

destiny of faith allows itself to be questioned as the very destiny of humanity.

The whole *oeuvre* of Michel de Certeau is the story of the 'Abrahamic journey' that goes from the experience of God to that of the 'quotidian', this latter being the challenge thrown down to the former, but also its resource, when the experience of absence finds its being satisfied by the desire that maintains it. Thus the *oeuvre* tells the story of the life of its author, the astonishing fidelity to his first intuitions and to his first engagements, across so many wanderings and distant explorations that always relate, one to the other, the question of God and the question of humanity.

## What is Heterology?

Ian Buchanan

Heterology is Michel de Certeau's great unfinished project. Begun while still in the U.S., it was put on hold so he could complete his work on mysticism,—and regrettably—never resumed. This work holds such great promise that the thought of continuing his project, of somehow bringing it to fruition, has long been a fancy of mine.<sup>1</sup> But besides the obvious difficulty of creating what is practically a new epistemology, there is the more immediate difficulty of establishing just what heterology is meant to be. Since Certeau died before he could formulate either a specific thesis, or a particular method, we have no certain way of knowing what he actually meant by the term, or indeed intended it to mean. So until now the fancy has remained idle. However, it now occurs to me that it may be possible to construct a workable impression of what heterology is by determining what it decidedly is not.

While it is true that we do not really know what heterology is meant to stand for, there is one thing, at least, of which we can be certain and that is what Certeau did not want this book "we will never ready"<sup>2</sup> to be. It is quite clear from his existing work that he wanted to steer what at the time of his death was then emerging as cultural studies away from what might be called, to coin a phrase, 'interpretative semiotics'. He

objected to 'interpretative semiotics' not because its result is more allegory than analysis, but because it presumes that the state of affairs called culture is, through being composed of 'symbols', a purely relative, or else *quid pro quo*, structure, without any substantive base. Geertz's 'interpretative anthropology' is exemplary in this respect. He avers that like lives, societies "contain their own interpretations", leaving theory the task of learning "how to gain access to them."<sup>3</sup> "What is needed", he therefore argues, "is some systematic, rather than merely literary or impressionistic", way of discovering, and subsequently articulating the given as the given. This would involve laying bare the "conceptual structure embodied in the symbolic forms through which persons are perceived actually is." According to Geertz, what cultural studies requires methodologically, but does not yet have, is "a developed method of describing and analyzing the meaningful structure of experience" as it is "apprehended by representative members of a particular society at a particular point in time". What is wanted, therefore, is "a scientific phenomenology of culture."<sup>4</sup> Such an enterprise, as Geertz later described it, is an attempt to understand understanding, and insofar as hermeneutics is understood to mean just that he is happy to accept that label for his work.<sup>5</sup>

The culture as puzzle view ("The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to."<sup>6</sup>) advocated by Geertz is predicated on an unbridgeable divide between the ethnographer and his or her subject, or what in philosophical terms amounts to Same and Other. What Geertz endeavours to articulate are particularized worldviews, or perspectives. As he points out, no doubt correctly, the ethnographer is not able to perceive what his or her informants perceive. All that the ethnographer can hope to grasp—"and that uncertainly enough"—is the apparatus which, at a deep conceptual level, the 'informants' "perceive 'with'—or 'by means of', or 'through' ... or whatever the word should be."<sup>7</sup> Then, the ethnographer can produce something like a map—a diagrammatization—of the vital concepts through which everyday life is lived. However, the vitality of these concepts does not survive their articulation, and whatever it is that ethnography does articulate it is not the vital concepts through which everyday life is lived. These remain beyond grasp, apparently infinitely other. This is a paradigmatic example of what I call the problem of otherness and though Geertz acknowledges the depth and significance of this problem, he never seriously engages with it himself. In fact, perhaps betraying a weariness with postmodernist debate, he places it beyond the grasp of anyone to solve.

If the relation of what we write to what we write about, Morocco, say, or Indonesia, can no longer be credibly compared with that of a map to a distant territory or to that of a sketch to an exotic animal recently come upon, what can it be compared with? Telling a believable story? Building a workable model? Translating an alien language? Construing an enigmatical text? Conducting an intelligible dialogue? Excavating a buried site? Staging an instructive illustration?<sup>8</sup>

All these possibilities, he adds, have been suggested. But none, he implies, have greater credibility, or more importantly, greater intellectual cogency, than the analogy of a map to a distant territory. The problem with this cognitive model is, as Certeau has pointed out, that it turns time into space.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Geertz, however, Certeau does perceive there to be another way, a means other than analogy: heterology. What is admirable in Certeau's critique of Geertz's position is the fact that he does not succumb to the manifold seductions of nihilism, and push aside a too optimistic positivism in favour of a gloatingly negative relativism. He does not allow that it is enough merely to posit that cultural studies is writing, and that writing is intrinsically metaphorical and therefore able to deliver only partial truths, which is all Clifford does, but searches for a more adequate mode of expression.<sup>10</sup> It is this 'more adequate mode of expression' that heterology would have been, hence my interest.

