# Global Origins of the Modern Self, from Montaigne to Suzuki

AVRAM ALPERT

# Global Origins of the Modern Self, from Montaigne to Suzuki

AVRAM ALPERT

SUNY PRESS

Cover: Clarissa Tossin, *Unmapping the World*, 2011 (detail). Ink on tracing paper, 33 in. × 46 in. Photograph by Hai Zhang.

Published by State University of New York Press, Albany



Printed in the United States of America



For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Alpert, Avram, 1984– author.
Title: Global origins of the modern self, from Montaigne to Suzuki / Avram Alpert.
Description: Albany : State University of New York, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018021838 | ISBN 9781438473857 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781438473864 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Self (Philosophy)—History.
Classification: LCC BD438.5 .A47 2019 | DDC 126.09—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018021838

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents


Preface ix

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1

1 Montaigne and the Other History of Modernity 28

2 Foundations of Universalist Global Thought: Rousseau and Kant 61

3 Aesthetic Visions of the Global Self: Schiller and Senghor 97

4 Dialectics and Its Discontents: Hegel, Marx, Fanon 135

5 Radical Pluralism I: Emerson 189

6 Radical Pluralism II: Du Bois 221

7 Emptying the Global Self: Suzuki 249

Coda: Being-Toward-Bequeathment 291

Notes 295

Works Cited 385

Index 415

# Preface

This book began as an analysis of the work of D. T. Suzuki and the impact he had on global culture. Suzuki, though rarely studied today, was "the man who brought Zen to the West." Through his English-language writings and lectures, which were quickly translated into French, German, Spanish, and other languages, he would influence a bewildering range of figures, including Simone Weil, Andy Warhol, Richard Wright, bell hooks, John Cage, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Severo Sarduy, Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt, Allen Kaprow, Allen Ginsberg, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Martin Heidegger, Carl Jung, Karl Jaspers, William Empson, Northrop Frye, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and even in his day, Suzuki was criticized for "Westernizing" Zen. Buddhist studies scholars felt almost like Suzuki had put them in a prison of "Zen" simplicity, where everything was about freedom from anxiety, emptiness, the loss of ego, spontaneity, and other themes commonly associated with Zen today. Those who actually went to Japan or China or Southeast Asia quickly found, however, that Zen was as complex, corrupt, historical, and anxiety-filled as any other form of life. Suzuki had lied, they claimed, and the torrents of critique began to rain down.

My first thought was simply to reread Suzuki himself, understanding that although he had reinvented Zen, his reinvention was still meaningful and deserved consideration (as much as any other modernization of religion, such as those by Martin Buber or Paul Tillich). Moreover, certainly there was something to say about figures like Cage, Foucault, and Paz and how they should be understood in light of this critical reception of Suzuki. But I quickly realized that the excessive (if correct) critiques of Buddhist studies scholars were not, in fact, the problem. Because the more I read of Suzuki's work, the more I realized he was in dialogue with figures like Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and Emerson, and that if I was to understand Suzuki, I would have to understand these thinkers as well.

And this presented a new challenge. For just as Suzuki was read as a "Westernizer," *so were they*. Of course that seems obvious—they were Western. And yet their works are filled with references to peoples and philosophical systems the world over. Montaigne, Rousseau, Kant, and Emerson read as much about non-European cultures as Suzuki did about European cultures. Why is he viewed as a "Westernizer," while they are viewed as global thinkers? What if we were to change the frame in which we read both Suzuki and the Euro-American tradition, and consider their works from the point of view of how they engaged the globe? Might that also affect how we read figures like Du Bois and Fanon—no longer as outside critics of the European tradition, but rather as entangled in the same struggle for global thought? These are the questions that animate this study.

My claim is that the question of the globe—that is, the question of what kinds of selves and institutions we should form to confront our global connectedness—is as central to modernity as the discourses of rationality, autonomy, or aesthetics. In fact, as I show in the chapters that follow, the question of the globe helps to *constitute* these other discourses. *That* this happened is undeniable—it's right there in the texts. Its meaning, however, is disputable. The argument of this book is not that we should discard Europe because of its impoverished understanding of others, nor should we brush European thinkers' mistakes aside as if they were mere historical blunders. (Early pluralist figures like Montaigne and Herder haunt our ability to historicize away the racism of the canon.) Rather, we should take the problem of the globe seriously and understand how the attempt to think it was dealt with by different thinkers at different times and different places.

To rethink Suzuki's work, then, I had to go back through many writers before him. As I worked back to Kant, I realized he was incomprehensible without Rousseau, and Rousseau in turn without Montaigne, and this whole history without critics such as Fanon, Du Bois, and bell hooks—all of whom, significantly, worked in the form of the essay. From Montaigne to Emerson to Suzuki to hooks, I am tracing a style—essaying the globe—that is neither philosophy nor literature, but rather a tentative thinking through of ideas about how to inhabit this planet that remains reflective about how those ideas are made in time, place, and language. This book is the story of how different writers at different times and places attempted this tenuous and difficult practice. In it, I argue for some of their solutions and against others. To do this, I develop an ethical vocabulary around unbearability,

identity, globality, and the need for a more radical pluralism. Suzuki is no longer the focus of the book, but his vision of a subject who undoes her ego so that she may experience the totality of global being will, I hope, find its place in a history of global thought.

