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Keynote Address: New Directions in English  
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**Introduction**

When I think about the forces currently at work transforming English two stand out: globalization and digitalization. Globalization is of course one of the key factors in the transnationalizing of literary studies, a trend connected to our earlier interests in multiculturalism, postcolonial, and Diaspora studies which is only going to continue to accelerate. But the impact of globalization on English will no doubt be matched by the impact of digitalization. The transformation of the spaces we teach into e-classrooms and virtual locations, the digitalization of the texts we teach both in the library and through projects like Google Print (the attempt to scan and hyperlink everything that's ever been written), our increasing access online to scholarly journals, and the adapting of social networking technologies to literary study, all promise to bring dramatic changes to our discipline.

When we ask ourselves what "new directions" English is going to be taking we need to think about the question in both literary and disciplinary terms. What will "English" as a body of literature look like in 2020 or 2050, and how will the study of English be organized and carried out? As far as the body of literature we will be studying goes, one thing is for sure: it is going to have an increasingly transnational character. Already,

English is less and less a national literature and more and more a language in which people from disparate parts of the world write. The explosion of South Asian, African, and Caribbean literature in English, and the work of writers primarily located in the metropolitan west like Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, and Jhumpa Lahiri who write about the effects of colonialism, globalization, and cross-cultural experience in the Western metropole, are all contributing to the creation of a remarkably transnational body of English literature that is going to move more and more to the center in terms of publication, popularity, and significance. Looking back in 2050, the literature we call “English” is going to look a lot different than it does now, and the knowledge we will need to teach and write about it will challenge us all in new ways.

This change will be dramatic, but it is nothing new. We all know that English as a body of literature is not a fixed, static thing. The so-called “canon” continually changes because the criteria we use to determine canons is always changing. The shape of both our programs and our curriculum, and the choices we make about the texts we teach, are constantly being re-formed by both disciplinary and social forces. As Gerald Graff makes clear in Professing Literature, theoretical and methodological shifts – from philology to historicism to the New Criticism—during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had a profound impact on shaping and reshaping both the canon of texts taught in English departments and the way those departments were organized. That reshaping continued, as we all know, under the explosion of “theory” in the second half of the century—first with the structuralist and poststructuralist revolutions which called our attention to the role language plays in constituting and disseminating meaning, and later

under the influence of more broadly social, historical and political forms of criticism—feminist, New Historicist, African American, Postcolonial, Gay, Lesbian and Queer theory—which dramatically altered both the issues we study and the range of texts we teach and write about. This second revolution came from both inside and outside academia, of course, for feminist theory, African American criticism and theory, and queer theory would be unthinkable without the women’s movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the gay, lesbian, and queer liberation movements. Because the work we do isn’t narrowly focused on aesthetic criteria and issues but is driven by a broad set of research interests that are social, cultural, historical, and political in nature, it makes less and less sense to think of canons at all, at least as they have been traditionally defined.

What the theory revolution and the various social revolutions I have been discussing have in common is an interest in difference. Structuralism and poststructuralism—from Saussure and Levi-Strauss to Derrida—called our attention to how meaning and truth are systematically produced by linguistic systems based on difference. They taught us that meaning isn’t inherent or immanent in things but is the product of systems of signification that work by drawing distinctions between things. These critical systems were anti-foundationalist through and through, insisting, for example, that there is no such thing as “whiteness” apart from a discursive system that distinguishes it from “blackness,” that the words “tree” or “stop” mean nothing in and of themselves apart from the system of signification that gives them sense. Derrida’s critique of metaphysical idealism translated into a broadly applicable deconstruction of all forms of

essentialism. This critique got historicized by Foucault into a more social and political narrative (or “genealogy”) that stressed how ideologies and institutions shaped discourses into essentialized ways of talking about reality. Foucault’s social and historical approach to the discursive functioning of difference led, of course, to the development of the New Historicism, and it blended with the other emerging critical movements I mentioned a moment ago to create, by the mid-1980s, an interest in difference that dramatically expanded the narrowly linguistic and philosophical interest in difference we see in Saussure and Derrida. The new interest in difference which came out of the women’s movement, feminist theory, the Civil Rights movement and African American criticism, postcolonial theory, and gay, lesbian, and queer theory, historicized and politicized difference in ways deconstruction or Foucault’s theories of discourse and power could only glimpse.

