Within the last two decades, a remarkable paradigm change is to be observed within American Studies – a change toward transnational studies. This turn is due to reasons both within and outside the discipline. In the name, and within the frame, of globalisation, calls are voiced to transcend the narrow frames of reference that national literatures and cultures provide.

The paradigm change within the discipline of American Studies can be traced back to two related, though quite independent developments. Thus in the eighties the revisionist movement, whose influence lasts until now, has criticized the Myth & Symbol School for perpetuating, through its monomythical canonization of white Anglo-Saxon writers, American exceptionalism; scholars like Don Pease, John Carlos Rowe, Amy Kaplan and Robyn Wiegman come to mind here. While at the beginning this revisionist critique focused upon the task to expose the mechanisms of exclusion at work in the existing canon, and to supplement this canon with alternative ones, other analyses, such as those of Sacvan Bercovitch, have drawn our attention toward the problematic powers of integration that the American myths provide. In an argument that strongly echoes Herbert Marcuse’s concept of repressive tolerance, Bercovitch claims that the centripetal force of these myths proves capable not only to defuse any resistance toward the social, political, and cultural status quo, but even to use such opposition in order to sustain this very status quo.¹

If, then, the national resources of resistance potentially, if unwittingly, support the very structures they intend to change or even overcome, then the only option left is to look for such forces of resistance outside of the sphere of influence of the American rhetoric – that is, by enlarging the disciplinary

field though a comparative approach. One of the best and most renowned examples of such a strategy is probably Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*.

The debate about multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity, however, ranges still further back in time, and back to another American myth: that of the melting-pot. This myth ignites – long before the revisionists’ intervention – the discussion how the U.S. relates to its diverse ethnic groups and cultures. The socio-cultural debate about the melting pot, that arises even earlier than the publication of the founding texts of American Studies such as Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* and Leo Marx’ *The Machine in the Garden*, later rejoins and re-enforces the revisionist turn. While revisionism emphasizes the subtle strategies of exclusion and inclusion, multiculturalism pursues the search for potential and actual roots of resistance at the periphery of the national, such as the brothers Ramon and David Saldívar have done for the Chicano/Chicana movement, Lisa Lowe has done for Asian-Americans, and Arnold Krupat has done for the Native Americans – to mention just a few.

These developments were, moreover, accompanied and informed by the rise of poststructuralist theories, without which the turn to postcolonial studies and theories would have been unthinkable. Within this paradigm, a concept has regained attention and relevance that has existed within the philosophical tradition of Europe since 2000 years, and that also played a role in American culture and literature since the end of the nineteenth century – the time, that is, when the myth of the melting-pot also gained influence: that of cosmopolitanism. The renaissance of the concept of cosmopolitanism might partly be explained by the fact that, contrary to other rather vague notions like, for example, multiculturalism, it combines both descriptive and prescriptive aspects; a combination, that is, that allows for a critical reassessment of both the developments within the discipline of American Studies as well as those of globalization as such. On the other hand, the figure of the Cosmopolitan, the citizen of the world, itself is in need of revision, since it is being instrumentalized by both sides of the contemporary globalization debate. While the political and economic elites claim a cosmopolitan frame of mind that combines economic influence, geographical mobility, professional expertise, and cultural connoisseurship – discredited, at times, by its critics as “frequent flyer cosmopolitanism”\(^2\) – the ethos of openness toward alterity and the acceptance of the Other is used by others as a means against the equalization of the world in the name of instrumental reason.