To get some idea of the necessity of constructing a 'more adequate mode of expression' one has only to witness the nihilism of Clifford's work. Echoing Hayden White's<sup>11</sup> earlier shattering of that certainty of historiography so cherished by historians, namely objective writing,<sup>12</sup> Clifford is content to recite the postmodern axiom that truth is always already partial, at best, because it is written. Ethnographers, as writers, "cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it." The implication of this view, which Clifford suggests is "more Nietzschean than realist or hermeneutic", is that "all constructed truths are made possible by powerful 'lies' of exclusion and rhetoric." Cultural studies must recognize, therefore, that even the "best ethnographic texts", or what he calls "serious, true fictions", have to be rethought in terms of "systems, or economies, of truth." Power is implicit in these systems, and it works through them "in ways their authors cannot fully control."<sup>13</sup> However, the problem, as Derrida shows, is more complex than this, and not only epistemological in nature:

There is no ethics without the presence of *the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, differance, writings

In other words, allegorisation, which erodes the other by prioritizing the 'detour' of writing, is incapable of being ethical. It is just this that Certeau will not allow. The difficulty is that the problem which Certeau must address to restore ethics is practically insoluble. For while the presence of the other is the condition of possibility for ethics, its absence is the condition of possibility for otherness. So, unless cultural studies can reconcile the logically irreconcilable, a just ethnography remains beyond its grasp.

In philosophy where there is already an established tradition of debate concerning the relation between Same and Other, namely heterology, a similar problem to the one outlined above exists. The problem is expressed in two different ways: on the one hand, there is the fear that the Other, if it is prediscursive, which is to say already constituted, will 'crush' the Same; and on the other hand, the fear is that the Same, if it is constitutive, such as is the case in phenomenology, will absorb the Other, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "Insofar as I constitute the world, I cannot conceive another consciousness, for it too would have to constitute the world and, at least as regards this other view of the world, I should not be the constituting agent."<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, 'heterology' designates that branch of philosophy concerned with the other as that which philosophy relies on without being able to comprehend. Corresponding to the first 'problem', the other in this case, besides being 'what I am not', 'where I am not', and 'when I am not', is also infinite and radically contiguous—which is to say, so beyond imagining that it does not even share a common border with the imaginable. God, obviously, meets all of these requirements but that does not mean that the Other *must be* construed theologically. In fact, that is one of the risks of heterology. Montaigne's "Of Cannibals", for instance, is, according to Certeau, "inscribed within this heterological tradition, in which the discourse about the other is a means of constructing a discourse authorised by the other."<sup>16</sup> As an absolute Other the Cannibal is Godlike in his ability to guarantee the Word.

As Levinas shows, the theological Other, which is precisely the type of Other that conditions his thought, reduces the subject to a state of passivity. Our relationship with the Other is always, he suggests, a relationship with Mystery.<sup>17</sup> Mystery, of which death is the supreme example, is that which incapacitates us, that which deprives us of the ability to act by overwhelming our senses. Contrary to Heidegger who asserts that death empowers *Dasein* with its fullest "potentiality-for-Being",<sup>18</sup> Levinas argues that death, by bringing the subject to the limit of the possible, leaves him or her no "longer able to be able".<sup>19</sup> What the subject, in the face of death, is no longer able to do is *grasp the*

*initiative*. So complete is the strangeness of the future of death that it renders the subject utterly immobile.<sup>20</sup> And, Levinas says, it “is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject.”<sup>21</sup> The other is the all-powerful before whom ‘we’ passively stand in judgement.

