial and postcolonial history insofar as his notion of "radical interpretation" finds its purest expression there. By "radical interpretation," Davidson means to ask how it is possible for speakers to interpret an utterance in the context of radical linguistic (and social) alterity (Davidson 1984d). How could the Hawaiians have understood James Cook, or Cook the Hawaiians, without producing serious distortions (Sahlins 1995, Obeyesekere 1997)? As he puts it, "Hesitation over whether to translate a saying of another by one or another of various non-synonymous sentences of mine does not necessarily reflect a lack of information: it is just that beyond a point there is no deciding, even in principle, between the view that the Other has used words as we do but has more or less weird beliefs, and the view that we have translated him wrong. Torn between the need to make sense of a speaker's words and the need to make sense of his patterns of belief, the best we can do

is choose a theory of translation that maximizes agreement" (Davidson 1984a, p. 101).

Davidson answers his own question about the possibility of radical translation positively, by propping the possibility of radical interpretation on the "principle of charity," namely, that speakers and listeners assume that the other is acting according to a set of rational linguistic conventions like their own (Davidson 1984b, p. 277). This convention allows speakers and hearers constantly to readjust their "passing theories" about the meaning of words as they realize that others are not using them as the listener would. As a result, if our aim is to understand the speaker as she or he wishes to be understood, then we modify our own language assumptions in the direction of a speaker's own as, in the course of conversation, we realize that the two are divergent—that the semantic way the other uses "hippopotamus" is the way we use "orange" (Davidson 1984c, p. 153). In other words we negotiate charitably. Charity begins at home, however; and Davidson has also argued that "if we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviors of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true *by our own standards*, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything" (Davidson 1984d, p. 137, my emphasis; for a trenchant critique see Cutrofello 1999). Contra Davidson, critical theorists have argued that indeterminacy/undecidability is the normal condition of communication and is productively exploited in domestic and international negotiations such as in the standoff in early 2001 between the United States and China over responsibility for the downing of an American spy plane. Maximizing agreement in this case and others depends on the nonsynonymous nature of lexemes and sentence-level texts and the uncharitable, performative nature of the dissemination and excess of those texts (Bataille 1985, Derrida 1972).

As the reference to James Cook and his Hawaiian interlocutors was meant to suggest, analytic philosophers and critical theorists are hardly the only scholars of language and culture interested in the problem of incommensurability and undecidability in contexts of radical interpretation. Since Benjamin Whorf proposed studying the ways that structures of languages influence (or, in its strong version, determine) the thoughts of those who use them, anthropologists and other students of culture have struggled to understand the significance of the semantic distortions and gaps that occur in translations across social and sociolinguistic fields (for discussion of the legacies of Whorfian linguistic relativity, see Schultz 1990, Lucy 1992, P Lee 1996).

The work of linguistically minded anthropologists initially focused on grammatical categories—classically, the influence of overt and covert grammatical markings on people's cognition. From this standpoint, precision and accuracy seem vital indeed to our everyday lives, given that "empty" gasoline drums could seem like lesser fire hazards (Whorf 1967). But more recently, linguistic anthropologists have foregrounded the problem that metalanguage poses to efforts to close semantic space in moments of radical translation (Lucy 1993, Jakobson 1962a, Silverstein 1981). John Lucy put it this way: "Whorf's account makes clear that

there is a specific semiotic problem involved stemming from the formal characteristics of reflexive uses of language. When using language reflexively (as metalanguage) to characterize the referents of forms in the language (as object language), speakers typically use the very same set of categories to describe the linguistic forms and to describe the reality to which those forms have reference" (Lucy 1993, pp. 24–25). Distortions are then not merely across linguistic phenomena but across levels of "linguistic consciousness" (Sapir 1949, Jakobson 1962b). Distortions simply compound as the structural terrain of translation becomes more complicated. Lucy again: "In fact, the problem is doubly acute since the analyst's own language categories may be so strongly felt that other languages will be interpreted or described in terms of them—effectively short-circuiting the possibility of developing clearly contrasting cases" (Lucy 1993, p. 25).

