"Clash of Civilizations," Or:
A Plea for Satire

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These are not good times for satire. However prominent terms such as difference and conflict may have been in theorizations of interculturality, as well as in the wide field of postcolonial criticism, they are regularly and programmatically subjected to and contextualized within perspectives of pacification and mediation that are inimical to satire. This is a censoring move that is motivated by the historical experiences of the twentieth century, and thus entirely "comprehensible," but that entails its own dangers. This essay briefly lists some of those dangers and argues that the reality of aggression in intercultural interaction cannot be dealt with through acts of denial, but only through modes and mechanisms of communication that will release and transform such aggression in ways ultimately not destructive of the social or civilized bond that should exist even between those separated by profound difference and grave conflicts. It recognizes satire as one such mode.

The extensive body of literature, both creative and critical, that has thematized cultures in contact during the last decades has been characterized by two apparently diametrically opposed, but really complementary impulses:

(1) It has foregrounded dissent and conflict as not only natural, but also necessary and good. The proliferation of prefixes such as *multi-*, *dia-*, *pluri-*, and *poly-* in terms that designate productive and useful sociocultural processes and tendencies attests to this development; *multicultural*, *dialogic*, *polyvocal* are not just analytical, but evaluative terms.

(2) It has also largely been shaped by a set of "purely pacific" prejudices. For obvious reasons that have to do with the atrocities of twentieth-century history, we have wanted to see the negotiation of intra- and intercultural conflict as an essentially peaceful process – to the point that the term *conflict* will rarely occur without some term such as *negotia-*

tion or *mediation* in its vicinity. Even (or particularly) where the public arena has been seen in terms of the mutual displacement and annihilation of positions, as in American neopragmatism, such competitive belligerence has been regarded as not endangering the social bond, and thus as ultimately, but always only implicitly being held in a framework of comparative social peace.

Both positions and their interplay are in need of re-examination. It seems to me that through the generalized and hence, in a sense, always already abstract pacific axiom we have censored our perception of what has actually been going on in and between societies; the axiom has reduced our ability to deal competently with the complexities and with the simple reality of ongoing conflicts. But this reality will assert itself against the censoring, which has thus, paradoxically, through the inadequacy of the views it generates, supported the rise of simplistic perspectives, such as Huntington's dichotomous views of the relation between the West and the world of Islam. The inadequacy of the discussion, in other words, supports the development of militancy, in what amounts to a simple reversal of positions and valencies in an aporetic moment: Both pluralization and pacification will reach a critical/liminal/aporetic state in moments of intense conflict over central values (see below), and the easy solution to this problem will be to internalize the two underlying values – plurality and peacefulness – as "ours," and to relegate whatever appears as threatening to an outer realm of otherness. In a panic gesture, the borders between Us, the enlightened pluralists, and Them, the benighted/totalitarian fundamentalists, will, then, be drawn in quasi-manichaean ways.

Therefore, we need to take dissent and conflict seriously and to recognize that it is not always good, nor always peaceful. We need to do so because only then will we be able to look at and make use of *all* the modes of dealing with it that culture/civilization (civilized life) has placed at our disposal. Conflict will remain a prominent event in the social life of a group, if only because any position taken in it will generate dissent from itself; you can't say *A* without someone saying *not-A* or *not-quite-A*. All culture is internally fissured, multiple: in a very general sense, all culture is interculture. Also, conflict will remain in the interaction of cultures to a degree that we need to begin with a view of the intercultural as an arena in which *deadly* conflict is possible – not necessary, not inevitable, not automatically given, but possible.

I wish to take the adjective *deadly* literally: we need to acknowledge the worst-case deadliness as the horizon of our discussion. For there are instances in which cultural difference itself creates an inordinate amount of aggressiveness by being *as such* and in itself perceived as aggression. This is regularly, automatically, and necessarily the case where the Other violates values that are central to the "identity" of the Self, where salient cultural perspectives and practices are objectively irreconcilable – where the Other is so disgusting that we are mortally offended. Current examples from life in western Europe of practices that create such intense value conflict would be, in steeply descending order of virulence: female circumcision, *shechita*, or invasions of the "space bubble" which individuals need around themselves as a zone that must not be invaded by others. (It is a platitude in travel literature that such bubbles are of radically different sizes in different cultures.) A particularly virulent example from satirical literature would be Gulliver's last voyage, on which humanity itself becomes the narrator's disgusting Other, or Swift's mysogynist poems – both instances operating with denunciations of the human body as something so vile that it erases whatever potential for dignity the individual may otherwise be said to have. The satirist's gesture becomes one of canceling/killing the Other in a fit of mortal disgust and disappointment, and the gesture is so brutal that it elicits (and may very well be intended to elicit) a reciprocal violence of the reader against the satirist. Elliott sums the process up in ways that indicate what is at stake and why the discussion of satire is apposite here:

> Timon, Alceste, Gulliver – those satirist-railers par excellence – wield their extraordinary powers of language in almost demonic fashion. Assuming god-like prerogatives, they damn all men; and because they cannot thrust the world into outer darkness, they exile themselves: Timon to his cave and then his grave by the sea, Alceste to the desert, Gulliver to the stable. Their invective develops all the force of the primitive; we, the readers, feel the magic and show it by becoming obsessed with their incantatory denunciations. One result is that we partially misread [. . .] The most common misreading takes the form of a facile identification of the fictive railer [. . .] with the actual author [and, more importantly, one needs to add, with the implied author of the text]. The primitive satirists of their work are, in the total literary sense, satirized. Their creators, rejecting the irresponsibility of the primitive mode, assume the plenary responsibilities of art. (220-221)

The well-known figuration of *the satirist satirized* that we have here indicates that the centrality of values that creates such mortal offense is not

a pure given, but that it is a potential object of fierce dissent in the text. In the social and cultural realm, too, the construction of identities, particularly in our "identitarian" times, operates with largely arbitrary and frequently contested identity markers.[1] It is "identitarianism" itself that, simply by foregrounding the theme of identity and difference, supports the centralization of values, as well as their stereotypical ascription to self and other. In the process, it constantly and unavoidably generates aggression, and the more important the conflict – the more central to the world view and self-perception, the "reality" and "identity" of a person – the more violent, in the sense of aggression-generating, will the centralized values tend to be. That identitarianism has this potential for violence is certainly why towards the end of the 20th century it has again and again been coupled as intimately as possible with those gestures of pacification mentioned earlier: the *multi-*, *pluri-*, and *poly*-terms serve precisely this purpose, at the same time that they may surreptitiously support the commodification of difference, its integration into some hegemonial scheme that will present itself as always already given.[2] (It is at this point that pacification becomes oppressive, and thus may begin to generate further aggression.)

Pacification cannot, however, be complete in cases of great centrality, such as those mentioned a moment ago. Neither tolerance (in whichever interpretation of the term) nor integration into the larger interpretive whole of an integral cultural scheme will make female circumcision endurable to a person who adheres to an enlightenment-based view of personal dignity and inviolability. No amount of invocation of shared democratic values will make the post-9/11 treatment of prisoners in Guantànamo by the US administration palatable to such a person. And no degree of satirical detachment from Timon, Alceste, or Gulliver will completely defuse their fundamental disgust with the world, nor will any degree of assent with them be able to silence our suspicion that precisely that disgust is fundamentally illicit, a case of intolerable *superbia*. Wherever the Other becomes utterly disgusting by violating a central

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[1] Cf. Thomas Mann's *Königliche Hoheit*, where a couple of spoiled young aristocrats regard the wearing of brown shoes as "eine Schweinerei" that automatically excludes you from their society, or (in a sense) from full humanity. Or cf. the conflict between the Big-Endians and the Small-Endians in *Gulliver* I, 4 – though here contaminated with the question of political causes.

[2] Examples would be the widespread talk of the "contribution" that "other" cultural productions make to a scheme that is seen in terms of "self," such as *dissent* being always already funneled into *consent* under the auspices of *the American* in Bercovitch.

value in one's own sense of self and reality, aggression will remain viru-lent; everything else would be a betrayal of precisely that self. And even cynical assent to the disgusting practice, such as its acceptance as the way things are, preserves at least a part of that aggression, which, having been repressed in one context, may very well re-emerge elsewhere.