All of these changes have contributed to the new directions English is taking, directions that are going to shape themselves in particular around our responses to globalization and digitalization. Globalization, as I mentioned earlier, is only the most recent of a number of developments that have fueled the transnationalizing of literary studies, and I want to turn now to a discussion of some of the key developments – and issues – connected to this change, before moving on in the last part of my talk to speak about digitalization.

Transnationalizing literary study obviously means complicating---and in some ways moving beyond---the nation as the main organizing unit for our teaching and research.

But it also means complicating and moving beyond the traditional locations we have used to anchor our work. As organizing units, nation and location are obviously linked. Although it would be a mistake to reduce nations to locations – since the idea of the nation involves a sense of cultural belonging that can transcend and even thrive without a specifically demarcated, bordered location— there is obviously an important sense in which organizing our work around national literatures meant organizing our work around discrete locations demarcated by nation-states. Until fairly recently “English” referred to literature produced within the borders of Britain or the United States. The transnationalizing of literary study is obviously about developing both historical and contemporary approaches to the study of literature in English that pay attention to how the production of literature and the issues it deals with unfold in complex ways that both predate and transcend the nation-state. Much work in this area has already been accomplished under the rubric of postcolonial criticism and theory. But this enterprise clearly involves dislocating literature from nations and relocating its production in spaces or regions that predate or transcend the nation.

For this reason there is a move in literary studies to reimagine the locations we study. We should keep in mind that location or place can be defined in two ways: as places we *study* (literature *in* America, culture *in* Africa), and as places we study *in* (the English department, the American Studies Program, the Center for Diaspora Studies, etc.). It is also crucial to note the reciprocal and constitutive relationship between locations and *the act* of locating---the locations we study in academia are, to a significant degree,

constructed *in the act of studying them*. They don't exist apart from the human act of measuring, delimiting, identifying, categorizing, and making boundaries and distinctions.

One particularly productive approach to thinking about location in this way is Rob Wilson's concept of "critical regionalism." Wilson argues that we imagine the places we study. He uses "the verb 'imagining'" in the sense of "articulating a *situated and contested social fantasy*" that "involves ongoing transformations in the language and space of identity by creating affiliated representations of power, location, and subject . . . expressing the will to achieve new suturings of (national) wholeness within 'the ideological imaginary' of a given culture" (236). A critical regionalism, for Wilson, analyzes the history and politics of how particular spaces get "regionalized" (how, and when, for example, the "Orient," "the Middle East," "America," or the "West Indies" came into being as cohesive areas for academic study), and it fosters a contemporary revision and reconstruction of regions or areas based on new political and cultural realities and new theories and methodologies in the general field of international studies in both the humanities and social sciences.

It seems to me that many of us interested in working out new directions in English have been developing something like Wilson's critical regionalism for some time now. In the U.S., for example, critical regionalism is connected to new work in American studies committed to relocating U.S. literature in a hemispheric context. The problem with traditional American literary studies was always its conflation of American and U.S. literatures, its refusal until fairly recently to transcend the nationalist paradigm for

American studies and relocate the study of American literature and culture in a hemispheric or transnational context, and to recognize the multiple and conflicting origins of literature in the U.S. Where the default narrative of American literature located its singular origins in the Puritan culture of New England, which began to flower in a fully self-conscious way during the so-called "American Renaissance," when Emerson, and later, Whitman, wrote about the necessity of grounding the nation's cultural and political identity in a national literature, border studies critics have insisted the study of U.S. literature and culture can best be revitalized by relocating it in a hemispheric context, by paying more attention to multiple locations that are *between* or which transgress conventional national borders—liminal margins or border zones in which individual and national identities migrate, merge, and hybridize. Wilson's kind of critical regionalism is at work—and will continue to direct—the increasingly transnational focus of American studies and border studies, and it dramatizes how the locations we study are the locations we imagine.

One model for this kind of critical practice I've found particularly helpful can be found in Paul Gilroy's book, [The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness](#). Gilroy's attention to the interconnected histories and locations of Britain, Africa, the West Indies, and the U.S. locates the emergence of American literature and culture in a transnational nexus that helpfully dislocates our traditional fixation on the English roots of American identity and ties them to the historical processes of globalization. Gilroy's work, however, needs to be supplemented by the work of Latin-American, Caribbean, and U.S. theorists in order to draw out all of its implications for the study of literature and culture in the

