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## PROLOGUE TOGETHERNESS

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### *Vingt ans après*; or, No Place to Hide

In the past ten years the Outside has greatly diminished in all its dimensions: geography, imagination, liberty. Transcendence has closed shop.

—ANDREI CODRESCU, *The Disappearance of the Outside*

[O]ut is over.

—THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN, *The World Is Flat*

There is no more outside.

—MICHAEL HARDT AND ANTONIO NEGRI, *Empire*

[W]hat outside?

—JEAN-LUC NANCY, *Being Singular Plural*

“L’enfer, c’est les autres,” Garcin proclaims in Sartre’s 1944 play *Huis clos* (No Exit).<sup>1</sup> Hell is others? How come? For one thing, the pronouncement conveys the uneasiness the writer and modernity overall feel before “alterity.” For another, Sartre insisted that he had been “misunderstood.” What his character meant, he explained, was not that our “relations with others are tainted,” “infernal” by definition, but that if these relations are “twisted, vitiated, then the other can be to us nothing else than hell” because “the others are the most important thing within ourselves that we can draw from to know who we are.” “When we think about ourselves, when we try to find out who we are,” Sartre went on, we “use the knowledge others already have of us. We form an opinion of ourselves by means of tools others have given us. Whatever I say about myself, an other’s judgment is always contained in it. This means that if my relations with an other are bad, I am completely dependent on this other. And then I am truly in hell.”<sup>2</sup>

America’s Cold War private fictions and public policies stage Garcin’s ambivalence with a vengeance by acknowledging “others” yet failing to act, or to act adequately and consistently, on this capital recognition. To be

sure, the anxieties and the indecisions, let alone the wrong decisions, do not go away after 1989. As I put the final touches on these pages twenty years thereafter, one thing is clear, though: whether “we” think of “them” as infernal or not, whether they inconvenience or soothe us, whether we grasp them through our “sympathetic imagination” like J. M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello or are puzzled by them like Thomas Nagel by his bat, others’ presence in American life is becoming more substantial than ever.<sup>3</sup> More than at any point in our past, being-in-relation, with an other, makes for the cornerstone of America and its self-perception in literature, art, and the humanities. The historically unrivaled intensity and extensity with which our relations with others recast our world and our representations of it are giving birth, I argue, to a particular way of seeing this world and ourselves in it, to a new, “cosmodern” cultural imaginary if not to a new cultural paradigm altogether—to an entire “cosmodernism.” What I want to emphasize from the outset is the former rather than the latter if by paradigm we imply a distinct body of work. Granted, the two are intertwined. But what has so far emerged across fairly established discourses, genres, and complex U.S. formations such as postmodernism and ethnic literatures is not so much another canon, although this too seems to be in the offing, as a new imagination modality. This novelty is far from absolute. It is cosmodern, not modern, and in that equally reminiscent of the *postmodern*. In fact, the cosmodern newness has been hesitant, slow in coming, and unabashedly redolent of prior stylistic and thematic hallmarks; cosmodernism is not only a paradigm in the making but also a “soft” one.

The onset of this paradigm nonetheless determines the last two decades as the scene of a cosmodern turn. Fundamentally shaping our present as a geocultural structure of co-presence, this turn or shift defines our age’s “presentness.” The post-1989 interval thus replaces the “contemporary” available in current literary-cultural periodizations. Given the history-changing significance of the Berlin Wall’s fall, it is for the first time since World War II that critics may have to consider resetting the boundaries of the present. Endorsed by my book, the move would place the commencing of the contemporary—contemporary in a strong sense, if you will—no longer at the end of World War II but at the end of the Cold War, with the latter no more than the former’s belated closure and with more recent events of incontestably global impact like September 11, 2001, as symptoms of the Cold War’s aftermath rather than as harbingers of another, genuinely new epoch.