Which raises the question, of course, how at least *a degree of pacification* may be achieved even in such cases: how a central or centralized conflict may be articulated, and the aggression generated by it released, in ways that will not damage the social bond (too much). We need to take stock of the mechanisms cultures (our culture, similar ones, radically different ones) have developed to "socialize" or domesticate deadly conflict. To put it (melo)dramatically: the question is how killing may be avoided. The (or one) answer is: through symbolization, in which the act of kill-ing the disgusting Other is transposed from the physical to the symbolic plane. In this perspective, satire is a major domesticating or civilizing strategy,[3] and this the more so, the more it addresses radical ambiva-lences such as those that are held within the figuration of the satirist satirized. It is not for nothing that satire has traditionally been defined as serving purposes of community formation; and even if Griffin is right to point out the inadequacies of the view that "the satirist appeals to, and thereby confirms and assumes we share, some traditionally sanctioned values" (37), it is the monolithic image of a body of sacred traditions that is in need of modification, rather than the basic community forma-tion. It is true, also, that this function is complicated by the fact that the satirist, however defined, can take three basic postures vis-à-vis his ob-ject, his contemporary reality: (a) he may criticize whatever deviates from a norm that is presented as being generally accepted; (b) he may criticize what is generally accepted from the point of view of a norm located in the individual, but sharable by all right-thinking people; (c) he may criticize a system of values from a skeptical and wholly individual-istic (or even almost nihilistic) position. But even in the third instance,

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[3] The simple distinction between speaking and acting is here intended to contradict terrible simplifications of Austinian performativity, which equate the two in illicit ways, denying the functional border between them. (And also overlooking the simple fact that in Austin not all statements are performative. "I declare you husband and wife" makes two people husband and wife; "I condemn you to death" does not kill, it merely authorizes the executioner to do his job. The difference becomes visible in the temporal space for a reprieve, commutation, or pardon between judgment and execution, in the second instance. There is no such grace period in the former.)

the aim is to change public opinion and thus to re-constitute the community. Even here, satire is a socializing strategy.

Now, community can, at least for a time, be established by physical violence, and some critics of satire (and invective) find that aspect in satire itself, thereby associating it with killing. Thus, Elliott makes much of the ancient connection between magic and satire and suggests that "the magic attributed to various archaic satirists may inhere in part in the power of ridicule to effect psychic (and, via psychosomatic channels, physical) damage" (77). He adds a remark on Kenneth Burke, however, and unwittingly thereby undermines his own position: "In the terms of Kenneth Burke, ridicule is a kind of rhetoric; it prepares the way for action. Before the Jew could be made a scapegoat in Germany, he had first to be made ridiculous. Before Christ was crucified, he was mocked" (85). What Elliott's remark overlooks is the dominant trend in Burke to regard symbolization, and rhetoric in general, as verbal action that *takes the place of* or displaces physical action. This, at least, is the tenor of Burke's *Philosophy of Literary Form*. Recognizing the indisputable possible continuity between laughter and killing, Elliott has a tendency to overlook or minimize the equally possible discontinuity – that ridicule will release aggression in a comparatively innocuous act (laughter), rather than an exercise of physical power (killing).

In other words: we return within the satire discussion to the question that sent us into that discussion in the first place – if people will kill for their values, how can we prevent them from doing so? How can we prevent satire from becoming propaganda? The implication of the question is, of course, that they shouldn't kill for their values – which, circularly, presupposes an anterior judgment that the clash of values is not worth killing for. In the colonial/postcolonial context: it presupposes the anterior judgement that Kurtz, with his "Exterminate all the brutes," is terribly wrong. And to gesture toward that judgment is to admit the limits of the present discussion: it ceases at the point where we admit that there may be values that one may have to kill for, and that there may be situations in which it may become necessary to kill. At the same time, I would insist that such points and situations are the limits of civilization and that it is the task of civilization to defer them as long as possible.

At least in modern societies, such deferral is one of the functions of satire. As a literary genre, it is precisely defined by the gesture of civilizing/pacifying the conflict through the imposition of form, through its

association with convention, ritual, even play. The close and simple association between satire, invective, and killing is an archaism. The example of the 18th century in England – one of the truly great ages of satire – as discussed, for example, by Kropf and Nathan, shows how much the workings of satire and invective are subject to regulation by social compacts. It shows that aggression is there constantly being controlled, at the same time that it is being acted out. It ultimately supports the view that satire can fulfill the function of controlling the almost uncontrollable. The view is perhaps strongest in Kernan, who from an ethological perspective ultimately interprets the *form* of the work itself as a demonstration of *control* (61).