Americas, and so in my own work I connect it to Edouard Glissant's work on cultural zones in the Americas, and to the work of Gloria Anzaldua, Edmundo O'Gorman, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, Nestor Canclini, Jose David-Saldivar, and others.<sup>1</sup> All of this work can be usefully linked to Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone, for the Americas represent just the kind of spaces she has in mind, ones marked by colonization and improvisation.<sup>2</sup> Gilroy's black Atlantic, Glissant's cultural zones, and Pratt's contact zones provide useful models for the kind of critical regionalism Wilson endorses. They can help us transnationalize literary and cultural studies (historical and contemporary) while at the same time paying careful attention to local histories marked by the interaction of particular populations and cultural forms. They offer a way to rehistoricize and relocate U.S., Caribbean, Mexican, and Latin American literatures in a way consistent with disciplinary shifts away from narrow nationalist frameworks, opening up the way to deterritorializing literary and cultural studies, or at least to reterritorializing these practices in a way that pays attention to multidirectional flows of power and influence.

There are of course a number of challenges this kind of reterritorialization presents us with, whether it involves resituating the study of "American" literature in a hemispheric context, or whether it involves the larger project of approaching "English" as a transnational body of literature produced in disparate locations and embodying a dizzying array of histories, identities, and cultures linked to the complex histories of colonization and globalization. As English moves off in new, transnational directions under the influence of globalization studies we will have to develop answers to some

vexing questions.

One of these questions has to do with how we are going to balance our attention to the material and cultural aspects of globalization as they surface in the literature we study. This challenge is related *both* to the broadly theoretical question of whether or not globalization is a homogenizing force, and the more narrowly methodological question of whether we take a culturalist or a materialist approach in the work we do. There are compelling arguments made on both sides of these questions, but I will be insisting that it is a mistake to approach them in either-or terms. I do not believe we can really make a distinction anymore between pure and homogenized cultures, or between critical methodologies that are culturalist or materialist. I want to explain my position by reviewing the arguments other critics have made.

Many critics of globalization argue it is a dangerously homogenizing force, that it really amounts to the westernization of other cultures. I'm sure you're familiar with this argument so I'm not going to review it in much detail. It insists that economic and cultural globalization are a one-way street in which local, indigenous economies and cultures are purged of their traditional ways of life, beliefs, fashions, cuisines, and forms of entertainment by the introduction of western practices through economic globalization. This scenario urges we resist globalization in our work, and privilege texts that critique it, because it threatens to wipe out traditional, local, indigenous practices.

Among the most persuasive critics of this position are the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai

and the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah.<sup>3</sup> Appadurai points out that the word culture has traditionally referred to a “property of individuals and groups” deployed “to articulate the boundary of difference” (13) connected to the needs of nation-states and to the nationalist ideologies they require. He wants to turn our attention away from the static concept of “culture” to the more dynamic concept of “culturalism.” For Appadurai, culturalism is “the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics” (15). It is often based on identity politics and deployed to fashion diasporic identities imaginatively and to assert the rights of deterritorialized groups in nation-states. As such, culturalism represents an “instrumental conception of ethnicity,” whereas culture is grounded in a deceptively static, “primordial” myth of ethnicity or other traits in which a carefully constructed group identity has been “naturalized” into something substantive, inherent, primary, or originary (14).

Appadurai links culturalism to processes of identity formation influenced by the media and by the rise of mass consumer culture, arguing that individuals and groups in different cultures appropriate and transform globalized commodities in imaginatively different ways that resist homogenization. These processes, he insists, enable transnational subjects or members of diasporic public spheres to imagine or improvise new, postnational identities that resist the homogenizing forces of globalization.

Opportunities for mobility and self-fashioning are increasingly worked out in a social imaginary in which the kinds of symbols and imagery we usually associate with narrative and the performing arts engage the imagination in the complex re-formation of subjectivity. To the extent global culture is a function of this “mass-mediated imaginary,”

what Appadurai calls the “social work of the imagination” lies at the heart of culturalism, construed as the conscious construction of individual and communal identities that are always making and remaking themselves in response to new localities, social and political pressures, and transnational cultural discourses (31) in ways that work against homogenization. This process suggests that we need to complicate a simple preoccupation with how national literatures function in relation to historically homogenous cultures by examining how transnational literatures are instrumental in the formation of subjectivity in deterritorialized and diasporic contexts in ways that avoid homogenization.