I submit, further, that the cosmodern lynchpin is relation itself—the concept and practices of “relationality” in narrative, theory, and other areas of post-1989 American culture. What U.S. artists and thinkers drive home with characteristic acumen after the Wall’s collapse is that, as David Hollinger puts it bluntly, “there are fewer and fewer places to hide,” where self and other could opt out of the mutually “defining” context of each other’s proximity, influence, and inquiring gaze. Our “historical situation” in the United States and beyond in the “age of networks” is one of unparalleled panopticity, of a hitherto peerless scopic presence of individuals, groups, and cultures to one another.<sup>4</sup> I do share the concerns of those who associate the world’s visual availability with vulnerability to surveillance, control, and military “targeting.”<sup>5</sup> However, dicey and unevenly distributed as it is, the world’s new visibility and the flows and exchanges enhancing it apace inform, for better or worse and to a formerly unmatched degree, the self’s relational situatedness, its “cosmodern condition.” Also a condition of knowledge, of representation and self-representation, this condition does not decouple the familial and the familiar completely. It just eats into their overlap, renders “hereness” less homey, less certain and full of certainties to the residing self and therefore correspondingly thought-provoking, rife with the questions presented by the defamiliarizing presence and beliefs of others. That is, America’s location and role and the cultural meanings swirling across and around them are not simply topological but also structural or, better still, structuring. They are concurrently *in* and *of* worldly nature, actively involved in what I determine, following thinkers like Heidegger, Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, as the “worlding of the world”—the world’s “parts” such as people, nation-states, “spheres” (and hemispheres), “regions,” “civilizations,” and racial-ethnic communities coming together and being by being with each other. On this account, the meaning of U.S. culture reveals itself to the trained eye—not for the first time but with more acuity than in pre-1989 times—cosmosemiotically, in conjunction with our global era’s world semantics.

This is not a case for American exceptionalism or American imperialism because, in the first place, it is not a case for what Nietzsche ridicules as “Münchhausen’s audacity”—the *causa sui* delusion of “pull[ing] oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamp of nothingness”; I am endorsing neither the “Adamic,” stand-alone American myth nor its later, self-reliantly strutting avatars.<sup>6</sup> Quite the contrary. While I agree with Hollinger that “the United States is not so much a model for the world as an archive of experience on which the world can draw critically,” what I do

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in *Cosmodernism* is place, broadly speaking, the United States in “global perspective”<sup>7</sup> and, more narrowly, late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century American literary, cultural, and theoretical discourse in the worldly context of the “interpersonal,”<sup>8</sup> where this discourse lends itself to interpretation as a fable of relatedness. I keep telling myself that if America—surely not by itself—has bestowed a particular meaning (and structure) on the globalizing world, our country, its culture, and this culture’s significations cannot stand outside this meaning-making and structuring (“worlding”) process either, which is another way of saying that we cannot “rely” solely on ourselves to comprehend and achieve our American selves. To be sure, the global chickens are coming home to roost. One of the biggest players in world history, the post-1989 United States is now a vibrant site for the kind of history and narratives in which Americans more and more are and read “with”: with the wider world, with its stories and histories, and with these narratives’ storytellers and characters. In response, students of American culture have started factoring this cultural-epistemological homecoming into their reassessments of home and of the emotions and notions that make us feel secure, at home, but also special, “unlike others”—into whatever makes us us. And so, as we wrestle with our own otherness, with the idiosyncratic landscape of domesticity, we also grapple with the location and production of “we.” To grasp who we are, we struggle to figure out where we are, to locate ourselves and thus take on, anew, the “challenge of drawing” the Theophrastian “circle” of this “we.”<sup>9</sup>

Given, on one side, the leveling thrust of globalization, and on the other, the resurgence of violent factionalisms, “clashist” views, and crude antinomies such as we/they, the West / the rest, or “McWorld”/“Jihad” not only in writers such as Samuel P. Huntington and Benjamin Barber but also in public affairs and rhetoric, there is something pressing about this challenge and the relation-grounded culture, identity, and human fellowship vision that might drive us to accept it. No doubt, globalization does, and means, various things to various people, but one of its major tendencies is to assimilate the different, the singular, and the other along with their “otherwise” and “out there.” Equally ominous, antinomism of the sort invoked above reifies all these. Critics like Huntington, for instance, do allow that these days “identity at any level—personal, tribal, racial, civilizational—can only be defined in relation to an ‘other,’ a different person, tribe, race, or civilization,” but they largely treat it as a monolith immutably opposed to analogously monolithic entities.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the

