CHUNG-HSIUNG LAI

Re-writing the Subject: The Thrownness of Being in the Multicultural Condition

> Thrownness is neither a 'fact that is finished' nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein's[1] facticity[2] is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the "they's" inauthenticity. (Heidegger 223)

What, or rather who, is the subject? Is the subject entirely metaphysical or empirical? How can the subject be re-written in the multicultural condition? The aim of this paper is to re-visit Heidegger's idea of the ontological thrownness of Being in order to scrutinize how the ethico-political forces of "temporality" and of "the Other" operate to re-shape the subject in the multicultural condition. Here my key argument is that, in terms of the existential thrownness of Being, Heidegger privileges the Self over the Other, the ontological over the ethical, and the future over the past. These privileges need to be called into *question* to promote a more open and ethical intersubjectivity of the subject. By using Gadamer's idea of "historically effected consciousness," Derrida's idea of "arche-writing" and Freud's idea of "writing pad," I will explore what I call *hauntological thrownness*, an otherness-

1 Dasein, for Heidegger, signifies "Being-there", the site where beings manifest themselves as openness-to-being. It is the very entity who exists before the subject, and even before the separation of the subject and object.

2 "The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity is 'within-the-world'" (Heidegger 1962: 82). Facticity is thus the existence of ontical objects in the world, which has influence on Dasein, yet is not deterministic. In other words, facticity is human destiny being "thrown" into the endless changing world but that does not determine Dasein's existence.

Canadian Review of Comparative Literatim/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL/RCLC September - December / septembre - decembre 2003
0319-051X/03/30.3-4/495/J10.00/O Canadian Comparative Literature Association

oriented thrownness of Being, to revise Heidegger's ontological thrownness of Being in the multicultural context. The concept of the subject has been written and re-written differently as long as the history of philosophy can record. Generally speaking, it, in the ontological sense, can be divided into two categories: first, the subject is "the conscious," "the ego" or "the independently existing entity." In other words, the subject "I" is the subject of "knowing," of "thinking," of "speaking" and of "willing." Second, the subject is seen as the "base" or "site" rather than "center" or "doer." That is, the subject is an *a priori* "ground" upon which "thinking," "knowing," "willing" and other qualities can operate. That is why, in Latin, the word the *subjectum* literally means "that which is thrown under," the fundamental condition which lies under the predicate "think," "know" or "will." However, Heidegger deconstructs the traditional concepts of ontology by asserting "all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being" (31).

Accordingly, in *Being and Time,* Heidegger develops his own phenomenological epistemology to perform his task of neither destruction nor reconstruction but deconstruction of the history of ontology or of any determination of the subject, enabling him to re-examine one question: the question of the meaning of Being. One of the major contributions Heidegger makes is his insight of understanding (or questioning) as a primordial mode of human existence. That is to say, understanding is projective thrownness[3] *(Geworfenheit),* an existential structure of Being. The questioning of Being's meaning as projective thrownness is thus the ongoing experience of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Thrownness, in view of that, "is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over" (Heidegger 1962,175). We may therefore assert that the subject is always delivered over as thrownness into the world.

Given that thrownness is an ongoing movement, which is always influenced by Dasein's facticity, it is therefore this movement which creates the turbulence *(Wirbel)* of falling. This unveils the fact that the state-of-mind is not a static state but a dynamic movement. In other words, thrownness, in respect of temporality, is three-dimensional: the past, the present and the future. Firstly, thrownness, as falling projection, consists pardy of previous

3 jection, for Heidegger, means the existential structure of understanding. Interpretation is then the projective development of understanding as a kind of existential thrownness.

moments (the *past)* which have been delivered over to Dasein as facticity, thereby opening up the horizon of Being-already-in-the-world. Secondly, since thrownness is defined as a dynamic movement which consists partly of the state of fallenness of everydayness *(the present),* Dasein's existence is a process of projecting thrownness through present action, opening up the horizon of Being-amidst. Finally, thrownness also grounds itself on the moments to come *(the future),* projecting the Self into states of turbulence and possibility as futurity, opening up the horizon of Being-ahead-of-itself. The projective force of thrownness therefore exists in *the past, the present and* the *future.*