This is the case in the theoretical works of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida.\textsuperscript{3}

The debate ignited by Nussbaum’s essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” which is documented in the volume \textit{For Love of Country}, cannot be resumed here. What this debate makes clear, however, is that neither the concept of cosmopolitanism nor its definition is undisputed. What the different contributions to this volume do make evident is that a liberal conception of the tolerant citizen of the world, to which Nussbaum resorts in the tradition of the Stoics and Kant, is forced to open itself to different and other definitions of what cosmopolitanism is or may be, in order to avoid the assumption of a universal cosmopolitanism that ignores the very differences it set out to acknowledge. This, finally, leads to the paradoxical conclusion that, as Sidney Pollock and others in the introduction to a special issue of \textit{Public Culture} point out, it is “uncosmopolitan” to categorically define cosmopolitanism, since every single definition excludes other possible definitions, which contradicts the basic idea of cosmopolitanism as such.\textsuperscript{4}

The complex of problems as I have outlined it so far lifts any theory of cosmopolitanism to a meta-theoretical level: Any attempt to define the concept of cosmopolitanism finds itself confronted with the very objections of essentialism and nationalism that it set out to overcome. Thus the question arises whether cosmopolitanism itself implies a set of universalist assumptions that contradicts its efforts to opening up towards what is different or other – a problem pointed out by writers as diverse as Carl Schmidt, Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Charles Taylor.\textsuperscript{5} How, that is, do the axioms and assumptions proposed by cosmopolitan philosophers from the Stoics (Zeni, Diogenes, later Seneca, Plutarch and Cicero), and later in the wake of Kant’s works, relate to the fact that the sovereignty of definition as to what is to be considered cosmopolitan and what not is itself always embedded in a specific cultural context and part of a historically contingent genealogy? On the other hand, can a radical relativism that takes into account such contingencies operate at all with a concept such as cosmopolitanism?


One of the possibilities to avoid such a Catch-22 situation is to pursue theories of a “vernacular,” “situated,” or “local” cosmopolitanism, as they have been proposed by Homi Bhabha, Lorenzo Simpson, or Gayatri Spivak. These authors attempt a theoretically precarious combination of the local and the global in what has been labelled the “Glocal.” Another recent approach, however, resorts to the concept of aesthetics, and more specifically, to literature, which is considered to have special qualities to transport and represent cosmopolitanism. Thus Bruce Robbins speaks about “tonal experiments” in novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Remains of the Day* and Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, while Anthony Appiah goes so far as to declare the novel in general a cosmopolitan genre, in that it succeeds to combine local and individual horizons of experience with general or even universal human problems; an assumption to be found in a similar vein also in Martha Nussbaum’s works. Often, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of the dialogic and the polyphonic in the novel are referred to in this context, which begs the question, however, if the cosmopolitan can be reduced to the polyphonic and heterogeneous as such. There undoubtedly is a democratic impetus inherent in polyphony; it is, however, important to have a closer look at how the different voices are accorded weight, legitimation, and thus recognition, and on what ethical basis such recognition is withheld or given.

As both generic, cultural, or conceptual generalizations about what “cosmopolitan” might mean carry quite a few problems in their wake, I would like to have, in what follows, a look at the American “Glocalism” of such modernist writers such as Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and Alain Locke, as well as at its postmodernist variety in Toni Morrison, famous contemporary voice of the African Americans in the last decades.

The modernist authors whose works I mentioned above are all situated roughly between the turn of the century and 1940. A time, that is, on the one hand still highly influenced by the project of the consolidation of an American national culture, which started about 1850 with the works of the Transcendentalists and Whitman’s poetry, and was extended into histori-

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ography by Fredrick Jackson Turner’s famous frontier thesis. A time, on the other hand, in which the melting pot was mainly interpreted, as Philip Gleason has shown, as an assimilative process designed to shed cultural idiosyncrasies and otherness in order to achieve what Alexis Tocqueville described as early as 1840 as “the general equality among the people” which he considered “the fundamental fact from which all others seemed to be derived.”