“cosmoderns” summoned in this book hint that there is another way, neither assimilationist nor disjunctive. Here, “differential” identity does not spring from smooth, equal-to-itself sameness, and it does not reinforce “separateness,” the “apartheid type of difference,” either.<sup>11</sup> “Mov[ing] about” America and the world “with always at least two gestures[,] that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at,”<sup>12</sup> this identity is, to the cosmodern mind, rationale and vehicle for a new togetherness, for a solidarity across political, ethnic, racial, religious, and other boundaries. Underwritten by concepts of concern and duty that still have to be spelled out, vaster solidarities are something that we have to foster because the problems confronting America and the world after the late 1980s place us all in relation and interaction, entangle us in a web from which it is getting harder and harder to extricate ourselves.

Those of us who buy into this picture assume, I suspect, that reciprocity, solidarity, obligation, caring for others as if one cared for one’s own are the best ways to manage a condition of togetherness that not all of us have foreseen, sought, or welcomed. But this management of our world’s relationality is still unethical if it proves just a “pragmatic” gambit. Ideally, it should follow from an awareness of what we owe to others *in principle*, from day one, for they have been originally constitutive to the world, and their otherness has been “there”—and thus (in) “here”—since the very beginning as a template of worldliness and thereby of selfhood itself. We shall see that thinkers like Levinas and Nancy are adamant about the a priori inscription of alterity into the self’s existential-cognitive script; what we learn a posteriori from the cosmoderns’ repeated surveys of the post–Cold War self-other give-and-take is that transactions of this type have never been more wide-reaching and more meaningful for who we are.

### Approach, Focus, Structure

Neither the only “new thing” eager to supplant, say, postmodernism or multiculturalism nor full-blown movement or school, cosmodernism is principally (a) an *imaginary modality* of mapping out today’s world as a cultural geography of relationality; (b) by the same token, a *protocol of subjectivity formation*; (c) an *ethical imperative* pointing to the present as much as to the future; and (d) a *critical algorithm* for decrypting and as-

sembling a range of post-1989 narrative and theoretical imaginings into a reasonably coherent and, again, ahead-looking model. If the cosmoderns read the world in terms of self-other interconnectedness, this algorithm helps me read their readings and thus become the cosmoderns' voyeur, privy to their insights into the new geometry of "we." My method is not the only one applicable to the United States of the "network society" era, and I do employ it rather heuristically, but, drawing as it does from an array of methodologies and interventions, it is itself relational. It is not watertight but effective enough, so I resort to it with a fair amount of consistency. I develop it theoretically at the comparative crossroads of a Levinas-inspired ethics of selfhood, identity studies, postmodern intertextuality, and globalization scholarship's more context-oriented analysis. This approach affords, I trust, a deeper understanding of what a plethora of emblematic texts and authors mean individually as well as together in the literary and cultural history of the past two decades or so.

Which texts and authors, one might ask. If cosmodernism is just one way of trekking over the landscape of post-Cold War relationality, what I offer too is only one fashion of tracing this journey; there is a method, I would like to think, not only to how I read but also to what I choose to read. But my choices are highly representative formally and culturally, attesting to the unfolding of the cosmodern across a host of directions and genres in recent American literature and criticism. As noted earlier, the major works covered are theoretical and especially narrative, chiefly fictional: novels, short stories, romances, memoirs, and travel accounts. Without exception, my primary sources came out after the late 1980s, most of them during the past ten years. Of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, their authors are native and immigrant, mainstream and not-so-mainstream American writers, with Chang-rae Lee, Raymond Federman, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nicole Mones, Suki Kim, Azar Nafisi, Pico Iyer, Alice Randall, Don DeLillo, Karen Tei Yamashita, and John Updike the more pivotal figures. Some of them (Federman, DeLillo, Lee) have been claimed by the divergent canons of postmodernism, ethnic literature, and postcolonialism. For this reason, they have seldom if ever been treated together, all the more reason to test the cosmodern as a classification or, even better, cross-classification principle, as well as an opportunity to readdress problems the former metafictional, postmodern, ethnic, and postcolonial rubrics have left unsolved. Also, in cases such as Lee's, the cosmodern problematic shapes an author's vision from the get-go; in others (e.g., Updike), this happens much later. Some of my writers (Nafisi, Lahiri) are only now be-