Kwame Anthony Appiah shares Appadurai’s rejection of the idea that contemporary forms of globalization disrupt cultural authenticity and lead to homogenization because he insists that cultural authenticity is always a product of what he calls “contamination.” In his view, the traditional distinction between authenticity and contamination simply does not hold because cultural forms and practices often construed as “authentic” are in fact the product of contamination. “[T]rying to find some primordially authentic culture,” he writes, “can be like peeling an onion,” since, for example

The textiles most people think of as traditional West African cloths are known as java prints, and arrived with the Javanese batiks sold, and often milled by, the Dutch. The traditional garb of Herero women derives from the attire of nineteenth-century German missionaries, though it’s still unmistakably Herero, not least because the fabrics they use have a distinctly un-Lutheran range of

colors. And so with our *kente* cloth: the silk was always imported, traded by Europeans, produced in Asia. This tradition was once an innovation. Should we reject *it* for that reason as untraditional? How far back must one go? . . . Cultures are made of continuities *and* changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes . . . (107)

Appiah embraces what he calls “cosmopolitan contamination” (101) because he rejects as inaccurate in the first place the distinction between authenticity and contamination. All “authentic” cultures, he insists, are the products of contamination, so what critics of “cultural imperialism” see as the contemporary disruption of traditional cultures by the forces of globalization is in fact part of the long history of normal cultural development. “Cultural purity,” he insists, “is an oxymoron” (113). This kind of contamination, Appiah argues, is not a new thing. The

migrations that have contaminated the larger world were not all modern.

Alexander’s empire molded both the states and the sculpture of Egypt and North India; first the Mongols then the Mughals shaped great swaths of Asia; the Bantu migrations populated half the African continent. Islamic states stretch from Morocco to Indonesia; Christianity reached Africa, Europe, and Asia within a few centuries of the death of Jesus of Nazareth; Buddhism long ago migrated from India into much of the East and Southeast Asia. Jews and people whose ancestors came from many parts of China have long lived in vast diasporas. The traders of the Silk Road changed the style of elite dress in Italy; someone

brought Chinese pottery for burial in fifteenth-century Swahili graves. (112)

For all of these reasons Appiah insists that globalization, conceived as a long historical process, does not produce homogenization in any conventional sense of the term. Here Appiah's position echoes the stress in Appadurai on the idea that Western cultural forms and products are appropriated in myriad and imaginative ways by people in different places, so that while it might be accurate to think of the West as exporting homogenous cultural forms it is inaccurate to think of their reception by different cultures as homogenous. While globalization facilitates the proliferation of similar products around the world, Appiah argues those products have a localized reception and adaptation and therefore do not produce homogeneity.

I think Appadurai and Appiah are right that globalization cannot simply be reduced to Westernization or Americanization, and that the dynamics of reception and appropriation within globalization have a complexity that belies such simple labels. Our examination of cultural change under the pressures of globalization as reflected in the literature we study has to be complex enough to acknowledge how local cultures are transformed by the products and styles of the West *and* how those cultures appropriate Western materials in a way that transforms both those products and styles and the cultures from which they come. Moreover, as Appiah rightly insists, we need to let go of the romantic and erroneous notion that there are such things as pure, indigenous, timeless cultures uncontaminated by long and complex histories of cultural exchange and perpetual transformation. This process is certainly at work in the global production of English,

which is increasingly influenced by South Asian and Latin American writing, a Hispanic tradition grounded in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico, African American literary idioms, and any number of cultural traditions specific to formerly colonized and Diaspora communities in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere. The culture we call “English” is so thoroughly hybridized, so inexorably based on complex exchanges among various cultural traditions, that it is getting ever more difficult to identify a dominant Western discourse that is not being subordinated to, and shaped by, this accelerating mix of sources and discourses from outside Britain and the United States.

While it may make little sense, from this perspective, to worry that cultural forms produced under the pressures of globalization will simply replicate Western ones, we ought to pause a moment to consider the class differences that mark these cultural flows and transformations (something Appadurai and Appiah pay little attention to). For example, while Appadurai may be right that the appropriation of Western cultural forms can be a potentially liberating exercise of power, we need to recognize that this power is inherently uneven. Well-off, secular youth in Lahore, Kingston, Mumbai, or Nairobi may have the privilege of exercising this power through cultural consumption and appropriation, but the poor in such cities and rural populations often do not. The kind of transnational cultural hybridity Appadurai and Appiah write about, and that we can trace in the literary production of global English, is potentially liberating in a number of ways for plugged-in urban youth, but it may not have much to do with the lives of the urban and rural poor who are still caught in the stratifications of a global economy that leaves their lives relatively unchanged. Globalization, and the kind of cultural hybridity it may

foster, is much more readily available to elite postcolonial academics than it is to poor migrants working at menial jobs in the metropolitan West (a point dramatized in Kiran Desai's wonderful new novel, The Inheritance of Loss).