While what I have called the national-cultural consolidation of white America was fuelled mainly by the attempts to get rid of the sustaining influence of Europe and its aesthetic norms, the three authors that I want to have a closer look at are characterized by both a distance toward the American scene and a renewed interest in Europe. To use Europe as a backdrop against America was, however, by no means a new phenomenon of American literature at the turn of the century. Since the Puritans Europe has served as a screen on which – mostly favourably – to project American progress and successes. In words that could also be written by Emerson or Whitman, Cotton Mather as early as 1702 declared in the *Magnalia Christi Americana*:

Let Greece boast of her patient Lycurgus …; let Rome tell of her devout Numa … Our New England shall tell and boast of her Winthrop, a lawgiver as patient as Lycurgus, but not admitting any of its criminal disorders; as devout as Numa, but not liable to any of his heathenish madnsses; a governour in whom the excellencies of Christianity made a most improving addition unto the virtues, wherein even without those he would have made a parallel for the great men of Greece, or of Rome, which the pen of a Plutarch has eternized.

Others have followed Mather, among the most prominent being Royall Tyler (*The Contrast*, 1787) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Marble Faun*, 1860). A notable exception preceding the work of Henry James is William Wells Brown’s *The American Fugitive*, which depicts, in contrast to the former, America as savage and Europe as civilized, and not as decadent and antiquated, as which it was usually conceived.

What develops, around the turn of the century, are two versions of cosmopolitanism which, although they overlap in various ways, ought to be distinguished. One is an aesthetic variety of cosmopolitanism which is reflected in the works of Henry James and Gertrude Stein; the other is what I would call an ethno-political cosmopolitanism that is first developed by W.E.B. Du Bois, but given a full and theoretically reflected expression in the works of Alain Locke. What characterizes all of these authors is a

degree of distance toward American culture; a distance toward what they conceive as its parochialism that either feeds into a narrow nationalistic literature that courts the taste of a market geared toward the “common man,” or whose narrowness and fear of the other or the unknown is expressed in simple racism. Both the parochialism of the Victorian world view and the parochialism of an American society hard put to deal with the newly freed slaves provided the hotbed for a new form of cosmopolitanism that was, however, expressed in different forms and designed to serve different ends in the works of James, Stein and Locke.

II

Let us therefore be of nowhere, but without forgetting that we are somewhere.

Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves

For all of the above, however, the concept of cosmopolitan is intrinsically connected to the more general idea of civilization. While the nationalist outlook of a Whitman or an Emerson considers America as the epitome of civilization, James’ attitude toward America is more ambivalent. His early work, e.g., The American, is still characterized by the predominant stereotypical image of Europe as morally questionable and socially decadent. In his later novels – most notably The Ambassadors – he draws a more ambivalent picture of the relation between American and European culture. Especially the question of the moral superiority of modern America in comparison to a Europe still marked by aristocratic culture – especially and repeatedly evoked by the topic of the seduction of a morally innocent American hero by a “femme du monde” – acquires, in The Ambassadors, a more complex shape.10

Many critics – among them, most notably, James himself – have considered The Ambassadors his most achieved novel in regard to the “international theme” so prominent in his oeuvre.11 At the novel’s center is the concept of art as one of the tools to break up a narrowly nationalistic point of view in order to achieve a cosmopolitan broadening of horizon. Such a

cosmopolitanism, however, entails a certain elitism which James himself was often accused of, and which thus reflects some of the reservations James harbored toward American democracy and its egalitarian structures. This democratic tradition stands in stark contrast to a still hierarchically structured European society whose cultural “openness” carries both aspects of aesthetic mundaneness and moral demi-mundaneness. Many critics have reduced the story to a simple clash of cultures. One pole is puritanically disposed Woollett, Massachusetts, to which the ambassador Lambert Strether tries to bring back the allegedly “lost son” of Mrs. Newsome, Chad Newsome, in order to then receive his “bounty” in the form of Mrs. Newsome herself. Paris, on the other hand, is considered by Mrs. Newsome and her likes the European den of iniquity which Chad has fallen into, but which he in the end manages to escape from – to the charms of which, however, the ambassador himself, Strether, finally succumbs.