It is this aspect, the controlling of aggression, that distinguishes satire from propaganda, which is the art of creating, focusing, and releasing aggression. The borderline is tenuous, but so are other borders in cultures, such as those between belief and superstition, freedom and anarchy, order and suppression, etc., etc. That such borders are tenuous merely testifies to what we are all familiar with, though we need to forget it again and again in order to live our daily lives: that civilized life is a tightrope act. The mechanisms of civilization, and particularly those that articulate aggression, are ambivalent, easily perverted, easily turned around to produce the opposite of the intended effect. This is why they need institutional loci and institutional support: this is why they need a public that knows how to read them, as well as genres and modes (such as satire) that guide the reception of the individual utterance. I shall presently return to this point.

The appeal to form that we have, most prominently in Kernan, is, however, not enough to clarify the pacifying or socializing work of satire. This explanation points toward and legitimates certain ways of dealing with existing conflicts – or rather with conflicts that are regarded as existing. But conflicts, as has already been stressed, are not given, they are constructed. And another, possibly even more important function of satire is to construct manageable conflicts. This lies at the root of the discussion, within satire criticism and theory, whether the aggression of satire serves the propagation of norms, or whether the appeal to norms that we undoubtedly have in satire serves the venting of anger. There are good arguments for the view that, as Weiss puts it,

Satire nicht in der Absicht, durch Kritik zu bessern und zu fördern anthropologisch zu fundieren sei, sondern im menschlichen Aggressionstrieb. [. . .] Mit diesem Ansatz läßt sich wesentlich überzeugender begründen, warum

die Norm in den Satiren nur selten explizit dargestellt wird, weil sie nämlich nicht didaktisch eingebracht, sondern nur für die aggressive Tendenz bemüht wird, wenn die Satire die Abweichung vo[m] Normenverständnis einer Gesellschaft oder einer sozialen Schicht attackiert. (11-12)

Similarly, Bentley suggests that "all acts of reformatory violence, religious, moral, legal and literary, spring from 'sadistic' impulses and are but rationalized ways of justifying one's pursuit of the atavistic pleasure of inflicting pain" (389). Such views, however, invariably encounter the problem that they need to distinguish (to use Bentley's terms) satire from sadism, and invariably they have recourse to a type of sublimation of "primitive" impulses, thus re-introducing some type of primacy of norms over aggression. Having posited a foundational role for sadism, and a derivative one for satire, they reverse the relationship in an act of hierarchization. In fact, the answer to the question whether norm serves aggression, or vice versa, is, *both* – but the merit of views such as Bentley's and Weiss's is that they lead to the recognition of a double phase, or an internal dialectic, of the civilizing action of satire. If we regard society – as I think we should – as a playing field of multiple, amorphous, and initially ungovernable conflicts and aggressions, or as fundamentally "polymorphously aggressive," one of the first civilizing acts has to be to give structure to that field by isolating issues that can (just) be managed peacefully. Satire does that, thus focusing aggression, and having identified them – or, more properly, in the act of identifying them – it subjects them to the pacification of form.

Propaganda aims at structuring that field in such a way as to make war possible. It is not for nothing, though, that there is an extensive body of literature on the question of art and propaganda.[4] The two are mis-matched twins, and the link between language and physical action is bi-directional. But again, if we can substitute language for the act of killing, and if we can use language to incite people to kill one another, what determines the direction? I have already indicated what I think the answer is: cultural context and social climate, institutional loci and genres. Which raises the further question, of course, which kind of context and climate is most conducive to the pacification of aggression in satire, to the "controlling of the almost uncontrollable" that I have addressed.

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[4] If the question has recently not produced much useful discussion, this probably means we are overlooking something.