The positions critics like Appadurai and Appiah take are often criticized for taking a positive approach to the study of globalization. Masao Miyoshi in particular seeks to make a strong case *against* any academic work that seems complicit with globalization which, he insists, is mainly economic and decidedly unjust.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Miyoshi insists that the autonomy of faculty in the research university in general and the humanities in particular has been compromised by the kind of “academic capitalism” (39) that fuels globalization, and that changes we celebrate as progressive – a focus, for example, on “particularity” and “diversity” (40) – are in fact complicit with the needs of global capitalism. In Miyoshi's view, the ideal of “multiplicity and difference parallels – in fact, endorses – economic globalization” (40). Where others see a value in focusing on diversity and difference Miyoshi sees a debilitating strategy of division and fragmentation. “If the strategy of division and fragmentation is not contained and moderated with the idea of a totality,” he writes, “it may very well lose its initial purpose and end up paradoxically in universal marginalization” (42).

Miyoshi sketches out his position through a critique of the impact structuralist and poststructuralist theory have had on the humanities. Under their influence, “totalizing concepts” such as “humanity, civilization, history, and justice,” along with “subtotalities” like “region” and “nation” were rejected, and all “foundational ideas and concepts” came

to be understood as thoroughly “historical and cultural constructs” (42). Our poststructuralist focus on difference and multiculturalism, according to Miyoshi, has fractured and fragmented various oppressed populations in ways that have actually undermined political agency. Both multiculturalism and identity politics have what Miyoshi calls the “imprimatur” of the “philosophy of difference” I talked about earlier, and they have in his view contributed to a debilitating “multiplicity of perspectives, specializations and qualifications” that are “intensified by the rage for differentiation,” particularly in humanities departments (46).

Miyoshi’s narrative ought to give pause to all of us who are interested in directing our new work in English away from broad master narratives and totalizing systems and toward work on the discrete, the local, and the particular. But ultimately, it seems me his argument is misguided and reductive. He is certainly right that a preoccupation with difference has been the hallmark of critical and cultural theory since the late 1960’s, but it is only from the perspective of someone who wants to maintain an outmoded collectivist imperative for social change that this preoccupation would appear politically conservative. And of course to real political conservatives multiculturalism and identity politics (especially feminist, queer, and minority) appear central to the agenda of radical leftists both inside and outside the academy. Surely both of these positions (on the left and the right) fail to acknowledge the extent to which multiculturalism and identity politics have contributed, however awkwardly, to the improvement of social justice in the U.S. and elsewhere. While Miyoshi wants to dismiss the important lessons poststructuralism has taught us about the reductive impulses and political dangers of

totalizing systems and master narratives, it seems to me imperative we resist his dismissal of the local and the particular and his nostalgia for a manufactured essentialism no matter how attractive its political aims might be. It may be that attention to particular differences makes it more difficult to see the total picture, but the kind of totality or universality Miyoshi endorses more often than not reduces, obscures, ignores, or in fact rejects the legitimacy of local and particular differences when they threaten the constructed coherence of a totalizing master narrative. It may be better to run the risk of making a fetish of local differences than erasing them in the interests of a larger, totalized good.

Miyoshi's critique of the positions taken by critics like Appadurai and Appiah is endorsed and amplified by H.D. Harootunian, who attacks their culturalist orientation because it allegedly distracts from the real work of a materialist critique of globalization.<sup>5</sup> He blames this culturalism on the pervasive impact of postcolonial studies. In a discussion of the somewhat vexed relationship between postcolonial and Area Studies, he laments that "postcolonial studies has strangely converged with area studies in recuperating the privilege of culture and cultural values" (169) rather than paying attention to economic and material conditions, to "the role played by capitalism throughout the globe and to the relationship between the experience of everydayness and the relentless regime of the commodity form" (173). Because the implications of Said's *Orientalism* got taken up by literary studies rather than by Area Studies, postcolonial criticism, in Harootunian's view, was forced "to appeal to culturalism" (154) and the "textuality" of the "literary/semiotic disciplines" (155). For this reason, one effect of the

monopolization of colonial discourse by English studies and its gradual transformation into postcolonial theory is that the migration of colonial discourse to English studies meant that its emphasis would be textual, semiotic, and generic, whereas if area studies had confronted the challenge posed by the Saidian critique, there would have been greater concern for the social sciences and the role played by political economy, that is to say, materiality. (167)