Although at the end of the story it becomes clear that Chad in fact has an affair to a married “femme du monde,” Madame de Vionnet, what has hardly been recognized by many critics is that James never really describes the fundamental change that Chad has undergone in Europe. Mostly, the attempts to explain Chad’s change are reduced to a mainly positive, though indescribable and finally inexplicable development he has gone through; or rather, the inscrutable driving forces behind it. The following quote is just one instance of many in the novel: “The phenomenon that had suddenly sat down there with him was a phenomenon of change so complete that his imagination, which had worked beforehand, felt itself, in the connexion, without margin or allowance... it was too remarkable, the truth; for what could be more remarkable than this sharp rupture of an identity?” (96) Most often, art and aesthetic experience allegorically replace genuine explanations for both his and Chad’s conversion. Strether’s own experience with Europe and the influence it has upon both Chad and himself is so overwhelming – though seemingly unrepresentable – that he finally urges Chad not to go back to Woollett and stays himself, thus declining the fortune of Mrs. Newsome offered for a successful intervention.

12 At no point in the novel does James indicate, let alone describe, how exactly Chad has changed, or what might have caused this change.
13 Although, as Terry Eagleton has pointed out, James hardly ever addresses problems of class in his novel, The Ambassadors is almost manically obsessed with questions of money, and is permeated by a “fiscal discourse.” Thus, even Chad’s magical change in Europe rests, after all, on his financial means to go and stay there in the first place, which becomes clear when Mrs. Gostrey draws a connection between the “vulgar industry” of the Newsome’s that provides the money for Chad’s adventures, and his reluctance to return: “Is it perhaps then because it’s so bad – because your industry is so vulgar – that Mr. Chad won’t come back? Does he feel the taint? Is he staying away
Lambert Strether, however, is by no means the self-defying hero who simply leaves all monetary calculations behind because he considers himself morally undeserving due to his betrayal of Mrs. Newsome. Not only does he urge Chad to leave Madame de Vionnet after having “all that can be got” out of her, adding that Chad’s “value has quintupled” (428) due to her positive influences on him – thus taking quite a fiscal view on what is, after all, a love affair. Declining both his own future with Mrs. Newsome as well as the one offered him by Mrs. Gostrey, his adviser in things European who offers herself as a kind of replacement for Mrs. Newsome, his moral integrity is, for him, purely a question of calculation; one which forbids him to gain any profit whatsoever from his European adventure. Which has Mrs. Gostrey say, in one of the finely ironic moments so typical for James: “It isn’t so much for your being ‘right’ – it’s your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so” (438). Moral instinct, that is, is replaced by moral calculation altogether. Thus, Strether finally displays the very calculating, monetary, Puritan morality that characterizes Woollett, Massachusetts.

James’ main protagonist, then, is by no means the cosmopolitan archetype that many commentators have taken him to be. His calculating attitude still makes him an outsider to the sublimely incalculable otherness that Europe represents to American eyes; an otherness that cannot be captured by the monetary accounting that might “quintuple” one’s values by simply going there. There is no “assessing” otherness, no “accounting for” it, and that is why James himself consequently restrains from defining this otherness in any way. What art itself can do – both in the novel and as this novel – is only to expose the reader or spectator to this otherness, without in any way giving a ready-made example or model how to deal with it. Art, that is, resists familiarization; its task rather is, in the words of Russian formalist Viktor Shlovsky, to defamiliarize the view on objects and persons threatened to be reduced – by means, for example, of prejudices and stereotypes – to the already known and the allegedly familiar. In fact, Europe finally remains impermeable to both Strether, to the prejudiced people of Woollett, and finally to the reader him/herself; a hermetically sealed mystery neither not to be mixed up with it?” “Oh,” Strether laughed, “it wouldn’t appear – would it? – that he feels ‘taints’! He’s glad enough of the money from it, and the money’s his whole basis” (42). Nevertheless, Strether feels uncomfortable when this topic is raised, as he answers Mrs. Gostrey’s inquiry whether he has been “paid in advance” to get Chad back: “Ah, don’t talk about payment!” (52)

to be accounted for by economic calculations or touristic usage, nor disclosed by simply reading a novel – not even a Jamesian one.