The problem is, which temporal thrownness has priority over others? The Heideggerian ordering of the past, the present and the future in terms of projective thrownness, as Stephen Mulhall points out, "registers the relative priority of futurity" (145). Heidegger writes: "[t]he primary meaning of existentiality is the future" (Heidegger 376) and "[t] he primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (378). The authenticity of existence can only exist in a visionary future through "anticipatory resoluteness". This explains why Heidegger, in *Being and Time,* spends much more time and effort discussing the future dimensions of thrownness — thrownness into "there", into a world, into uncanniness, into indefiniteness and into "Being-towards-death" — than the thrownness of Being- towards-historicality.

Heideggerian ontological thrownness, moreover, is a progressive sequence of an ego-guided temporality towards *death.* Borrowing Hegel's idea of the absolute self-closure as the meaning of history, Heidegger sees *death* as the absolute closure of Being or the transcendental horizon of the subject's temporality, which gives meaning to Dasein. In consequence, the ethical dimension of otherness is, more or less, neglected by Heidegger's analysis of ontological thrownness. Hence, one may safely state that Heidegger privileges the Self over the Other, the ontological over the ethical, and the future over the past when he deals with the existential thrownness of Being.

Nevertheless, when the subject is thrown into the multicultural world, these privileges become problematic. The subject falls into the multicultural "everydayness" for it lacks what Gadamer calls a "historically effected

consciousness"[4] the effect of historical consciousness operates in the fusion of horizons (that of the past and the present). This historical consciousness, as a mode of self-knowledge of the subject, can indeed help the subject to better understand the sources of its problems at the multicultural present, and thus find its ways out of the mire of its "presentness." The past and the repressed, I contend, are just like traces of a palimpsest, which, in the process of re-writing the subject, are constantly being thrown and transformed as *disturbances* of a full presence in the name of justice; *a* simulacrum of absence disrupts *the* simulacrum of a full presence, a *haunting* of the repressed cultural identities undermines the fixed and dominant sense of belonging to the ego-guided culturalism.

Let's take Derrida's "arche-writing" to explain how these palimpsestic features of what I call hauntological thrownness re-write the subject in the multicultural context. In "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida gives credit to his idea of arche-writing to Freud's six-page "Note on the Mystic Writing Pad," where Freud uses the writing pad as a metaphor "to picture the functioning of our perceptual apparatus of our mind" (232) and of the origin of memory. The writing pad is a drawing implement on which drawing or writing can be done with a hard stylus. But, the drawing or writing can be removed by detaching its double covering sheet from the wax slab upon which it rested. However, nothing is ever completely removed and forgotten. The drawn or written traces are still there, slightly imprinted upon the wax and covered beneath the sheet like our unforgettable traces of memory. Freud concludes his essay by saying that "if we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystical Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering-sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind" (232).

In this Freudian two-handed machine of perceptions, Derrida claims, "traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure" (226). This two-handed machine, nevertheless, does not operate by itself. The projective thrownness (the ontological one as one hand, and the hauntological one as the other) is, I believe, the steam power for the engine of this apparatus. In respect of writing as "perceived" presentation, although it is the stylus, which makes the writing visible on the pad, the wax pre-exists the very action of writing. The origin of memory is, Derrida argues, the unseen *arche-writing* in the wax. Arche-writing attempts to explain a preexisting writing in our brain (which functions like the wax which perceives the writing and retains its trace) before any ontogenetically and phylogenetically physical writing or even speech. "Memory or writing is the opening of that process of appearance itself. The 'perceived' may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it" (224).

Accordingly, the *unseen* palimpsestic traces marked beneath can be read, from the perspective of this non-psychological apparatus, as the erasure of omnipresence and omniscience of a full presence of historical writing or representation. Bearing the traces of Freud's mystical writing pad on his wax slab in mind, Derrida believes that Freud failed to make explicit the non-psychological apparatus of writing and its relation to a psychological apparatus. Writing for Derrida is the relation between psychological and non-psychological apparatuses. It is the infinite disturbance of the full representation of subjectivity. Derrida writes: "[t]he trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance. An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence" (230).