The implicit debate between Appadurai and Appiah, on the one hand, and Miyoshi and Harootunian on the other, gets at some fundamental issues related to new directions in the transnationalizing of literary and cultural studies. The main issue here has to do with whether or not the transnational study of literature and culture under the sign of globalization ought to be culturalist or materialist in its orientation. As I've already indicated, I think this sets up something like a false distinction. Harootunian's emphasis on material conditions makes sense until it is used as a club to beat "culturalism" over the head, for no contemporary approach to economic flows of power under the forces of globalization can do without a clear understanding of how cultures and commodities are embedded within each other. Likewise, Appadurai and Appiah's approaches to identity and culture make sense as long as they're accompanied with the recognition that neither stand apart from dramatically uneven material and economic conditions. It seems to me that any transnational or global approach to literary and cultural studies has to find a way to link cultural and textual analysis to an analysis of material conditions and economic forces. Surely it is clear by now that culture and textuality are

embedded in economic and social relations, and that material economies are inextricably connected both to cultural forms and to structures of discourse and representation that are open to textual analyses. The new direction English takes will have to chart a route through the resolution of this complex debate.

There is a larger question, of course, in debates like these: do globalization studies and a westernized, academic approach to the transnational study of other literatures and cultures simply represent a form of colonization, the export of Western critical categories, terms, theories, and practices, all of which threaten to create a Western critical context for the local literatures we study in the newly emerging English? Has the discipline simply exhausted itself as a field of study in the same way that Western capitalist markets began to exhaust themselves before the export of Western commodities fueled a new, global economy? In this analogy United States and British critics, having used up their own literature and feeling guilty about its complicity with the various oppressive practices of patriarchy, slavery, imperialism, and colonization, have turned for new material to the literature of the other. The danger here is that in globalizing literary studies we may replicate the same oppressive structures and practices many critics associate with the homogenizing effects of cultural globalization, structures and practices that further the dominance of expansionist cultures at the expense of local ones. One key challenge we face as we take English in new directions is how to supplement the traditionally nationalist orientation of “English” with a transnational one without seeming to colonize the study of global literature within English departments. For as I have already indicated, we will not have gotten anywhere if we end up reconstructing English

in a way that seems to assert its dominance over transnational literary studies.

### **Conclusion: Coherence and Fragmentation**

If globalization has helped undo the Eurocentrism of literary studies in the West, this development has not been uncontroversial. Indeed, even some progressive critics have blamed the transnationalizing of literary study for the discipline's supposed fragmentation and loss of coherence. Writing in 2000, for example,<sup>6</sup> Edward Said blamed "economic and political globalization" for "the gradual emergence in the humanities of confused and fragmented paradigms of research, such as those available through the new fields of postcolonial, ethnic, and other particularistic or identity-based study," fields that reflect "the eclipse of the old authoritative, Eurocentric models and the new ascendancy of a globalized, postmodern consciousness from which . . . the gravity of history has been excised. (66)

Like Bill Readings in The University in Ruins, Said takes the "deterioration of the position of the humanities" in the university to be a direct result of the "catastrophic effects" of globalization (66). The end of Eurocentrism, in his view, has simply left us with a hodge-podge of critical approaches rooted in identity politics and shorn of a historical consciousness. In our rush to celebrate a "purely academic version of multiculturalism with which many people in the real world of ethnic division, conflict and chauvinism would find it difficult to identify," we miss paying attention to "sites of resistance to the terrible negative effects of globalization" (66). The worst of these effects for Said, beyond even the poverty and political divisions that attend globalization, is the "dominance of the

United States as the only superpower left" (66). As I've already indicated, this dominance can seem to carry over into the realm of academic politics, for those of us who have worried about the extent to which global studies simply represents the re-colonization of "Other" literatures by Western academics are, in fact, concerned that transnational literary studies is coming to be dominated by a single superpower. In this scenario, Eurocentrism is simply repackaged as globalization, and multiculturalism gives way to an inevitably leveling kind of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, to the extent that "English" as both a language and literature are privileged in discussions about globalization, it seems that the rich complexity of literature and cultural production under globalization is in danger of being subordinated to the powerful forces of this dominant discipline.

But are things really this bad? Is globalization itself simply the newest and most efficient agent of capitalist exploitation yet developed by the West, a process that relentlessly homogenizes and Westernizes the cultures it entangles in its net? Is the attention we pay in the academy to literatures and cultures formerly excluded by Eurocentrism corrupted by its association with a Western commitment to difference, diversity, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism that has already been cunningly co-opted inside the university by English departments and outside of it by capitalism? And must we, along with Said, think of postcolonial and transnational studies, gender studies, the study of "ethnic" literatures and other approaches that grow out of identity politics as hopelessly compromised and fragmenting?