III

The intercourse of cities with one another is apt to create a confusion of manners; strangers are always suggesting novelties to strangers ... the refusal of states to receive others, and for their citizens never to go to other places, is an utter impossibility, and to the rest of the world is likely to appear ruthless and uncivilized.

Plato, The Laws

Although Gertrude Stein’s view on Europe concentrates on Paris as well, her representation of it follows a completely different aesthetic program. Starting from her modernist project to free and unearth, by means of literary strategies taken from cubism, and through repetition, objects from the cultural and semantic sediments they have been covered with, the question arises as to how such a strategy fares once it takes on an “other” such as France. Similar to Tender Buttons, in which objects are freed of their semantic wastes of the past by means of repetition and almost Dadaistic connotations, Paris, France tackles an entire nation – a nation, moreover, that has been the object of many American stereotypifications from Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans to Star Wars.15

As in James, art plays a decisive role in Paris, France; though I am afraid that I won’t have the opportunity to go into this aspect of her work in any detail. Starting from a picture of a Waterloo battle-scene that has influenced her picture of France since her youth, however, she takes up the generalizations that unavoidably go with any stereotype and extends them into absurd spheres. Thus statements such as “There is no difference between life and death in France” (13), “any French person has to have one child” (19), or “[a]ny French child can thoroughly understand everything” (102), throw an almost Dadaesque-satirical flashlight on the distorting absurdities of stereotypes and prejudices. Other, steadily repeated characterizations of the French as “fashionable,” “logical,” and “civilized” lose, in the context of their evocations, any cognitive and semantic potential. Moreover, very personal and particularized anecdotes allegedly designed to prove and support these stereotypes, on the one had subvert these very stereotypes, but on the other hand amount, in their total, to a very personal, if not idiosyncratic image of France. In connection with the stereotypes that function like two-

dimensional screens devoid of any meaning, an image of France is evoked that seems very individual on the one hand, very strange on the other; an image that protects France and French culture against the reductive appropriation though these stereotypes. Paradoxically, however, her own generalizations about France and England serve to throw them into relief as compared to an adolescent and tumultuous America, a clear reference to the American Adam, as in the following quote:

France who was the background of all who were excited and determined and created by the twentieth century but who herself was not at the time enormously interested. France really prefers civilization to tumultuous adolescence, France prefers that the adolescent learns reserve and logic and civilization and fashion as he emerges out of adolescence, France who thinks that childhood and adolescence should be felt instinctively as not an end in itself but as a progression toward the state of being civilized (119/20).

What is special about Stein’s France is its attitude toward foreigners. In her usual, playfully hyperbolic style she states:

After all to the French the difference between being a foreigner and being an inhabitant is not very serious. There are so many foreigners and all who are real to them are those that inhabit Paris and France … Naturally, they come to France. What is more natural for them to do than that? (18/9)

It is “natural” since, as she elaborates, “[f]oreigners belong in France because they have always been here and did what they had to do here and remained foreigners. Foreigners should be foreigners and it is nice that foreigners are foreigners and that they inevitably are in Paris and in France” (20). Again, a deeper truth lies behind the childlike matter-of-factness of this statement: That France, in Stein’s view, does not exert the pressure to acculturate to is mores (whether that is indeed true for France is another question), but that it extends its hospitality to embrace difference, and not to dissolve it in an imaginary melting-pot.

Paris, France, then, is way more than the “Stein for beginners” that the critics have mostly reduced it to; in its sometimes sardonic humour, it opens another way to deal with the irreducible strangeness of the culturally other, and the same time to satirically criticize one strategy to reduce this complexity: that of stereotypification.