The Derridean concept of palimpsestic traces as disturbance of the full presence illustrates what I call the hauntological thrownness as the ethical and political disturbance of the Heideggerian ontological thrownness of Being in the multicultural condition. Where, however, does the hauntological thrownness of Being come into the world? Although the hauntological thrownness is guided by otherness, its haunting (ensuing as re-inscriptive disturbance) does not merely emerge from the horizon of the Other, nor from that of the Self. Rather it comes from the unchartable and unreconcilable space between the Self and the Other, between the past and future and between the arche-writing and the represented writing. To be more precise, it is the horizon of *transformation*, the horizon of *differance*, the horizon of *catachresis* as a hitherto unexplored *possibility* — the *possibility*, as spectres, of justice illustrates the *spectres*, as possibility, of justice in the ethical haunting of palimpsestic traces.

4 In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains that "[historical consciousness no longer simply applies its own criteria of understanding to the tradition in which it is situated, nor does it naively assimilate tradition and simply carry it on. Rather, it adopts a reflective posture toward both itself and the tradition in which it is situated. It understands itself in terms of its own history. Historical consciousness is a mode of self-knowledge" (235). That means, in order to provide a better hermeneutic of history, persons and groups should develop their historical consciousness which is a reflection on themselves and their positions in history and tradition.

It signifies the very nature of writing; the spectral interval to link letters, words, phrases and sentences; the anxiety between *arrival* and *to-come* and between the *presence* and the *absence* in a textual presentation of the subject. However, this nonsynthesizable separation, space, interval or hiatus is not a decisive rational break or what is called an unequivocal "epistemological break." Rather it is a *simultaneous* double-desire of the subject *per se* — it is the *fear* of being totality transformed into a desire for separation as the infinite rupture whilst, at the same time, in separation, being a desire for the very possibility of relationship; a matter of *time;* a matter of *writing* and a matter of *haunting.*

Hauntological thrownness is therefore just like this kind of scratching force which brings the "hidden" subjectivity of the subject beneath the "represented" subjectivity of the subject back to light. In respect of human temporality, hauntological thrownness thus turns the repressed otherness of the subject as *the future of the future*. Or, to be stricter, the past which is always already spectrally transformed into a radical future, which keeps on demanding the openness of the subject for re-entering, *differently.* This re-turning seeks not a finished signified upon the surface of the writing pad but a heterogeneous hybridity, scattering the ego-oriented subject into an ongoing changing and hybrid world of the Other, into a new and heterogeneous *every dayness.* That is, the otherness-oriented thrownness of Being is ethico-political — where there is an ontological oppression there is a hauntological resistence — and transformational — always *"out-of-joint"* always *"there"*, yet always *"to-come."*

To explore how the subject is re-written in the multicultural condition more specifically, I need to cope with "what" is multiculturalism now. The global rise of cultural studies, devoted to re-shape the concept of *culture*, has prepared the theoretical and politico-social climate for the "cultural storm" of multiculturalism. Although one must admit that the disputes over pro- or anti-multiculturalism are, admittedly, still conflict-ridden simply because this concept means many different things to many different people, it is generally regarded as the politics of recognition that signifies the ethico-political return of the repressed to challenge against the ego-oriented culturalism. This ethico-political movement has become, from a broad geopolitical perspective, radically de-centered as a heterogeneous practice, an otherness-oriented practice thrown into the world.