I don't think so. The dangers I have reviewed are real, but I want to offer a more hopeful narrative than the one Said has offered. In the first place, there is nothing new about "fragmentation" in literary studies. It has a long history in literary studies and is integral to its development. Whether we consider the steady fragmentation in English of the so-called "canon" from British, to British and American texts, and, more recently, "global English," or, its transformation from texts authored by white men to texts authored by women and minority writers, or whether we consider the historical proliferation of critical approaches ranging from philology, historicism, the New Criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, the *New Historicism*, postcolonialism, eco-criticism, etc., we see a discipline that has been constantly fragmenting and then reforming itself. In literary studies, as in most other academic disciplines, "coherence" and "fragmentation" are codependent. Coherence comes as a benefit of fragmentation. It isn't an alternative to it.

We need to be careful not to set up a historical view of literary studies in which a monolithic and coherent Eurocentrism remained dominant until postmodern fragmentation set in, a fragmentation specifically linked to the debilitating effects of globalization. This historical narrative is much too simplistic, and it doesn't leave much room for the "new directions" we're interested in exploring for the next couple of days. The current shift in literary studies, which Said and a host of other contemporary critics across the ideological spectrum, characterize as a new kind of fragmentation, simply represents another instance in which one form of coherence gives way to another as the discipline continues to evolve. Earlier instances of this so-called fragmentation often occurred along narrow lines related primarily to methodology (philological, rhetorical,

formalist, historical, Structuralist, poststructuralist, etc.) whereas recent forms of fragmentation are related more to the influence of political and social movements (Marxism, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, postcolonial studies, African American and border studies, and now, globalization studies). However, the current shift — if that is what we are witnessing — from a postcolonial to a global perspective is quite consistent with the way the discipline of literary studies has developed over the whole course of the twentieth century. The transnationalizing of English is simply the latest instance of this pattern of development.

### **Digitalization<sup>7</sup>**

In want to turn my attention in the time I have left to another way in which literary study is relocating and even transnationalizing itself: through the shifting of our work to online, virtual locations where our access to each other, to the students we teach, to our colleagues, and to digital texts, is going to profoundly alter what we study, how we study and teach it, and even what we write about.

The impact of digitalization is beginning to be felt across multiple but converging platforms. Principal among them are classrooms, libraries, academic journals, online texts, and online research venues.

#### **Classrooms**

At Loyola most classrooms are now what we call “e-classrooms.” They all contain consoles that combine a computer, a broadband connection, a wireless connection, a

DVD player, and an overhead projector. This means that the English classroom is a multimedia space. But more significantly, it is also a networked space. The classroom is no longer a hermetically sealed place. It's connected to a world of information, resources, illustrations, video clips, dialogues, etc. The teaching of English is reshaping itself around the e-classroom, with the formats of lecture and discussion being supplemented by networked interaction. And to the extent the networked classroom is a portable place, it can travel with you wherever you go (I know, a blessing and a curse). As courses become networked they will operate cut across multiple formats—conventional websites to house course materials, blogs to post timely links and facilitate discussion, and social networking sites like Facebook that can be used to create course sites where students on Facebook can network (like we've done for this conference—or create pages for characters—or critics—in the books they're studying).

We haven't even begun to scratch the surface of social networking formats and their adaptability for scholarly use (Barack Obama's presidential campaign people have, that's for sure). Using the Facebook group page for this conference as a model we can begin to explore the possibilities of adapting social networking formats to academic conferences. There's no reason why people belonging to MLA divisions couldn't begin to hookup via social networking technology on the MLA website, or for that matter, why people giving papers and attending sessions couldn't subscribe to groups corresponding to the sessions they're interested in. Just add a "My Convention" tab to the MLA site toolbar and you're on the way. The same social networking technology

could be used to facilitate communication and exchange between people who subscribe to online academic journals.

