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INTRODUCTION

Thinking across Continents

I love India, but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot—I shall forever seek my *compatriots* all over the world.

—Rabindranath Tagore

So long as the seeing is something to see, it is not the real one; only when the seeing is no-seeing—that is, when the seeing is not a specific act of seeing into a definitely circumscribed state of consciousness—is it the “seeing into one’s self-nature.” Paradoxically stated, when seeing is no-seeing there is real seeing; when hearing is no-hearing there is real hearing.

—Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki

Turning outside to inside over and over, turning the inside out: what he is waiting for is not there—visibly; that which is not, neither the outside nor the inside.

—Michel Deguy, “Catachreses”

In the context of Jean-Luc Nancy’s “Euryopa: Le regard au loin,” a short and baffling text written in 1994, Rudolphe Gasché explains how Nancy raises the philosophical question of Europe by investigating the question of the world, sense, finitude, and horizon—a pregnant and operative clutch of terms that our book prefers to settle with by *thinking across continents*. Gasché explains:

Nancy’s starting point is the admittedly questionable etymological meaning of Europe, *Euryopa*—originally an epithet of Zeus, meaning, either *wide-eyed*, or *far-sounding* (i.e. *thundering*). *Der Kleine Pauly* renders it as “far-sounding and looking far into the distance” and goes on to mention another possible but equally questionable etymology, to which Nancy also has recourse, namely the semitic pre-Greek *ereb*, obscurity. According to this origin, the name “Europe,” to cite Nancy, “would mean: the one who looks in the distance (or, as well, the one whose voice is farsounding).” But Nancy brings to bear the other possible etymology

of the word, thus determining *Euryopa's* glance as a “look far into the obscurity, into its own obscurity.”¹

If Europe, as an idea, is looking into the distance, where the world is realized by being world-wide, it is also a way of looking that problematizes finitude and infinity in our understanding of the world. Looking into obscurity and into one's obscurity is holding a position as the world, where infinite means “the infinity of finitude, of the infinitely finite.” Martta Heikkilä points out that under such notions of finitude “there is no idea that goes beyond the world by giving it any end, reason, or ground. A world is a space for the infinite of truth and existence: a world free of a horizon. The world is made up beings that are infinitely exposed to existence as a non-essence. Thus they are singular or finite beings that make up the finite and horizonless world, a world which is infinitely finite, hence infinite.”² This makes me think about Asia, the continent, the world, which I am writing from in a slightly different way. We don't have a consensus on the origin of the word *Asia*. It could have been derived from Ἀσία first attributed to Herodotus (about 440 BC), where we locate a reference to Anatolia, or the Persian empire. Perhaps more authentically, it emerges from Akkadian (“to go out, to rise”) with a borrowed allegiance to the Semitic root *Asu*, which is a reference to the rising sun. Asia then becomes the land of sunrise. But presently it is not what it used to be: it has drifted away as a geographical mass, got a new name, footprints of new cultures, marks and remarks of new thoughts and ideological formations. Also, with light, Asia becomes a land or a space that gets light first and loses light first. It first gets noticed and then allows others to get noticed by withdrawing from prominence. Losing light is not losing sight but about sighting others and sighting oneself. Losing light, then, is not darkness but no light, not possession but a sharing with others, a light that comes to it only to be distributed to others. Again the light that it loses to its others comes to it as its light and also the light of others. That light dissolves and sublates itself. So the figure of Asia is always behind the figure, the idea that hides to project, retraces to reaffirm. Asia demarcates itself from its self (light and no light, blind spots?) and also self-demarcation (it is the host to a light and then dispossessed to become, in the process, both the guest and the host). Like the light that goes away and returns upon itself, Asia always has an Asia before itself. Sounding Nancyean, I would like to argue that when there is light Asia sees itself. When light disappears, Asia thinks, seeing changes to thought and discovering the power of invisibility. A reality first (light

there is) and then a possibility, which is both self-demarcation and demarcation from others. Asia, for me, thus, continuously doubles itself.