For Lyotard, this ‘passivity’ constitutes the very value and advantage of Levinas’s thought. What it expresses is the fact that insofar as I am spoken to “the place of the one who speaks to me is never available to me to occupy.”<sup>22</sup> That is to say, it is always the other who speaks, not me. In many respects, the central problem of the different (the impossibility of finding an adequate phrase to articulate wrongs,<sup>23</sup> and, concomitantly, the impossibility of determining criteria for justice<sup>24</sup>) is a Levinasian one. It reiterates precisely Levinas’s primary problem: “How can a being enter into a relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?”<sup>25</sup> In other words, how can a victim become a plaintiff? How can a victim of a wrong, remembering that by definition a victim is bereft of the means of proving the occurrence of a wrong,<sup>26</sup> give testimony against an other when to do so means speaking in the other’s place? Insofar as the speech situation is that of a tribunal it is the law that speaks, not the victim, and it is this place that he or she must occupy to become a plaintiff.

But in doing so they lose control of their testimony. How, Levinas asks, can one avoid being crushed by this other? Like Levinas, Lyotard locates this problem in discourse, or more specifically in the pragmatics of the speech encounter; unlike Levinas however, whose model is the conversation,<sup>27</sup> Lyotard’s is the tribunal, which allows him to depict the political as an agonistics between Self and Other.<sup>28</sup> The other for Lyotard is an oppressive weight of prescription that cannot be attenuated because its axioms precede and therefore condition the situation wherein redress is sought. Justice, in this case, is only possible insofar as one is able to free oneself from the obligations imposed by the other.<sup>29</sup>

This is the reverse of Derrida’s construction of justice, wherein the other must be freed from the obligations of the Same before justice can prevail.<sup>30</sup> Even so, it is noteworthy that in both cases justice is a matter for a still to be specified futurology. In both cases, the just is that (in the Same) which sustains an open future, one free from obligations. The Same, for Lyotard<sup>31</sup> as well as for Derrida,<sup>32</sup> philosophically transcribes the social as a relatively homogeneous, or at least hegemonically stable, bloc or assemblage. It is not determined by an extant state of affairs,<sup>33</sup> however, but rather by an internal logic of conformity, a will not to be different.

Where Derrida and Lyotard differ is in their respective definitions of the other. Both, of course, maintain that the other is ‘what I am not’, ‘where I am not’, and ‘when I am not’, but Derrida in contrast to

Lyotard, refuses the traditional heterological definition of the absolutely other.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Derrida relegates heterology to the lowly rank of hollow dream.<sup>35</sup> Yet in doing so he opens the way for a critical heterology such as the one Certeau hoped to formulate. Derrida's critique of a specific concept or notion creates a rupture through which heterology as a new mode of analysis emerges. In a long essay on Levinas, Derrida argues that a "purely heterological" structure of thought, which is to say a structure of thought that radically distinguishes Same and Other, is the naive dream of empiricism. According to Derrida, by "radicalizing the theme of the infinite exteriority of the other" Levinas assumes an identical aim (albeit with greater audacity) to the one which "has more or less secretly animated all the philosophical gestures which have been called empiricisms in the history of philosophy."<sup>36</sup> In other words, by "making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other"<sup>37</sup> Levinas is compelled to relinquish conceptuality, which is to say philosophy.<sup>38</sup> His philosophy which is, perhaps in spite of itself, a philosophy of immanence, cannot sustain the concept as a transcendental *a priori* without admitting that coherence in incoherence—i.e., the incoherence of the relation between the Same and the infinitely Other, which, because it insists on a radical disjuncture, is no relation at all—is possible. Without the possibility of forging coherence *in* incoherence philosophy is constrained to contemplation which, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is *not* the function of philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Yet that is all Levinas's muted philosopher can manage—he or she stands before the Other as the plaintiff stands before the tribunal.

So for Derrida 'heterology' is a pejorative. It stands for a philosophy that in consequence of an assiduous adherence to an absolutely bi-nomial structure of thought, which is to say a philosophy conditioned by the disjunctive, is in fact a nonphilosophy. This is precisely the sense in which Certeau takes up the term. As Certeau reveals in the work of Freud (as well as in that of Bourdieu<sup>40</sup> and Durkheim<sup>41</sup>), the supposition of an absolute other is an intellectual ruse by which means the rigour of philosophy is evaded. In Freud, it is the so-called ordinary man that fulfils this function. Posited as "the representative of an abstract universal", the ordinary man plays, in Freudian theory, "the role of a god who is recognisable in his effects", albeit a humbled god submerged in the superstitions of common people. The ordinary man provides Freud's discourse with the means of "generalising a particular knowledge and of *guaranteeing* its validity by the whole of history."<sup>42</sup> Although the initial sense in which Certeau used the term 'heterology' was critical, or purely classificatory, I would argue that Certeau intended, additionally, for it to broach a *constructivist*

approach to cultural analysis, and this is the project he left unfinished.<sup>43</sup>