These journals, of course, are rapidly moving online. Long established journals published in hardcopy are now available online through formats like Project Muse. But more radically, some journals are going completely virtual. One example is Postcolonial Texts. This journal is facilitated by the folks at the Public Knowledge Project at Simon Fraser University. They've developed open source software for the publication of peer-reviewed academic journals, which I'm sure is the wave of the future. The high acquisition costs libraries incur for major academic journals is astronomical, and in a not-for-profit business like literary studies it makes sense to shift publication online where costs will tumble and the ease of acquisition will rise. There is no reason why a university or a university press has to sponsor and support the high cost of producing journals in hardcopy when scholars can publish their own peer-reviewed and edited journals using the PKP open source software. They also distribute open source software for managing academic conferences. In fact, PKP is sponsoring an exciting conference in July of this year on the future of scholarly publishing. Take a look at the "Call for Papers" link.<sup>8</sup>

These developments are being matched by the transformation of libraries into electronic learning spaces that don't even store books, and by online projects that promise to eventually put what we now call "libraries" right into our laptops. The Gutenberg Project and Bartelby are two venerable examples, but the Google Print project promises to

revolutionize our electronic access to (hyperlinked, searchable) texts. And our research, already dramatically transformed by some pretty rough-hewn and sometimes unreliable online resources like Wikipedia, may be revolutionized once scholarly and peer reviewed wikis come online (see Wikipedia's Citizendium, Scholarpedia, and Google Scholar—the links to all of these projects can be found on my “Networked Public Culture” course blog, the URL for which is included in the footnotes to this address).

With all of these developments one wonders, of course, about the fate of the book. Books aren't going to go away. We're certainly going to keep teaching books, which means we'll be ordering them and our students will be reading them for years to come. But the way we access and read books is going to change, especially scholarly books. I-Tunes is of course the model here, and some people find it scary. On i-tunes you don't have to buy the whole album. You can pick the songs you want to download. When books go online, you may not have to buy the whole book. Perhaps you'll want to buy the Introduction and chapters 2 and 6 of Professor X's next book, or put together a course packet by buying and downloading chapters from a half-dozen critical studies of Shakespeare or Tony Morrison. The possibilities of networked publishing are exciting, and the challenges to traditional practices are vexing.<sup>9</sup>

All of this means more control for users. Networks used to be built, owned, and controlled by media conglomerates and were synonymous with single brands: ABC, NBC, CBS, then later, PBS, MTV, HBO and Showtime. All this has changed with the rise of networked culture. In the world of networked culture networks aren't built and

owned by mega corporations but are developed by tech savvy young people like those who started MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, networks that aren't commercial but social. And the network doesn't just consist of one of these sites but is made up of all of them. We put together our own networks on sites like Facebook and through the browser bookmarks we collect. When I look at the tabs running along the top of my browser I see "My Sites" which contains all of the sites I've created and those I subscribe to (from Blogspot to Netflix to Flickr and YouTube). I see a "News" tab, a "Shop" tab, an "Entertainment" tab, a "Travel" tab, a "Politics" tab, a "Blogs" tab, and so on. These tabs, collectively, constitute my network. It's a network I've constructed and control. It connects me to other users who share my interests and keeps me up-to-date and entertained in the ways I want. This network is thoroughly adaptable to academic work, especially to teaching. The possibilities for networking the work we do are exciting, and of course they are linked to the forms of transnationalization I spoke of earlier, for networked classes, books, journals, and conference have a global reach we'll need to manage, but certainly want to explore. What we do with all these possibilities is more up to you than it is to me, but it will be fun to watch.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective, Nestor Garcia Canclini, Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity, Edouard Glissant, Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, Ed., trans. J. Michael Dash, Edmundo O’Gorman, The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History, Gustavo Perez-Firmat, Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?, and Jose David Saldívar, The Dialectics of Our America.

<sup>2</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation

<sup>3</sup> See Arjun Appadurai’s Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers.

<sup>4</sup> See Masao Miyoshi, “Ivory Tower in Escrow” in Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies.

<sup>5</sup> See H.D. Harootunian, “Postcoloniality’s Unconscious/Area Studies’ Desire” in Learning Places.

<sup>6</sup> Said’s essay is in the January, 2000 special edition of PMLA called Globalizing Literary Studies. My own essay, “Beyond Discipline?,” is the first article in this volume, by the way.

<sup>7</sup> For resources and discussion of all the issues discussed in this section please see the blog for my “Networked Public Culture” course: <http://networkedpublic.blogspot.com/>

<sup>8</sup> The URL for the Public Knowledge Project is: <http://pkp.sfu.ca/>  
See the list of links entitled “Networked Books and Scholarship” on my course blog (above) for more projects connected to networked books and scholarship.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the future of the book in the age of networked publishing visit The Institute for the Future of the Book at: <http://www.futureofthebook.org/>