So our book, *Thinking across Continents*, speaks of no finite Asia or Europe or America—self-contained, harmonically hermetic. This finitude, falling back on Nancy, “does not mean that we are noninfinite—like small insignificant beings within a grand, universal, and continuous being—but it means that we are infinitely finite, finitely exposed to our existence as a nonessence, infinitely exposed to the ‘otherness’ of our own being.”³ We are caught in the across, not simply going from one end to another (from Asia to America) but *an cross*, in a crossed position (Anglo-French origin of across, literally “on cross”), subjected infinitely to finite spots of meditative singularities. We restore and rejuvenate our across and cross positions through dialogue (*regard*, lending to others, two minds in conversation and a host of thoughts across times and traditions). Our dialogues have evinced our presentness in a culture and tradition of thought and have also given “birth to presence” where we have begun without beginning and ended without having a beginning and an end that we can claim are just ours. This is because we have thought about literature within a world and yet did not forget about its potential to go world-wide. Our positions and transpositions belong to us and to the other.

I approached the book as a deep victim of trans-habit. *Trans*, as a prefix, means “across, beyond, to go beyond,” from the Latin *trans-*, from the prepositional *trans* “across, over, beyond,” probably originally the present participle of the verb *trare-*, meaning “to cross.”⁴ This crossing, going across, and staying perpetually crossed is what motivates and characterizes my doing of literature. Brought up in a family of academics in which my father taught physics and my mother taught history, I submitted to the stirring liminality of getting curious about disciplines such as quantum mechanics, Indian and Western philosophy, evolution, and the ramifications of Indian history. Our library shelves housed Richard Feynman and Albert Einstein, flanked by Satyajit Ray, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Victor Turner, Mircea Eliade, J. S. Mill, and Vincent Smith. My early life amid a wide variety of knowledge regimes, macerated by training in Hindustani classical music and the Bengal school of painting, augmented the fecund frequencies that refused to stay confined to a border but became interference (*-ference* in the sense of “carry over, ferry across”).⁵ Deeper investments in literature in later years, then, could not have come without the crossaffiliation—my affair of *ference*—revealed in joyriding philosophy, history, political and social theory, comparative aesthetics and

religion, cultural theory and criticism. I stood jauntily entranced. This book, then, comes with its own logic of manifestation ignited through an already embedded deposition and disposition, my across factor.

My transposition is built around what I have called the (in)fusion approach, a philosophy of seeing, a hermeneutic desire, that diffracts to interact. Reflecting on the (in)fusion approach, John W. P. Phillips succinctly argues that the sense of “*fusion* (melting, liquefying by heat, and joining by, or as if by, melting), the *infusion* (the pouring of liquid over any substance in order to extract its active qualities) and the Latin (*fundere, fusum*) which can be either to pour (the warm water over the herbal mixture) or to melt (the wax before sealing a letter)” create the operative and dynamic spaces that perhaps “allow us to sidestep the normal institutional barriers”; the (in)fusion approach, both as method and nonmethod, inspires us “to consider what it might mean for a scholar to be steeped in the minute intricacies of an idiom, patiently picking through its margins, and at the same time allowing this work to melt the boundaries of the idiom itself so that other idioms all of a sudden are effectively in play.”⁶ Staying “crossed,” rather acrossed, is what I would like to correspond with the “exteriority within phenomena” that diffractively brings continents together, builds knowledge houses whose relational windows, as Karen Barad argues, are perpetually open and inviting.⁷ It is the space outside that works within, as not in its exteriority but as “folded in,” enfolded, unfolded, refolded. But going across is not staying crossed in the perpetual whir and whirl: it develops an archive of thinking, a stratum of knowledge, creases and strategies of understanding without losing touch with the force of the across—Deleuze’s “new cartographer.”⁸ Being across breeds the pleasure of being “out of place,” a toss amid our “heretical geographies.”⁹

(In)fusion, then, can be considered an orientation, a kind of investigative spirit that respects knowledge regimes, the boundaries of tradition, the sacrality of paradigms, but also dares to infringe on them. The infringement is diffractive like an earthworm, as Karen Barad has illustrated resonantly: “Earthworms revel in . . . helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over—ingesting and excreting it, tunneling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it.”¹⁰ Tunneling through a concept and then transposing it through the gamut of culture and time is what (in)fusion does, much to its productive joy. It assumes a cross-epistemic and transcultural entanglement in a concept or an idea making it “behave” with a difference and some travelling mo-

mentum. (In)fusion has a deep tendency to go across, crisscross, find the crossed point of delicate intersections to enable an epistemological experience gain a vein of life. All my chapters in the book, thus, walk across thoughts, between ideas from a variety of cultures and traditions, making for an experience of literature that is diffractive, mostly, out of time, in the whirl of the “now”—the now that Barad argues “is not an infinitesimal slice but an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across space-time in its ongoing iterative repatterning.”¹¹ My (in)fusion-now is folded into “événement” and the now, in Deleuzian terms, becomes the “prehensions of prehensions,” where “echoes, reflections, traces, perspectives, thresholds and folds” prehend and operate as conditions of possibility.¹² However, (in)fusion, through its powers and strategies of melting and smelting, need not be misjudged as a debilitating carnivalesque. The zone of trans maps the effects of difference between communities of thought and paradigms of ideas without being oblivious of the difference, the specificities, the peculiarities that each thought through its own cultural parentage carries with it.