If we define cultural studies as the concerted effort to articulate culture, that is to say, *write it*, then a number of problems become immediately apparent. The principal of these, the one which eclipses all the others, is the problem of *writing* itself. But this problem is too general: it must be refined before we can even begin to confront it. To engage with this problem cultural studies needs to take its reflexivity much further than it presently does. Important metacritiques of anthropological—ethnographic—*mis-en-scene*, such as those instigated by Talal Asad,<sup>44</sup> and after him Edward Said<sup>45</sup> (who expands the scope of the scene to include the writing of literature), and even more recently James Clifford<sup>46</sup> (whose war cry is that all ethnographic writing is allegorical), only engage with the issue of ‘What *is* said?’, leaving aside the more important question, ‘What *can* be said?’. This ‘problem’ has both an epistemological and ethical dimension; it is, *at once*, an orthopractic question: can a just ethnography be written?; *and* a complex philosophical problem: can the other speak as other? By just, or better justice, I mean, as Derrida puts it, the “affirmative experience of the coming of the other *as* other”.<sup>47</sup> Thus, a just ethnography is one that permits the other to speak as other. A politics of the other, the central concern of cultural studies today, should be preceded by a philosophy of the other. Hence the necessity of heterology. My hypothesis is that from this speculation a new and more adequate ‘mode’ of cultural analysis—indeed, a new ‘method’ too—might be constructed.

So what would ‘heterology’ look like? All that can be said, on the basis of the foregoing, is what it must be like, and that is what I will confine myself to stating. It would have to be formulated as an alternative to, but not as a compromise between, the two impossible positions outlined above: the impossibility of the infinitely other; and the impossibility of an other that is not infinitely other. If cultural studies is permitted to construct its object as infinitely other, then it unavoidably construes it as mysterious, which prevents it from ever being able to articulate its position, and, more worryingly, licenses its lack of concern. If it is impossible to speak for the other, then why try? The alternative is equally problematic: if the other is not infinitely other then cultural studies would be entitled to, and quite capable of, speaking on its behalf. This risks the subsumption of the other. As we have seen, there is no compromise to be had between these two positions, so a solution, such that one is possible, must be sought elsewhere. This is why I have suggested Certeau meant to develop a constructivist mode of cultural studies—it is the only, or at least the only way I have encountered, way out of this impasse.

Instead of positing the existence of the Same and Other, what I am calling constructivism<sup>48</sup> would argue that each is still becoming, and therefore never yet infinitely other, so it is always possible to articulate at least some aspect of its discourse. By the same token, insofar as it is becoming-infinitely-other, some part always remains outside the grasp of that attempt at articulation, so it can never be subsumed. This according to the Derridean definition given above provides the necessary set of conditions for freedom, and with it, ethics, because the Other in its becoming is always arriving and therefore outside of the range of the Same's determination. Because the Same is similarly becoming, it is itself incapable of the total determination of the Other. Heterology, then, models itself not on the tribunal or the conversation, though it participates in both, but on a kind of empiricist philosophy that Deleuze called transcendental empiricism.<sup>49</sup>

Transcendental empiricism is the name Deleuze gave to his version of pluralism. Certeau used no such fancy name as this, but he was nonetheless a pluralist of the same ilk. In his meditations on the city and the difficulties it poses to analysis, Certeau formulated a precisely transcendental empiricist conclusion. Neither the bird's-eye view (the symbolic equivalent of the transcendental), nor the curb-side view (the symbolic equivalent of the empirical or immanent), he found, can provide a completely satisfactory articulation of the city since both of necessity exclude the other. What Certeau did then was to suggest a way in which both views could be simultaneously expressed: strategy and tactics.

- 1 My claim is made on the basis of the three articles which according to Luce Giard can be described as 'heterological' (or at least 'proto-heterological') in the strict sense that Certeau apparently intended to give the term: Certeau 1980; 1986:67–79; 1988:209–243 (Cf. Giard 1991).
- 2 Giard 1991:213.
- 3 Geertz 1973:453.
- 4 Geertz 1973:364.
- 5 Geertz 1983:5.
- 6 Geertz 1983:58.
- 7 Geertz 1983:58.
- 8 Geertz 1995:98.
- 9 Certeau 1984:97.
- 10 This is, I think, how Certeau's analyses of space should be understood: as a search for a more adequate means of articulating the simultaneity of the being of space itself, and spatial experience. Cf Certeau 1984:91–130.
- 11 White 1973; 1978.
- 12 Novick 1988:1.
- 13 Clifford 1986a:7.
- 14 Derrida 1976:139–40.
- 15 Merleau-Ponty 1962:350.
- 16 "God and the cannibal, equally elusive, are assigned by the text the role of the Word