IV

The problem of stereotypes – especially that of racist ones – has haunted another group of Americans even more urgently: African-Americans. The campaign against such parochialisms thus acquires a different – and
more urgent – quality for them. Individuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, however, are also characterized by a fundamental distance toward the dominating culture of America, and thus by a certain estrangement toward it. The turn toward an alternative culture – in Du Bois’ and Locke’s case, toward African-American culture – is inasmuch more problematic, as that the latter had been considered, in American culture, as second-rate, primitive, and undeveloped. What intellectuals as Du Bois and Locke were consequently asked to perform is a double task: On the one hand to create a place for African-American culture, but on the other hand to do so by forming coalitions with an audience and a readership beyond that of the contemporary literary market which reduces African Americans to roles between Uncle Tomism, minstrelsy, and a potential threat to white civilization and culture. In The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois draws quite a bleak picture of the Black artist. He sees him

darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defence of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the “higher” against the “lower” races. To which the Negro cries Amen! and swears that to so much of this strange prejudice as is founded on just homage to civilization, culture, righteousness, and progress, he humbly bows and meekly does obeisance.16 (789)

Du Bois, however, turns the tables upon those prejudiced against the alleged “barbaric” African-Americans by denouncing racist stereotypification as the real barbarism, and as a lack of education and civilization. Torn, that is, between the attempt to establish and revalue an own African-American tradition to provide the roots for something like an ethnic identity and self-consciousness, and his own cosmopolitan education – in the face of which he sees both white and black culture wanting – the cosmopolitan internationalism of the later Du Bois tries to bridge the gap by forming alliances between the talented tenth of ethnically aware intellectual elites. It is these alliances that Du Bois believes to be able to leave behind and to transcend both the parochialism of a racist white mainstream culture as well as that of a black culture which three hundred years of oppression have left in rudimentary shatters.17

This bridging, as the case of Alain Locke makes clear, is, however, a precarious theoretical challenge. Poised between a “cultural cosmopolitanism” and a “racial culturalism”, Locke combined the so-called “primitivism” of the Afro-American tradition with the elitism of modern art.\textsuperscript{18} Both his philosophical background and his modernistic inclinations have induced critics to call him “Eurocentric to the tip of his cane” – which, interestingly enough, again connects his concept of cosmopolitanism with European preferences. Indeed, Locke tried to create parallels between African-American and Irish, German, Italian and Jewish folklores in a very sophisticated way, which brought him the reputation of being “the high priest of the intellectual snobbocracy.”\textsuperscript{19} As Terry Eagleton has claimed with regard to James, Locke’s aesthetic mandarinism tended to completely disregard the entire realm of economy and class – the very aspects the late Du Bois would later put at the center of his Marxist views and writings. Locke, on the other hand, tried to tap the resources of African-American imagination in order to transcend ethnic and national boundaries by means of a “cosmic emotion such as only the gifted pagans knew, of a return to nature, not by the way of the forced and worn formula of Romanticism, but through the closeness of an imagination that has never broken kinship with nature.”\textsuperscript{20}

In the following, longer self-portrait, Locke pits the parochialism of Philadelphia against his own cosmopolitan views – views that he acquired by resorting to the classic European texts on cosmopolitanism:

Philadelphia, with her birthright of provincialism flavoured by urbanity and her petty bourgeois psyche with the Tory slant, at the start set the key paradox; circumstance compounded it by decreeing me as a Negro a dubious and doubting sport of American and by reason of the racial inheritance making me more of a pagan than a Puritan, more of a humanist than a pragmatist …. Verily, paradox has followed me the rest of my days: at Harvard, clinging to the genteel tradition of Palmer, Royce and Munsterberg, yet attracted by the disillusion of Santayana and the radical protest of James (William James, that is) …. At Oxford, once


\textsuperscript{19} George Schuyler, quoted in David Levering Lewis, \textit{When Harlem was in Vogue} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 149; 117. Whether, as Ross Posnock claims, cosmopolitanism “became the crucial term enabling Locke’s move from expatriate aesthete to race man,” begs the question, as it suggests Locke’s moving away from the first and toward the latter, which I don’t think is correct. Rather, his cosmopolitanism enabled him to achieve a theoretical precarious balance between the two. Cf. Ross Posnock, \textit{Color and Culture: Black Writers and the making of the Modern Intellectual} (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) 195.