The question cannot really be addressed sensibly unless one recognizes that control is not everything. Implicit in those views of satire that stress its basis in aggression is a recognition that such aggression needs to be released, and furthermore, that the release of aggression is highly ambivalent, rather than simply destructive. There is a simpler view – so simple that it is rarely given words – that to attempt to stifle aggression is dangerous: the image of the pressure cooker without a safety valve comes to mind. But whatever the merits of such a view, there is also a recognition that in many cultural situations the aggressive playing-out of differences provides release from the oppressiveness of the established order. Whether one interprets such release in a moment of exceptional freedom from restraint psychoanalytically as therapeutic desublimation, or views it in a more general post-1968 perspective à la Marcuse and believes that "satiric style is corrosive of the [repressive] psychic patterns necessary to civilization as we know it" (Bentley 51),[5] such considerations take one in the direction of the carnival(esque). But it is perhaps in certain art works that the tension between aggression-as-destructiveness and aggression-as-creativity becomes most salient.

With regard to Ben Jonson, for example, Donaldson has argued most forcefully that aggression becomes both destructive and constructive, because aggression is a source of an energy that is radically ambivalent:

> I want to suggest that anger meant a great deal to Jonson, both morally and creatively, and that it is a major source of energy throughout much of his work: energy which Jonson himself seems to have regarded, however, with ambivalence, and which he was not always able fully to direct and control. (57-58)

The complications are obvious. This energy both fuels and threatens creativity; for on the uppermost pragmatic level of the work's rhetoric, the satirical aggression is not only directed toward the object of satire in such a way that it can be seen to serve a purpose, which subjects it to control and establishes a type of order, it also threatens the efficacy, the form of the satirical act itself. And on the level of plot and theme, Donaldson finds a similar tension in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, for example; there

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[5] Cf. his entire argument, 49ff.; cf. also Elliott on "the psychological dangers of repression, [. . . and] the therapeutic value to be found in the patterned release of aggressive impulses" (81).

anger is seen as a divisive [or socially/communicatively destructive] emotion, yet also oddly enough as a sociable [or socially/communicatively creative] one: many of the play's characters come to the fair precisely in order to enjoy the exhilaration of a public quarrel. The same paradox may be felt elsewhere in Jonson's comedies. (66)

Plot and theme, thus, replicate the ambivalence that also governs the pragmatics of the text in which they appear.

The question that arises here is whether we truly have a tension or dialectic, or whether there takes place a framing that (as Kernan seems to argue) subjects the anarchy within to a control from without. It seems the question is both easily answered and unanswerable. It is easily answered in so far as the work, in order to be communicatively effective, needs to integrate itself (tautologically) in a communicative / co-operative / creative schema. But against this rather simple framing works the internal anarchy of the text, with all "the exhilaration of a public quarrel," as a force that constantly prevents closure. The stronger the inside pressure, the greater the need for containment − and the stronger the containment, the greater (potentially) the pressure from the inside. An interesting (archaic) instance of extreme aggression held by a very strong ritualistic frame is *flyting* − according to Shipley's *Dictionary of World Literary Terms*

> (also fliting; mainly Scots, 16th c.). Poetical invective; esp. an exchange of abusive verse by two poets, as *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie*, 1508. Occurs as dispute in epics, e.g., that between Beowulf and Unferth. King James I urged "tumbling verse for flyting." Cf. Doggerel; Débat; Abuse.

If we follow the trails suggested by Shipley, *doggerel* gives us the criteria of rough form and risibility, *débat* appears as a highly literary counterpart, in a clearly fixed form, and *abuse* refers to the entire genre of abusive, aggressive poetry, in a functionalist/anthropological context. Gray stresses that this extreme form of satire does not only (once again) have "a normative function, which plays a part in ensuring the coherence of the social group" (23), but also, in its performance aspect (ibid), directly serves *that purpose and its opposite*, as "a form of ritualized hostility, which

can vary in tone, from a carnivalesque boisterousness to something which 'stops just short of lynching'" (25).[6]

On the one hand, the ritualized hostility takes us back to the carnivalesque. On the other, it raises a problem that reconnects this entire discussion with the question of interculturality: if ritual is culture-specific — which at first sight it would seem to be — , then its containing and controlling force would seem to be the weaker, the more internally fissured, the more multicultural a society would be.