- in whose name its writing takes place—but also the role of a place constantly altered by the inaccessible (t)exterior [*hor-texte*] which authorises that writing” (Certeau 1986:68–9).
- 17 Levinas 1987:75
  - 18 Heidegger 1962:294.
  - 19 Levinas 1987:74
  - 20 Levinas 1987:81
  - 21 Levinas 1987:74.
  - 22 Lyotard & Thebaud 1985:39.
  - 23 Lyotard 1988:5
  - 24 Lyotard & Thebaud 1985:14–15. For a critique of the inherent danger of Lyotard’s notion that justice is only possible when judgements are made in the absence of previously determined criteria, see Norris 1993:86–88.
  - 25 Levinas 1987:77.
  - 26 Lyotard 1988:9.
  - 27 “We shall try to show that the *relation* between the same and the other [...] is language. For language accomplishes a relation such that the terms are not limitrophe within this relation, such that the other, despite the relationship with the same, remains transcendent to the same. The relation between the same and other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as a conversation [...]” (Levinas 1969:39).
  - 28 “Reality is always the plaintiff’s responsibility” (Lyotard 1988:8).
  - 29 Lyotard & Thebaud 1985:41–2.
  - 30 Derrida 1994:36. Not only does Derrida define justice in terms of an openness towards the other, he also defines deconstruction in these terms as well. “Deconstruction”, he says, “is not an enclosure in nothingness [as a number of his detractors have alleged], *but an openness towards the other*” (Derrida 1984:124 my emphasis).
  - 31 Lyotard 1988:105.
  - 32 Derrida 1994:34.
  - 33 Any attempt to define the Same in terms of a state of affairs is defeated by the sheer diversity sameness can contain: eg. “identical genital acts mean very different things to different people” (Sedgwick 1990:25).
  - 34 According to Norris, Derrida takes this stance against Levinas in recognition of the fact that “it is no great distance, whether in philosophic or in psychological terms, from the attitude that on principle renounces all claim to know or comprehend the other to the attitude that views otherness as a threat” (Norris 1994:57).
  - 35 Derrida 1978:151.
  - 36 Derrida 1978:151.
  - 37 Derrida 1978:151.
  - 38 As Derrida puts it, empiricism “has always been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*: as the philosophical pretension to nonphilosophy, the inability to justify oneself, to come to one’s own aid as speech” (Derrida 1978:152).
  - 39 Deleuze & Guattari 1994:6.
  - 40 Cf. Certeau 1984:50–60.
  - 41 Certeau 1984:64
  - 42 Certeau 1984:3.
  - 43 Cf. Buchanan 1995.
  - 44 Asad 1973:17.
  - 45 Said 1993:78.
  - 46 Clifford 1986b:98.
  - 47 Derrida 1994:36.
  - 48 I take my definition of constructivism from Deleuze & Guattari 1994.
  - 49 Deleuze 1994.

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## The Shattering of Christianity and the Articulation of Belief

Jeremy Ahearne

This article is based on a number of texts written by Michel de Certeau between around 1969 and 1974. These texts all explore the ways in which a lucid Christian belief may endure as a resource in contemporary societies.<sup>1</sup> They also indicate a form of transition. In comparison to the probing but orthodoxly circumscribed analyses of *L'Etranger, ou Bunion dans la différence* (1969)<sup>2</sup>, we see the emergence of a more open (more exposed but also freer) mode of reflection. Although Certeau would rarely return in his writings after the mid-1970's to the question of contemporary Christian belief as such, the analytic and figurative frameworks generated by this reflection continue to inform his thought. They help us to make sense of the apparently disparate heterogeneity of his subsequent publications, taking us as they do in a series of significant zigzags between, say, *The Writing of History*, *The Mystic Fable* and *The Practice of Everyday Life*.<sup>3</sup>

Christianity was, in Certeau's view, in the process of 'shattering'.<sup>4</sup> While this may have seemed a provocative diagnosis in 1974, it appears today as a basic premiss for a scrupulous sociological analysis.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Certeau suggests that there is nothing intrinsically new about this process. He recalls elsewhere the major scissions already at work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Christendom broke 'into pieces', producing here and there new generations of believers 'without