ginning to enjoy due recognition yet not necessarily under rubrics they are comfortable with, while others seem to fall completely outside established categories (Yamashita, Randall) or to fit several at once (Updike, Mones). And where names like Bharati Mukherjee are briefly discussed, others are solely mentioned even though they could have been treated in extenso alongside or in lieu of the key figures. I could have dwelled at length, for example, on Thomas Pynchon (with the 2007 novel *Against the Day* a strong contender), Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, or Jonathan Safran Foer rather than on DeLillo, and I could have had a separate section on cosmodern cyberpunk or on Native American literature for that matter. Likewise, Lee and Kim belong with an entire series of novelists part 1 and part 3, respectively, can only touch on; Federman makes it, also in the first part, but so could have the late Ronald Sukenick, Charles Johnson, Octavia Butler, Rebecca Goldstein, Aleksandar Hemon, Domnica Radulescu, and Gary Shteyngart, along with others across a whole spectrum of ethno-racial traditions.

A considerably theorized undertaking, this book does not propose another grand theory but a textually and contextually minded argument for cultural change in post-1989 American letters. The five parts, usually in their later sections, ground the argument in narrative analysis. The parts' initial portions, the introduction, and the epilogue nuance and historicize the basic contentions by intervening in a couple of ongoing debates so as to reframe tactically several highly charged notions including the cosmodern's neighbors: "modern," "postmodern," and "cosmopolitan." Setting up the whole presentation, the introductory segment underscores the imaginative-projective aspect of cosmodernism and makes a case for the odd term itself before working out the latter's conceptual-historical ties to "relatedness" and "otherness," on the one hand, and "late globalization," on the other. In 1848, when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels noticed the "bourgeois" push to "establish connections everywhere,"<sup>13</sup> world connectivity, albeit on reduced scale and in different form, had been centuries if not millennia old. My point then is neither that global interconnectivity constitutes something new nor that the cosmoderns are the first to pick up on it. The DeLillos, the Lees, the Iyers, and the critics of their time only do so more systematically and more programmatically in response to a relationality that itself gets more world-systemic after the Cold War. This latest installment in the global saga is "late globalization" and the logic of relationality it tends to foster worldwide "ego-logical."

As a cultural-imaginary development, cosmodernism is more than a reaction to the geopolitical context. Yet, as the introduction's second section elaborates, the ecology cosmodernism wants to be sets out to critique late-global ecology. What I designate by ecology is a cultural environment organized around the self's vital links to an "other" whose radical difference—whether racial or ethnic, linguistic, sex- or gender-based, and so forth—must be entertained as a possibility and cultivated in a world whose dominant thrust seems narcissistic, self-reproductive, standardizing, pushing others to reproduce "our" lifestyles and fantasies. In other words, the relatedness inherent in cosmodernism speaks to and upholds unabashedly an ethics of difference. The togetherness surfacing in cosmodern imaginings does not obtain as self and other ford the gulf of their asymmetries and contrasts (the multiculturalist pipedream of the 1960s and 1970s). It is, we discover time after time, the distinct, the singular, that makes, as Giorgio Agamben says, for the "most common" in us and thus for the basis of "real community."<sup>14</sup> Standing as it does on a structure of "with-ness," this community presupposes a "collegial ethic." In pursuing the ramifications of this ethic in the humanities of the past decades, particularly in the new comparatism, in global/planetary studies, and in the neocosmopolitan revival, the introduction's last section charts an epistemological shift parallel to and occasionally overlapping with the cosmodern turn.