One of my favorite examples of such distortions is found in T. G. H. Strehlow's classic *Aranda Phonetics and Grammar* (1944). Strehlow's text seems especially relevant insofar as it shows the migration of the distortions produced by metalinguistic problems into moral evaluation. Strehlow's task is to outline the major phonemic and grammatical features of Arunta. But Strehlow is significantly bothered by one feature of Arunta grammar, the supposed absence of gender distinctions. Strehlow initially presents this difference with distinct neutrality: "The Aranda nouns know no distinctions of gender: masculine, feminine and neuter are all meaningless terms to the Central Australian tribesman. Not even the common animals of the chase are differentiated according to sex" (Strehlow 1944, p. 59). However, linguistic difference quickly migrates to moral ascription. For Strehlow, the Arunta do not merely *lack* gender distinctions, the Arunta "*refused* to acknowledge in its grammar the primal distinction of the genders" (Strehlow 1944, p. 59, my emphasis). Putting aside the question of whether and how Arunta marks gender, we see the grammatical presuppositions and entailments of English motivating what Strehlow considers the basic conditions of human articulateness. Quine's query about whether it is possible to translate an English-based theory into Arunta is apposite, though somewhat differently approached. The metalinguistic sense Strehlow has of the necessity of nominal gender in English becomes a moral insistence on what "primal distinctions" humans must acknowledge to be human as such.

The concept of linguistic and cultural indeterminacy and foreclosure has a much broader scope than linguistic anthropology. A paradigmatic case in the anthropological literature was the debate between feminist anthropologists in the 1980s over the relevance of the concepts of nature, culture, and capital to other societies (Ortner 1974, MacCormack & Strathern 1980, Di Leonardo 1991, Gal 2001). Marilyn Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* is in many senses the ethnographic apotheosis of this debate (Strathern 1988). We see a renewed interest in this problematic in the more recent generation's interest in the Foucauldian concept of "singularities," the Derridean concept of "undecidability," the Gramscian focus on cultural hegemony, and perhaps most influentially, Walter Benjamin's invocation of translation in *The Task of the Translator* (Benjamin 1969). For

instance, in a study influential in critical anthropology, William Pietz has argued that the cultural fetish—we might include under the sign of "cultural fetish" all trade in and around cultural difference—is the mark of the foreclosure that occurs in the process of radical translation. "Fetish is not of any one of the two cultures coming into contact. It is a concept-thing (an idea and a material thing at the same time) that arises in the gap that comes about at the moment of contact between the two cultures/languages. It becomes imbued with power to carry meaning across borders" (Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; see also Taussig 1993, and for recent full-length ethnographies incorporating these critical traditions see Ivy 1995, Rabinow 1999, Rofel 1999, Morris 2000).

Indeed, however interestingly, much of the post-Whorfian literature has focused on the semantic and grammatical features of language that lead to linguistic and social distortions in the proximity of alterity. But, in focusing on how linguistic distortions influence the apprehension of the social world, these studies have bracketed how social interaction, and thus social power, determines linguistic distortion (commensurability, and incommensurability). And it is exactly the issue of power that has interested anthropologists studying radical and subaltern worlds. Talal Asad noted some time ago that insofar as "the languages of the Third World societies. . . are 'weaker' in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around" (Asad 1986, pp. 157–58; see also Chakrabarty 2000, Trouillot 2000). To return to Quine and Strehlow, if gender was not a feature of Arunta noun phrases, how did it become so, rather than English losing this grammatical marking? A number of scholars have examined just these types of questions, including Miyako Inoue, who has studied the "birth" and subsequent history and social effects of a discernible "woman's role" and an associated "women's language" in post-Meiji Japan, and Lydia Lui, who has developed Asad's point in the context of "translated modernity" in China during the first forty years of twentieth century (Inoue 1994, Lui 1995; see also Hart 1999, Saussy 1999). More recently, Emily Apter and Gayatri Spivak have discussed the impact of machine translation on the global politics of social intelligibility and conceivability (Apter 2001, Spivak 2001).

To be sure, recent pragmatically inclined anthropological approaches to semiotics resituate Davidson's focus on interpretive commensuration away from semantics and toward an interactive sociology (Daniel 1984, Urban 1996, Silverstein & Urban 1996, B Lee 1997, Irvine & Gal 1999). If Davidson advocates a semantically grounded theory of translation that maximizes agreement, pragmatic approaches ground agreement in real-time social contestations over the presuppositional underpinnings of any interaction. By demonstrating that Davidsonian adjustment occurs at the level of language usage, these scholars re-embed social and linguistic commensuration and de-commensuration in their social and institutional contexts. They demonstrate that every domestic and foreign exchange is a struggle at multiple levels. At the simplest, the struggle is to characterize the social nature of the interaction (the socially inscribed who, what, and where of any event, even

those that happen "nowhere"), and thus the terms of how and what are say-able in this context and how it relates to questions of social and subjective worth, and livability. If a listener orients her conventions of interpretation toward a speaker, we can now ask what institutions of capital, subjectivity, and state influence the degree of this orientation (Povinelli 2002a).