The trans-moment or trans-now is about enacting a communication—difficult and debatable—between apparently incompatible paradigms of thought and concepts. This conflict as communication is not easy to experience and execute because one has to be sure that difference comes through as “differencing,” made manifest through intra-activity, an entanglement which preexists our investigation into the forms and modes of difference. My emphatic point is that cultures of thought are intra-active, deeply meshed across different backgrounds, cultures of inheritance, and positionalities. (In)fusion-now is a way, a provocation, to look into the potency of such entanglement (a manifest demonstration of this critical spirit runs through chapter 3).

But (in)fusion-now generously concedes a kind of immanence whose workings might develop both deconstructive and diffractive potential. I revise my earlier entrenched position to link (in)fusion with interdisciplinarity, for I can see the immanence of this approach, its inventive and yet viscous and involved workings within and outside the discipline and in deference to the cardinal principles that disciplinary paradigms love to protect and have remained possessive about.¹³ It is not always mediatory, brokering disciplinary dialogues: rather, it is committed to a subtle decrusting of sedimented thinking through conviction of the deep, intra-active, and involved transmediatory existence of literature and concepts and theories by which we try to make sense of literature. This is the power of the across,

clearing spaces and promoting and acknowledging forms of appearing and appearances or emergences. It announces events as ruptures, which Elizabeth Grosz calls “nicks”: ruptures into our systems of thinking to figure out an issue and explore what possibilities a concept or an idea can be put to, inciting within limits a force of asystematicity.¹⁴ The untimely and the unaverage is what (in)fusion-now aspires for, an “open-ended cohesion, temporary modes of ordering, slowing, filtering.”¹⁵ (In)fusion-now creates frames that are its conditions of understanding and motors of the across.

Infusion-trans-now is the refusal to see our intellectual doing as simply “keeping up with literature,” as one of our “constantly shrinking fields,” and believing that “steady progress is being achieved simply because, as the field gets smaller, the objects left in it look larger.”¹⁶ Our readings of literature usually come with footnotes: sites carefully cited to provide the institutionalized performatives of knowledge and its address. If literature has gone across borders, we are obligated to account for such movements through a method or a rule and enshrine such moves within a tradition and pattern that should sacerdotalize an inheritance. Not that I am beligerently opposed to such institutional keys that unlock our readings of literature. I am not disrespectful either of the specificities that culture and tradition are highlighted with. But like Michel Serres, relishing a kind of nonanxiety of adversarial modes of knowledge formation (the hard as against the soft, as Serres argues in *Five Senses*) where frames, and hence borders, determine our sense of the world and world-meaning, I plunge into literature, most often without footnotes (endnotes, however, materialize to evince how my spirit of the across, staying footloose, has stayed afoot through the book!). Thinking literature saves itself from the “end of thought” by not merely avoiding footnotes but by not feeling their necessity. J. Hillis Miller and I thought across in ways that are varied and made allowance for literature to speak back to us; we dialogized on the literary, and eventually found ourselves on either side of the fence without forgetting that “something there is that does not love a wall.”¹⁷ We experienced the footnoted locality of our continent and again forgot what we were “walling in” and “walling out.” Experience, excursus, energy were our software of literature. Literature, I admit, exists without us.