I do not think this is the whole answer. In point of fact, it is possible to argue that ritual in its strong forms comes with such strong signals of "rituality" that, despite the obvious fact that the stranger may not understand the rules, and the form, or the message and the content of a given ritual, he will in no way be able to mistake it for anything else. It is the more weakly institutionalized "frames" that are in danger of being mistaken and misread, and this the more frequently and with the more devastating results, the more multicultural a society is. This at least seems to be the message of Linda Hutcheon's account and analysis of a Canadian cause célèbre from 1989/90: "the controversy that raged . . . around a museum exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto called 'Into the Heart of Africa'" (52). The context for her discussion is provided by her anterior work on irony as a foundational trope in Canadian discourses of identity, but her topic really is the satirical use of irony and the latitude for satire as a form of literary or quasi-literary indirection in a multicultural society. She places the basic possibility of an "oppositional use of irony" within the context of the "'transideological' nature of irony's politics: the fact that it can be used to legitimate — and to undermine — a wide variety of political positions" (53). But however "transideological" the play of irony may be in general, in its specific exercise it is also enmeshed with power, it may include and exclude, it establishes hierarchies and/or egalitarian relationships — in the last analysis, its use is a matter of taking positions in and employing the resources of potentially very different "discursive communities" (54f.): it is ideologically conditioned and placed in a web of ideological contingencies. This restriction comes to the forefront as one recognizes the dependence of irony on shared codes:

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[6] Cf. the discussion as "verbal duel", 27ff.; also the reference to the survival of flyting in plays like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Waiting for Godot* (43).

The markers embedded in the ironically intended utterance are of two kinds – those that are meant to tell perceivers to be alert for the presence of irony and, then, those that guide the particular interpretation of the irony – but both are transindividual or socially determined, and assumed to be shared by interpreters and encoding ironists (53).

And this restriction affected the success of the exhibition at the ROM – an exhibition culled from the African holdings of the museum, which attempted "to foreground both the material limitations of the collection and the politics of its coming into being in a Canadian cultural institution" (56):

> From the start, the focus of the exhibition . . . was not intended to be on Africa or even primarily on the African context of the artifacts exhibited – and this was to prove a problem. The catalogue of the show made this post-colonial and meta-museological interest even clearer. . . . What it did not foresee was that another transformation attended the opening of the show: from museum specimen to political symbol. (56f.)

Briefly put, African-Canadian constituencies were not interested in the "post-colonial and meta-museological" focus, but severely offended by what they perceived as just another colonialist representation of Africa. The inability and/or unwillingness of these audiences to contextualize imperialist material in the way the exhibition intended, and to share their critique – which was using the standard shock techniques of satire, such as confronting the visitor at the entrance with "a very large, wall-sized picture of a white soldier's sabre piercing an African's breast" (57) – undermined the intended effect of the exhibition, and it cost the curator her teaching position (60).

Hutcheon sees and discusses the complications, but her approach, which is heavily, though not simplistically, informed with the perspectives of political correctness, makes it impossible for her to go beyond the fact that they result from the multiplicity of discursive communities and therefore *just exist* in multicultural Canada at that point in time. She refuses to tackle the thorny job of discussing the justification, the merit of differing reactions – within her perspective they are all equally meritorious because they exist. One of the reasons for this failure is that she does not engage the question of the institutional frame within which members of such communities encounter the problem and what demands the institution may legitimately make of them. Behind this perspective undoubtedly stands the standard 1990s definition of the mu-

seum as a place of communal *self*-representation – a definition that in a multicultural society, because of the clash of differences within it, can only lead to insipid exhibitions that sedulously avoid all potentially controversial gestures, and/or to the creation of mini-museums that cater to one, and only one constituency.

What Hutcheon does judge, however, is irony, and with it (implicitly) satire:

> A trope that depends as much as does irony on common cultural references and common community values is an endangered species in our world today – and perhaps appropriately so. [. . .] For all the homogenization that capitalism and mass culture are said to have induced in our postmodern world, differences are perhaps even more visible than ever . . . and even more painful than ever. (61)

The (multi)cultural situation in Canada in 1989/90, then, becomes such that irony, at least in the service of satire, becomes impossible, because it may be mistaken, because it may offend cultural groups. There is an undercurrent to her analysis that suggests that Hutcheon is not entirely comfortable with the development, which to me seems to be characteristic of the entire end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. But she does not take a stand against it, which is to say that she accepts the need to level public displays and public discussions down to the simplest reception and the lowest common denominator. From the perspective on satire that I have tried to advocate here, this is a dangerous move.