Amy Gutmann, in the introduction to Taylor's *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition?* rightly asserts that "if human identity is dialogically created and constituted, then public recognition of our identity requires a politics that leaves room for us to deliberate publicly about those aspects of our identities that we share, or potentially share, with other citizens" (7). In other words, only by facing the ethnoracial differentiation more affirmatively and keeping a *dialogical* room for cultural *differance*, can we have a less racist subjectivity of the subject in the multicultural condition. Consequently, by advocating the project of multiculturalism, the multiculturalists aim to prevent coercive cultural assimilation which forces the subject of ethnoracial minorities to adopt the way of life (such as language, tradition and religion) of the majority. This aim can only be plausible by and through increasing the willingness and ability of people, in both ethnic majorities and minorities, to understand, and therefore respect, the differences of the Other.

Accordingly, to promote multiculturalism certainly doesn't mean to embrace the Nazi project of creating an ideology of a new racial order, in which one's race determines one's identity and in which one's blood is a God-given value superior to others. On the contrary, without pretending that the nutshell of racism can be smashed by a single heavy stroke, multiculturalism attempts to remedy the situation of given racism in our present societies via a constant and rigorous re-negotiation in the multicultural public sphere. Hence, the notion of cultural identity, in our multicultural era, is not seen as a purity or ontological closure of the subject but rather the existential dialogical result of a democratic "recognition" (to use Taylor's word) of active *differences.* That is, in the multicultural context, the subjectivity of the subject is neither a fixed ideology nor crystallized identities—it always *differs* and *defers* to constantly re-write the subject, *differently.*

Judging from what has been discussed above, I would like to conclude that the subject can be divided into two spheres: the pre-existing one and the ontico-ontological one. These two spheres are distinct, but intersect regardless. The former level of the subject, as the metaphysical subjectivity of the subject (or the arche-writing beneath the ontological writing pad) is

5 By highlighting the notion of recognition as a vital need for both humanity and democracy and by advocating the Rousseauean quest of the recognition of citizenship, Taylor argues that "the politics of recognition" is the very politics of multiculturalism. Such politics of equal recognition, like racial identity and authenticity, is constituted *dialogically* in a healthy democratic society.

impersonal, universal and transcendental. That is, being the primordial and epistemological base of the subject, the existence of the subject as such, can neither be assimilated to, nor deduced from, anything but itself: an existential phenomenon signifies that which only manifests itself in itself. However, the latter level of the subject, as the ontico-ontological activities and empirical knowledge of the subject "I" (or the ongoing experience of Dasein's Being-in-the-world) can indeed be indeed laid down as a subject, can be brought out by analysis and thus can be re-written in and through the existential forces of thrownness. This is because the subject of knowing, of thinking and of willing is always thrown into the world and appears as an "ego" or "Self only through its identities or ideological discourse — the subjectivity of the subject always emerges through the writing, discourse or language of a culture.

Indeed, opening debates about the interrelationships of language and culture, the author of *The Empire Writes Back* points out that there is no escape from the global power-structures in the postcolonial condition since there is no escape from writing, discourse or language. Likewise, we may also state that the subject, in the multicultural condition, has become a variable and complex function of discourse, a discourse for the repressed Other to write back in the form of hauntological thrownness. And there is no escape of it. This hauntological thrownness of Being is certainly not progressive nor an absolute closure as the Heideggerian ontological structure of the subject. It forever *re-turns*, *re-enters* and *re-writes*. It rewrites what has been written upon the mystical writing pad of the subject, liberating the subject from the ideological prisons of identity by continually questioning and negotiating with the ontological and rooted ways of belonging. Furthermore, what is being written down in the multicultural condition is a more open, dialogical, dynamic and ethico-political intersubjectivity of the subject.

National Chen-Kung University, Taiwan

Works Cited

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature.* London: Routledge, 1989.

Critchley, Simon. *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought.* London: Verso, 1999.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference.* Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978.

—. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.

—. *Politics of Friendship.* Trans. George Collins. London and New York: Verso, 1997.

Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Truth and Method.* New York: The Crossroad Publishing Corporation, 1989.

Gutmann, Amy. "Introduction." *Multiculturalisnt: Examining the Politics of Recognition.* New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1994. 3-24.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962.

—. *Poetry, Language, Thought.* Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969.

Mulhall, Stephen. *Heidegger and Being and Time.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition.* New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1994.