We remember, with Serres, that a “cartload of bricks isn’t a house.”¹⁸ Working out a reading of literature is also about mapping one’s worldview, abilities toward world-making. Serres shows us how we are “as little sure of the one as of the multiple.”¹⁹ Somewhere, going across is also about believing in monadologies and letting them fall away through our ever

mounting investigations. The (in)fusion-trans-now thesis throws us into the space where a unitary knowledge of cultures and traditions of thought, the collectivity and indivisibility of knowing and the understanding of life and literature, are under question. There is the confidence and commitment to drop anchors across systems and orientations but not always with a rounded certitude in operations that would make the *across* a well-tested medium, a calculus to understand literature and literary thought. The now, as I have demonstrated in chapter 5, has both defined and undefined boundaries, something I have argued as the phenomenon of the “taking-place,” where the globality and locality of doing literature become a process that is viscous, “a lake under the mist,” in the words of Serres: “The sea, a white plain, background noise, the murmur of a crowd, time. I have no idea, or am only dimly aware, where its individual sites may be, I’ve no notion of its points, very little idea of its bearings. I have only the feeblest conception of its internal interactions, the lengthiness and entanglement of its connections and relations, only the vaguest idea of its environment. It invades the space or it fades out, takes a place, either gives it up or creates it, by its essentially unpredictable movement.”²⁰

I am happy to see the now as having Serres’s parasite: the noise, the perturbations, the disorder in a system of exchange.²¹ The now builds a turbulence that intercepts literature with an energy, new contracts, contacts, and topologies. Literature stays healthy through such violence. My reading of “Daffodils,” in chapter 5, of “Birches,” in chapter 1, of *Endgame* in chapter 7, and of “The Scholar Gipsy,” in chapter 9, are all in some ways a parasitic imbalance in exchanges, the imperfect balance sheet in the operation of the now but not as emergences of simple disorder but rigorous disorder. The parasitic now also has the character of Deleuze’s “series,” which is not simply the mechanism of resemblance and analogy but “multi-serial in nature,” an *agencement* (as the process of “laying out”) and a structure for connections and dislocations.²² (In)fusion-now is in the character of a judgment that is not overpowering but a force, a “non-organic vitality” that works across thought-traditions, becoming combative among a variety of forces and leading to a “new ensemble.”²³ It sponsors a growth of thinking and movement that produces a milieu (meaning an experience, middle, and medium, in the French sense of the word). It is across, without beginning or end, “but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills.”²⁴ The infusion-now is the *rumeur* (murmur) of assemblages, of affection across subjects and sources.²⁵ Literature builds its affective accumulation in making potent investments in the now.

What does this now map? It is multiplicitous and both strategic and imaginary, complex and curious. I am greatly tempted to see this mapping as akin to the “psycho-geographic” formations that the situationist theorist Guy Debord theorized from his walks across Paris. The thrust with Debord, as it is with my now, is about aspiring to hit detours, dare the de-standardization of connections, and aim configurations through seeming aimlessness—the *dérive*, a drift of a meaningful flâneur, an experimental momentum. The now-as-derive seeks to find communication in interruption, making dialogues possible across formally settled incompatibles. The now is naked but not without its own threads of chance, “redolent passageways, shocking landscapes, superimposing routes and spaces onto each other.” Now as “new cities” is our provocation to “*détournement* to monkey-wrench accepted behaviour, to create light, to *disalienate*.”²⁶ So I have tried to meet literature half way: a sort of gathering-up of thoughts, concepts, parameters from various ends of culture and tradition into a poetics of relationality.

Remapped Asia, both as the epistemic site I am writing from and as an atopolis, becomes the “being with” and is the continent that believes in the “taking-place” where light, no light, relight come together not in continuity (as it might appear) but works through contiguity. So my Asia (my *sahitya-darshana*, philosophy of literature) exists predominantly as an ensemble, as in-betweenness, a fractal, an otherwise than being. The doing of literature has its center as a relation, most often, an inoperative relation working through reticulated and articulated singularities. My Asia exceeds itself to form another Asia, an other Asia; awareness of Asia is also about an awareness of being “out of Asia,” being with non-Asia, being without my Asia-logos. I invest my relation with Asia and non-Asia in the *across*, which is not about taking Asia beyond the local into the arms of the global (the non-Asia, America, or Europe). Asia is out in the world, at large, has always been the world, has stayed world-wide (immanentism).²⁷ It is my *sahitya* in the book. Thinking literature begins in destroying literature, an experience of the impossible through excess, singularity, and eccentricity. My thinking across continents, then, is de-cartographized: geography becoming a vision, a topology, a thought in process. In across as desire, I have lost my home (*aAsia*) but have surely found a world, my *sahit* with continents, forms of a worlding, found my finitude without horizons. *Sahit* is my *across*, “a crossover in attributes of another origin,” that thought the book to life, conceived literature as *compatriot*.²⁸