more intrigued by the twilight of aestheticism, but dimly aware of the new realism of the Austrian philosophy of value; socially Anglophile, but because of race loyalty, strenuously anti-imperialist; universalist in religion, internationalist and pacifist in world-view, but forced by a sense of simple justice to approve of the militant counter counter-nationalisms of Zionism, Young Turkey, Young Egypt, Young India, and with reservations even Garveyism and current-day “Nippon over Asia.” Finally, a cultural cosmopolitan, but perforce an advocate of cultural racialism as a defensive counter-move for the American Negro, and accordingly more of a philosophical mid-wife to a generation of younger Negro poets, writers, artists than a professional philosopher. Small wonder, then … that I project my personal history into this inevitable rationalization as cultural pluralism and value relativism, with a not too orthodox reaction to the American way of life.21

Interestingly enough, if one brackets the ethnic references in this quote, it could have been written by both James and Stein as well. As Locke, both James and Stein were strongly influenced by the philosophy of William James, though both remained, as did Locke, rather humanists than pragmatists; as Locke, both evince a “not too orthodox reaction to the American way of life,” and both despised the “provincialism” of a “petty bourgeois psyche” that they detested and that they, contrary to Locke, fled permanently. All three resort to Europe as an alternative reference point which offered for them a degree of sophistication not to be found in America. All three lived with the paradox that by necessity characterizes a cosmopolitan outlook, in that they retained and evinced, in their writings, both attachments and reservations toward their country of origin, as well as to the continent they frequently connoted with cosmopolitanism – Europe. All three emphasize the respect toward, and sometimes sublime inscrutability of, the other that a genuinely cosmopolitan openness entails.

It is quite striking that, after almost 50 years of national consolidation and ethnic identity politics, this split between Europe and American as re-occurred. Both the parochialism and the imperial desires of contemporary America have led leading intellectuals of American Studies to turn toward Europe again after a phase in which America and Europe were simply thrown together under the label “Western culture” or “Western metaphysics.” Among those scholars are those who I have mentioned above; those, that is, who pursue a transnational approach toward American Studies. This is not to say that Europe holds some kind of key to cosmopolitanism; Locke’s lecture on cosmopolitanism from 1908 indeed calls for a rethinking

of the Eurocentric logic of cosmopolitanism. In what is an almost prophet-ic warning against a frequent flyer cosmopolitanism, Locke warns that the cosmopolitan’s fetishizing pursuit of exotica or raw source materials among colonized peoples and nondominant populations hardly amounts to reciprocal exchange. This reciprocity, however, cannot be presumed as long as the process of ethno-cultural consolidation has not come full circle. Or, as bell hooks has put it so poignantly: “It is easy to give up your identity – when you got one.”

V

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or a dead thing, male or female.

Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality

The potentially tragic aspects of such a process of identity politics are something that newer literary productions such as Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead, but especially Toni Morrison’s Paradise dramatize. In the face of the excesses of this ethnic consolidation, Toni Morrison’s Paradise points toward another cosmopolitanism beyond reciprocity; a cosmopolitanism of a radical, indeed impossible hospitality that echoes the philosophical works of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida.

The choice of Morrison’s Paradise might strike some as surprising, being, as it is, set exclusively in the context of an all-Black, small American town called Ruby. In contrast to Silko’s all-comprising gesture in Almanac of the Dead, Paradise sketches a scenario in which the trajectory of emancipation started by DuBois and Locke comes full circle. The contrast between the convent that offers refuge to the five main female protagonists, and the all-Black town of Ruby, is a restaging of the American Dream under different ethnic presumptions. It can be considered as a brutally honest coming to terms with the reigning identity politics to which ethnic emancipation has lead at the end of the 20th century. The strongly heterogeneous, persecuted group of women that finds refuge in the convent outside Ruby is facing a group of African American inhabitants of Ruby, whose diaspora – they

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22 Alain Locke, “Cosmopolitanism,” paper read to the Cosmopolitan Club, Oxford University, June 9, 1908; quoted in Anderson, Deep River, 122.
were denied help and shelter from their way up from the South – ends in the
founding of their ethnically exclusive city.