The shift occurred, inside and outside the academy, in head-on engagement with our time's global processes and themes. Literary-cultural cosmodernism tackles these problems directly and indirectly. Even though reducing literary cosmodernism to writing "about"—let alone "on behalf of"—late globalization is abusive, the book's main divisions do plot out a road map for the cosmodern imaginary around five thematic axes that run alongside, across, or counter to staple issues, aspects, and trends of the late-global age. These axes (*a*) thematize the cosmodern as a mode of thinking about the world and its culture, about cultural perception, self-perception, and identity; (*b*) forefront, accordingly, the intersubjective-communicational, dynamic dimension of cosmodernism; and (*c*) articulate the cosmodern imaginary into five regimes of relatedness, or subimaginaries: the "idiomatic," the "onomastic," the "translational," the "readerly," and the "metabolic." These are the foci of this volume's five parts.

Exploring the linguistic facet of cosmodernism's imaginary, part 1 looks at how American cosmoderns conceive of language and the alterity

it presupposes and verbalizes. As I propound in this part's first section, notable is the turn away from the classically cosmopolitan view of linguistic globalism and authority toward a multilingual, plurivocal, and more humble outlook. In this and other matters, cosmopolitanism has been universalist; cosmopolitanism is surprisingly idiomatic. The cosmopolitan self makes itself, linguistically and otherwise, as it opens itself up to the post-1989 Babel; thus, whatever this self speaks about, it speaks in tongues, other. Derrida's reflections on linguistic mastery and Doris Sommer's Derridean critique set the tone for the next two sections. These are devoted to Lee's interpellation of the ideology of nativist linguistic monopoly in his novel *Native Speaker* and to Federman's disruptions of similar "monotonies" of tongue and culture in his late fiction.

Part 2 carries on the analysis of language by taking up the representation of names and naming in recent American narrative. As I show, just as voice is unique and a *portavoce* simultaneously, a mouthpiece of others' voices, a name names the self and his or her heritage as this name names others; in fact—and this is typical of cosmopolitanism—the name employs those others' names to call the self and tell his or her story. Cosmopolitanism's "onomastic imaginary" pivots precisely on this mutual "nomination"—designation and identification—of self and other in the drama of naming. My questions here are: What makes one name oneself and those close to him or her by the name of an other from a different place or time? What kind of statement does one make "in an other's name"? What worldviews does the cross-cultural and intertextual practice of "heteronomy" unfold in the last two decades of American fiction? I provide my answers in conversation with philosophers of naming and identity such as Amin Maalouf, Alain Finkielkraut, Julia Watson, and Charles Taylor in this part's section 1, while the following three sections examine mainly "onomastic narratives" by Lahiri and Lee. Cosmopolitan onomastics is, I conclude, a with-ness marker, a nominal ecology.

Further expanding on the function of globally circulating words and names, languages and stories, and speakers and narrators in the cosmopolitan production of identity, part 3 turns to the "translational imaginary" embedded in fictional works revolving around the figure of the translator. Being, I specify in this part's beginning—having a being, being somebody—occurs, now more than ever, translationally. I also point out that critics from George Steiner to Umberto Eco and Rey Chow have shifted attention away from classical translation, which had primarily a linguistic component, to a notion as linguistic as cultural, existential, and political.

It is in this context that I seize on translation as a prime cultural modality of relatedness where, as Régis Debray reminds us, all culture is increasingly transmitted culture—that is to say, translated, relayed, and related. I close the section by theorizing cosmodern translation, that is, translation of an other's words that presents the translating self with an opportunity for "self-translation" and self-understanding. This part's remainder pursues translational cosmodernism in works by Mones and Kim.

If all translation is interpretation, reading of others and, by virtue of the same cosmodern logic, self-reading, then the translation scene is also a reading scene. Consequently, the translational and the readerly vectors of the cosmodern imaginary intersect. Focusing on the "readerly imaginary," the fourth part is part 3's natural follow-up. "Readings" is broken up into three sections. Building toward the concept of "cosmodern interpretive communities," the first theorizes the new togetherness emerging in turn-of-the-century reading practices. A modicum of reception theory helps clarify how a certain "appeal structure" (Wolfgang Iser's *Appellstruktur*) in texts read by audiences from times and places other than those where the material has been composed calls for what K. Anthony Appiah deems "cosmopolitan reading." I maintain that Appiah's notion is still fuzzy, and I use Iser's work on cultural "between-spaces" and "translatability" to detail what cosmodern "other-reading" is and how it works textually, culturally, and politically. The rest of the sections focus more closely on three representative authors: Nafisi, Iyer, and Randall.