Insofar as pragmatic approaches socially saturate communication, they help us ask questions about the emergence and foreclosure of socially inconceivable and incommensurate worlds. For, whether implicitly or explicitly, interactional signals indicate to persons how they should calculate and calibrate the stakes, pleasures, and risks of being a certain type of form in a certain type of formed space. Drawn into the semiotic process are the formal and inform(ation)al institutional forces that dictate the varying degrees of pleasure and harm varying types of people face breaking frame—of having the wrong body, or wrong form of a body, or wrong attitude about that formed body in a (informed) formed world. Davidson's worry over interpretation in the context of radical interpretation is displaced from a semantico-logical problem into a social problem; namely, the delicate and dramatic ways in which institutionalized conventions of risk and pleasure commensurate social worlds—make radical worlds unremarkable (Povinelli 2001).

POWER AND THE PRACTICE OF COMMENSURATION

Others have already begun moving in this direction. In "Commensuration as a Social Process," Wendy Espeland & Mitchell Stevens note that although it is evident in routine decision-making and a crucial vehicle of rationalization, commensuration as a general social process has been given little consideration by sociologists (Espeland & Stevens 1998). Drawing on Marxist analysis of capital forms of commodification and Weberian analysis of modern bureaucracies, Espeland & Stevens argue that the efficiency of bureaucracies and economic transactions depends on a standardization between disparate things that reduces the relevance of context—or, as they put it, "commensuration transforms qualities into quantities, difference into magnitude" (Espeland & Stevens 1998). They call for a sociology of commensuration that would ask, What motivates people to commensurate? What forms of commensuration do they use? What are commensuration's practical and political effects? What are the tensions between ethical systems and the formal rationality of commensuration such as, though not their example, the body organ trade (see Cohen 1999, Scheper-Hughes 2000, Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). Indeed, the emergent scholarship on bioethics in anthropology and science studies is an excellent site for studying the practical and political effects of social commensuration (see Kleinman et al 1999).

The questions Espeland & Stevens propose are nowhere more vital than in the anthropology of radical worlds and, more specifically, the study of the challenge radical worlds pose to the liberal diaspora. Philosophical worries about the

possibility of commensurating various variant moral and epistemological fields become national and international concerns. The Islamic diaspora into western Europe, the emergence of queer sexualities throughout the world, and other older forms of social life in new places or emergent forms of social life in any place push against the previously tacitly held understandings of a shared deontic and epistemic horizon (Handler 1988, Povinelli 2002b). National concerns do not stop at the doorstep of cultural and social movements. The emergence of new forms of economic association—adapting to and resisting globalizing capital—equally may challenge the grounds of older forms of liberal civil society (Gilmore 1999, Wright 1999, Nancy 1991, Agamben 1993). Primarily focusing on the emergence of new financial instruments, Lee and Lipuma have described a much broader anthropological task of studying "cultures of circulation" (Lee & Lipuma 2002). And yet, put crudely, the liberal national form seems continually to reconstitute some nominal, and normative, we-horizon out of these publicly celebrated or scorned, but in any case seemingly economically vital, flows of people, images, and things (Ong 1999, Malkki 1995, Rouse 1991). The question of how radical worlds emerge in this context is displaced by a seemingly more pressing question: How are these disparate social and cultural worlds made commensurate with the social idea(l) of nationalism and/or civil society without the use of repressive force? The problem of radical interpretation once again reappears. But now we ask what social practices and forms of social power are used to commensurate disparate ethical and epistemological systems in liberal national forms.