Ironically, while the foundational mono-myth of white America has
acquired a black face, its mechanisms of in- and exclusion have stayed the
same. It serves the powerful of Ruby as a legitimation, although or because,
embodied in the oven that forms the centrepiece of the city, the founding
inscription cannot be exactly deciphered, and lends itself to different and in
fact contradicting interpretations. Morrison here brilliantly plays with the
difference between the ambivalence of the founding myth and the possible
ideological appropriations it gives way to; the difference, that is, between
the open inclusiveness of the mythical basis, and the exclusiveness of the
different ideological uses and abuses that more and more throw into relief
an increasing heterogeneity that the leaders of the town desperately try to
suppress and deny.24

This attempt to preserve ethnic purity contrasts strongly with the openness
and hospitality of the convent located outside the city, where everyone,
independent of gender and colour, is offered refuge. In another brilliant nar-
rative move, Morrison right at the beginning informs the reader that there
is one white woman among those who live at the convent; the novel never
discloses, however, who of the five female protagonists the white one is.
The convent, however, also serves as a temporary safe – or saving – haven for
some, even male, citizens of Ruby. This fact – together with the one that
the convent’s permanent inhabitants are all female, and that they do not
distinguish between skin color – arouses the suspicion of the patriarchically
structured Ruby and leads, in the end, to a ferocious and violent attack on
the convent and its inhabitants. The dystopian end of Morrison’s story, I
would argue, dramatizes in an extraordinary fashion what both Lévinas
and Derrida have called the impossibility of an alternative conception of
cosmopolitanism based upon the notion of a radical and thus impossible,
hospitality. A hospitality that, according to Derrida, “irreconcilably opposes
The law, in its universal singularity, to a plurality that is not only a dispersal
(laws in the plural), but a structured multiplicity, determined by a process of
division and differentiatiation” (Derrida, 79).

What is so innovative about Lévinas’s and Derrida’s approaches to cos-
mopolitanism is that, by means of the concept of hospitality, they are able
to reach both beyond the problems of identity politics and allow to concep-
tualize cosmopolitanism from the perspective not of those who travel, but
those who receive and take in – a concept of hospitality that both Morrison

24 For a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between myth and ideology, see
and Lévinas see strongly connected with a female aspect. In what I take to be Morrison’s most courageous novel, this principle is reflected in the unconditional hospitality of the inhabitants of the convent. This hospitality and openness stands in striking contrast to the closed structures and rules of Ruby, whose insistence on ethnic purity, if not isolation, is ironically a result of a traumatic experience of hospitality withheld, when the founders, almost starving, where turned away by whites. In no other ethnic novel I know of is the connection between the dangerous consequences of identity politics and parochialism so intrinsically connected to the topic of hospitality as in Morrison’s *Paradise*. In this work, not only are the aesthetic and the ethno-political aspects of cosmopolitanism brought together; moreover, the open, highly ambivalent, but also tragic end of the novel, in which the citizens of Ruby attack and partly kill the female inhabitants of the convent, is one of the most successful dramatizations of what Lévinas has called the “allergic” reaction toward the other, as well as of what Derrida calls the “unconditionality” of a radical ethics of cosmopolitan hospitality. Morrison extends her concept of hospitality by means of a cosmopolitanism that is certainly not Eurocentric – which, however, seems only adequate in a time of globalization as ours. *Paradise*, then, points to a new Glocalism beyond the limits of a non-committal liberalism so often connoted to cosmopolitanism; a cosmopolitan ethics highly needed to tackle the problems awaiting a world becoming more and more globalized.


26 “This unconditional law of hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would be a law without imperative, without order, and without duty” (Derrida 83).