Reading, the cosmoderns tell us, is creative and self-creative. The foray into an other's work is not merely reproductive. It is productive. Through it, the reading self produces itself, makes itself into something it has not been before. The logic of cosmodern reading and cosmodernism generally is then "metamorphic," critically transformative rather than simply iterative. It is this logic and its critique of the egological system of iterations that part 5 brings to the fore as it applies itself to the "metabolic imaginary." Drawing on Nancy and other critics of late-global cultural "incorporations," this part's section 1 approaches culture as archival-patrimonial body and, at the same time, recognizes culture's own inscription into human bodies. The segment starts out with a brief aperçu of corporeality theories, old and new, that take into consideration the world's coming together. Cosmodernism's corporeal projections and transformations further corroborate, I contend, the constitutive role of otherness inside worldly togetherness. For, as we turn to, and even into, others' bodies and bodily configurations, we come into being, get in touch with ourselves and

the world. In contrast, the section's second half zeroes in on global, "metastatic" reproduction and copycat culture in DeLillo's later novels, primarily in *Underworld*, which I revisit alongside some of his recent essays to shed light on a cosmodern conception of culture that foregrounds the role the body and the discourse of physicality are assigned in the disruption of the world's redundancy. This implication segues us into this part's last portion. If the previous section looked at montage as an anti-iterative, countercultural ritual, this one analyzes the related technique of bricolage, more exactly "corporeal bricolage" and its subversive potential, with reference to Updike, Yamashita, and, again, DeLillo (*The Body Artist*).

Leaning on DeLillo one more, the epilogue asks about America's present "cultural time" in order to round off the cultural-historical definition of *Cosmodernism's* axial concept. A series of marginalia to DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* and to his essay "The Power of History" clear the ground for a handful of distinctions that enable an ethical rethinking—as well as a rethinking together—of essential and interrelated categories such as alterity, temporality, history, discourse, and culture. It thus becomes, at last, possible to answer the epilogue's question in terms pointing, with some reluctance, to the aforementioned "cosmodern turn." The last pages of the concluding part limn this turn as a protracted and luminous twilight of the postmodern paradigm.

## Acknowledging Others

"[T]here is no *invention* possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without the presence in the inventing subject of an abundance of the other," Hélène Cixous notes in an oft-quoted essay.<sup>15</sup> I have rediscovered the wisdom of the statement over the years spent on this project. Whatever insights and revelations this study has occasioned, they would have been impossible without the sustaining presence of others in my thoughts, on my bookshelves, and physically around me. An inquiry into the culture of indebtedness in post-1989 America, *Cosmodernism* also performs its theme. The book itself is a form of indebtedness.

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*Cosmodernism* does not reprint previously published texts properly speaking, but a few of its sections have come out, in different form, as follows: “Global Romance? Nicole Mones, Teilhard de Chardin, and the Critique of ‘Planetization,’” in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 29, no. 4 (December 2002): 491–518; “The Other, the Namesake: Cosmopolitan Onomastics in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*,” in *Names* 55, no. 1 (March 2007): 17–36; “Speakers and Sleepers: Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*, Whitman, and the Performance of Americanness,” in *College Literature* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 66–91; “Cosmobabble or, Federman’s Return,” in *Federman’s Fictions*, edited by Jeffrey R. Di Leo (forthcoming from SUNY Press). I am grateful to these journals and their editors—and once more to Jeffrey R. Di Leo—for permission to reprint modified segments of the articles, as I am to Rebecca Darlington for allowing me to use a visual reproduction of her exquisite work *Earth*, on the cover. Lastly, a note on translations: unless otherwise indicated, they are all mine.