One answer seems clear enough. The power of a particular form of communication to commensurate morally and epistemologically divergent social groups lies at the heart of liberal hopes for a nonviolent democratic form of governmentality. Since Kant, great faith and store has been placed in public reason as a means of diluting the glue that binds people unreflectively to moral or epistemological obligations and, at the same time, as a means of fusing, defusing and refusing deontological and epistemological horizons (Foucault 1997). Public reason—a form of communication in which free and equal citizens present truth claims to other free and equal citizens who accept or reject these claims on the basis of their truth, sincerity, and legitimacy has been granted the power of refashioning social institutions by continually opening them to the current consensus about what constitutes the most legitimate form(s) of public life (Habermas 1989, Rawls 1993). In this view, the procedures of reason and judgment are seen as determining social epistemologies and moral obligations, of bending moral sensibilities and making them pliable; and, in so doing, making a shared cultural and moral community. Through public reason perspective becomes perspectival; moral obligation and its conditioning of freedom opens to a broader moral horizon, the I-you dyad to a we-horizon, most notably the we-horizons of the nation and the human, the national and the cosmopolitan. Orienting justifications to this horizon detaches the social from the bonds of particular persons and groups; it makes members freer. It universalizes historical reason and moral

obligations not by finding some transcendental reference, but by recalibrating the scope of current consensus. At no time in history have these procedures of public reason seemed so necessary and so valuable as when they were emerging in the midst of the religious carnage of seventeenth-century Europe and as they are now called upon to mediate moral co-presence in an increasingly diasporic world.

In liberal democracies, the corrective function of public reason is not merely located in the give and take of discourse, but in the give and take of formal and informal institutions. In other words, the dynamic among the domains of liberal society—between the public sphere, civil society, various formal institutions of government—should ideally mimic the self-correcting movement of reasoned public debate. Take for instance the juridical branch in Australia. Jurists may well represent themselves as basing decisions on precedent and other genre-specific procedures of the juridical domain. But they also understand themselves to be continually realigning the relevance of the common law to contemporary public opinion of what constitutes public understandings of the good, the tolerable, the abhorrent, and the just (Povinelli 1998). Indeed, the actions of each "estate" are represented and understood to be liable to correction by another, and all, ultimately, to the franchised public.

Habermas has perhaps gone furthest in seeking to integrate the embedded dynamic of discursive and institutional self-correction. For him, the proceduralism of the democratic public sphere understands that the truth claims made by free and equal citizens are refracted against the "objective world (as the totality of entities about which true statements are possible)," the "social world (as the totality of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations," and the "subjective world (as the totality of experiences to which a speaker has privileged access and which he can express before a public)" (Habermas 1989, p. 120). The end-point however is roughly the same, some nonviolent means of commensurating divergent or diverging moral and epistemological worlds.

And yet, in the real-time of social life, democratic nations contain the violent suppression of Islamic fundamentalisms, David Koresh and Move members are burnt to the ground, queers are staked out in all senses of the term, and many, even voluntary, social practices are outlawed. Even public practices that seem aligned to reasoned public debate are the target of sometimes severe forms of governmental control (Hirschkind 2001, Daniel 1996, Feldman 1991, Aretxaga 1997). In other words, rather than edging toward a horizon of shared epistemic and moral values, these discursive and institutional gaps could be seen as always already allowing repressive acts. By the time the legislative branch catches up, the law has already sentenced a generation to death. What seems to be at stake then is how we come to characterize moments of social repression and social violence directed at left and right radical worlds as moving forward a nonviolent shared horizon, as the peaceful proceduralism of communicative reason, rather than as violent intolerance, i.e., the pragmatic aspects of communication. To do this we have to shift our perspective. We do not ask how a multicultural or plural nation (or world) is sutured at the

end of some horizon of liberal, institutionally embedded, communication. We ask instead how the incommensurateness of liberal ideology and practice is made to appear commensurate.

The temporalizing function of the horizon of successful self-correction seems an essential part of the means by which the practice of social violence is made to appear and to be experienced as the unfurling of the peaceful public use of reason. Characterizations of liberal governmentality as always already stretching to the future horizon of apologetic self-correction figure contemporary real-time contradictions, gaps, and incommensurabilities in liberal democratic discourses and institutions as in the process of closure and commensuration. Any analysis of real-time violence is deflected to the horizon of good intentions, and more immediately, as a welcomed part of the very process of liberal self-correction itself. Richard Rorty's discussion of liberal irony is interesting on this point. Rorty's ideal liberal is not a dispassionate philosopher in search of the holy grail of Truth, Goodness, and Justice, but a poet privately plagued by self-doubt about her deepest moral convictions, about what appears to her as a set of commonsense intuitions. In his words, "the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being" (Rorty 1989, p. 75). Her doubt is born from the knowledge that all truths are the contingent values of linguistic functions; that no one "vocabulary" is closer to reality than another; and that the values one cleaves to most dearly may well be harmful to others. Nevertheless, although Rorty's ideal liberal subject privately suffers her anxieties and doubts, she publicly passionately defends her values until the organic philosophers, poets, ethnographers, and literary critics—the minor philosophers of late modern times—demonstrate to her, not so much what she can gain by incorporating another set of values into her own, but how she can avoid inflicting pain and humiliation on others.