The only way out of the quandary would be to rely on the anthropological potential of ritual, as briefly alluded to above: To re-establish satire as a social practice by strengthening institutional loci in which it is permitted to play itself out. The socializing function of satire is best performed in a climate that provides the greatest possible latitude of expression, of engagement with life, within a very firm "pacific" or non-violent frame – something like the "pact" that, according to critics like Kropf and Nathan, governed satire in 18th century Britain. The socializing function does need a pre-existent social frame, or a public, but it also needs space in which to do its work. Hutcheon, however, shows that this space is dependent on a climate of opinion that is diametrically opposed to what we currently have. Under the aegis of political correctness, even quotation of what one wishes to analyze becomes potentially offensive. Furthermore, we have a strong censoring not just of "hate

speech," narrowly defined (which would fall under the heading of propaganda), but of any expression not just of hate, but also of dislike, of disapproval. Any utterance that can be termed "anti-X" is instantly tinged with suspicions of violence and evil. Against this tendency, one may very well be tempted to ask, "What is wrong, *per se*, with anti-American, anti-German, anti-Swiss utterances?" There may be very valid reasons to condemn, in no uncertain terms, the mental, ideological, political, economic, etc. constitution of a people at a specific point in time, and that "point" may have considerable temporal extension.

To stifle such condemnation is to stifle impulses for positive change. Also, the censoring of such criticism is based on a touching, but totally mistaken belief that if we change people's language – through the exercise of social force! – , we change their thinking. What we actually do, is create hypocrisy. A comparatively innocuous instance is the far-reaching prohibition on negative evaluation in written testimonials (at least in Switzerland and Germany), the result of which is well-known: the development of elaborate codes that hide the negative opinion in an ostensibly positive utterance. Another instance that is historically so burdened that it can only be explored with the greatest caution is the exploitation of the Holocaust as a means to silence criticism of individual or collective acts by Jews; but it seems obvious to me that that this silencing has, for example, been at work in the Near East conflict, and the world's dealing with it, for decades.

The reference to the Holocaust is necessary to point toward one of the major historical reasons why the censoring has occurred after the middle of the 20th century. The history of anti-Semitism not only exhibits shocking instances of propaganda, and of satire becoming propaganda (of words being used not for the symbolization of aggression, but for its release), it also shows that there occur thematic transferences and translations, that one disgust with the Other may be articulated as another one, and that a hermeneutics of suspicion is amply justified. And yet, the censoring itself has entailed severe risks. It has ultimately been counterproductive, not only in terms of the creation of hypocrisy that has already been mentioned, but also through a cheapening of precisely that respect for the Other that was one of its motivating values. The call for respect has pushed for the systematic avoidance of critical statements, and it has thus become wholesale, undifferentiated. "Respect" has become an empty term precisely because everything has been touted as worthy of the same respect. Where everything is respected, difference

vanishes, because differentiation vanishes, and nothing is truly respected. The inflation of the term *celebration* in academic and semi-academic discourse belongs in the same context.

One can recognize the historical pressures that have led to the censoring, and still deplore it. One can even recognize that satire and invective may lead to physical action – that they may become propaganda – without overlooking the fact that satire is also (and in civilized societies *primarily*) dedicated to managing the unmanageable in society and in interaction among societies/cultures. If censorship makes satire impossible, as it is currently tending to do, it will destroy or at least endanger a cultural institution dedicated to the regulated/controlled working-through of conflicts that may otherwise endanger the very fabric of society. With this function, with this capability satire is very close to the emergence of the social from all-out conflict, and for this very reason it plays an important role in the formation of a functioning arena for public discussion. It is a form of that mediation that Roger Sell has been discussing and propagating in his struggle against what he recognizes as simplistically conflictual views of culture and/as interculture. Satire is an extreme form of mediation, a tenuous form of mediation, but a form of mediation.

Like public discussion, satire is therefore usually characterized by open-ended dynamism; to look in it for "closure," that favorite of current theorizations of narrative-as-sense-making, makes very little sense, or none at all.

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