For Rorty, the pragmatic approach to the problem of metalanguage and radical interpretation is essential to his liberal eschatology. Because of the type of metalinguistic feedback discussed by Lucy and others, reflection on one's final vocabulary and its interpretive grounds simply binds a person more deeply into the structures of that language. So deep and wide are these final vocabularies and so saturated and mired is subjectivity within them that their commonsense appeal cannot be escaped through critical reflection on the propriety, validity, and truth of their interpretive groundings. Only an encounter with an Other can break the hermetic seal of linguistic subjectivity (Rorty 1989, p. 80).

It is important to note that the external cry of the pained subject is the necessary supplement of Rortian liberalism, producing not only the liberal subject's own sense of her good, but also nontotalitarian forms of propositional truth. For Rorty, new *semantic* world disclosures "provide fresh grist for the argumentative mill" providing the "novelties" that forestall a collapse into totalitarian regimes of truth (Rorty 1998, p. 319; Bakhtin 1986). Unfortunately, the grist Rorty feeds the mill are those multitudinous others whose pain we might be unintentionally causing. They

provide what the liberal subject requires to think and change since the knowledge of the contingency of all moral vocabularies is not enough to cause him to flee his particular moral vocabulary. He could not flee even if he so chose because, in Rorty's pragmatic deconstruction, to be a human subject is to be and become a value through and of language. Linguistic values (semantic, logical forms) cohere the self. They constitute the subject and society *as such* and as specifically valued beings-in-the-world-of-others. Listening to the articulated cry of a pained minority subject is the only means by which liberals can know when they are inflicting harm, pain, and torture on others, and why this pain is unjustified; i.e., of the type, scale, and quality that makes it systematic. In effect Rorty differentiates two distinct and distinctive social roles within multicultural liberal national society. Liberals will listen to and evaluate the pain, harm, torture they might unwittingly be causing minority others. Nonliberals and other minority subjects will present their pained subjectivity to this listening, evaluating public (see Connolly 1983 for a trenchant critique).

But note, those radical worlds that turn inward or away or refuse to dilate to the sympathy of the Same are treated as Durkheim once described the treatment of those who seek to free themselves from the norms of all thought. "Does a mind seek to free itself from the norms of all thought? Society no longer considers this a human mind in the full sense, and treats it accordingly" (Durkheim 1995, p. 16). Any political theorist worth her or his salt knows that liberals work within the space between the currently tolerable and the truth and acknowledges a crucial—the critical—distinction between the true and the conceivable. In a recent short book Michael Walzer, who has thought long and hard about liberal political forms, reminds us of a certain set of commonplaces among liberal political theorists: that all liberals acknowledge that "we choose within limits"; that few would ever be so daring as to advance "an unconstrained relativism"; and that not every act should be tolerated (Walzer 1997). Having said this Walzer does what theorists of liberal pluralism, multiculturalism, and diasporic nationalism often do, he urges readers to set aside the intractable problems facing national and international life—both within liberalism and across liberal and nonliberal societies—and concentrate instead on levels and types of disagreement that can be resolved without physical violence. Begin with the doable and the conceivable will follow.

Absent however from Rorty and Walzer's discussion is the dual orientation of this message of liberal sympathy. If we take liberal theorists of liberal worlds seriously, the anthropological study of radical emergences and incommensurate social imaginaries is faced with a numbing recognition. If the message addressing the liberal public might be "begin with the doable," the message addressing radical worlds is "be other so that we will not ossify, but be in such a way that we are not undone, that is make yourself doable for us." And the message conveys the stakes of refusing to be doable, and, thereby, the stakes of forcing liberal subjects to experience the intractable impasse of reason as the borders of the repugnant—actual legal, economic, and social repression. It is in this way that the late liberal

diaspora shifts the burden for social commensuration from the place it is generated (liberalism) to the place it operates on.

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