# Acknowledgments

This book first developed during my undergraduate education more than a decade ago. Since that time I have accrued debts both intellectual and personal, which are far more extensive than this brief acknowledgment can fairly accomplish. As an undergraduate, Étienne Balibar, Rosalyn Deutsche, Bruce Robbins, and David Scott provided me with my first lessons in philosophical, literary, and cultural criticism. I frequently returned to their words and works throughout my writing. I owe special thanks to Bruce for keeping up a dialogue with me about this work over many years.

At McGill University, where I was for a year by the generosity of the Sauvé Foundation, Cora Dean, Ken Dean, and Tom LaMarre showed remarkable generosity as they disabused me of my ahistorical approach to Buddhism and introduced to me the world of critical Buddhist studies.

The Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum, run by Ron Clark, provided me with an ongoing intellectual home outside the university. The friendships and working relationships forged during and after my time there—too many to name—have been perhaps the single most important aspect of both my professional and personal life for the past decade.

During my time in Philadelphia, Gabriel Rockhill and Alexi Kukuljevic invited me to join their recently founded "Machete Group," which provided opportunities for public encounters with my work that were invaluable. Our conversations over the years also fundamentally shaped many of my concerns here, and Gabriel has remained one of my most constant intellectual interlocutors.

In my graduate years at Penn, the Program in Comparative Literature provided an ideal intellectual home. The Benjamin Franklin and Penfield fellowships gave me time to think and read and enabled me to visit the D. T. Suzuki archives in Japan. I thank especially Nancy Bentley, Charles Bernstein, Warren Breckman, JoAnne Dubil, Amy Kaplan, Kevin Platt, and

Jean-Michel Rabaté. Branka Arsić and Don Pease also gave me much needed advice from afar. Jean-Michel was an ideal advisor—supportive, incisive, engaging—and has remained a close and exacting reader of my works.

My friends and colleagues in and around Philadelphia, who joined me in any number of both academic and extracurricular activities, kept me both sane and excited for this work. I owe special thanks to Tal Corem, Nadia Ellis, Mashinka Firunts, Kristen Gjesdal, Lewis Gordon, Jane Gordon, Cetin Gurer, Nick Keys, Grace Lavery, Astrid Lorange, Danny Marcus, Laura McMahon, Jessica Rosenberg, Danny Snelson, Daniela Tanner, Yannik Thiem, and Leif Weatherby. Laura Levitt also went out of her way to offer advice and help guide this book toward publication. My "performative" work as the collective Research Service with Danny and Mashinka has been a constant source of joy and inspiration, as has their friendship.

This book would not have taken the form it did without the support of an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University. I thank Henry Turner and Colin Jager for their excitement about my work and for bringing me to Rutgers. Many thanks are also due to Billy Galperin for his tireless support and engagement as director of the Center, and for our many fascinating impromptu conversations as office neighbors. David Kurnick and Rebecca Walkowitz, as directors of the Center seminar on "Totality," also provided invaluable feedback and conversations as I wrote. My thanks also to Jeff Lawrence, who read and commented on several portions of this manuscript.

As always, my para-institutional engagements remain central to my thinking and expression. It was a great privilege to organize the "Dictionary of the Possible" discussions with Sreshta Rit Premnath at the New School for the past two years. Many of the ideas in this book were tested there. Special thanks to our regular participants: Eric Anglès, Lindsay Benedict, Brian Block, Danilo Correale, Shadi Harouni, Margarita Sanchez, Edward Schexnayder, Adam Spanos, Keith Tilford, and Mimi Winick. Adam and Eric also kindly and critically commented on portions of the manuscript.

Over the years I have had the great fortune to present aspects of this work to engaged and provocative audiences at the ACLA, C19, and Caribbean Philosophical Association conferences and at Berkeley, Columbia, Humboldt, the Jan van Eyck Academie, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Rutgers, UCLA, the University of Florida, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Toronto. I owe a debt to all who came, listened, and engaged.

This book would not have taken the shape it did had it not been for the support of Christopher Ahn at SUNY Press, who secured for me

two wonderfully helpful anonymous readers' reports. Chelsea Miller, Diane Ganeles, Kate Seburyamo, and the rest of the staff also helped greatly with all the details of publication. The final writing of the book in response to those reports took place at Princeton, where a grant from the humanities research fund allowed me to hire Anna Leader, whose work and diligence as a research assistant was unparalleled, and Michael Hu, who carefully edited the final manuscript. As the project neared completion, an outpouring of scholarly generosity from experts on the figures I write about here improved the manuscript immeasurably. I cannot offer enough thanks to Jeremy Adelman, Bachir Diagne, Richard Jaffe, Michael Monahan, Inés Valdez, and Johannes Voelz. Eric Cheyfitz and Lawrence Buell were also kind enough to offer some brief reflections. The errors that remain are of course my own.

A book that attempts to span as much time and space as this one is only possible because of a larger community of scholars I have never met—many of whom can be found throughout the footnotes—who have done penetrating work in their respective archives. I imagine that some specialists will find my claims too broad or at times unconvincing, and it would be a great honor if they took the time to correct me. But I hope that they will also consider my provocation that the place of the globe and the span of the centuries change how we read canonical works.

My family first introduced me to the rigors and demands of intellectual life and showed me the many ways of thought and action that could contribute to this world. They have been my most tireless advocates, kindest supporters, and, when necessary, my gentlest critics. Without them, none of this would have been possible. Special thanks are due to my mother, Rebecca Alpert, who showed me how to do this work and who, in spite of the endless reading of her own intellectual labors, somehow found time to read, comment on, and edit the entire manuscript.

And finally, to my partner, Anthea Behm, who makes the past bearable, the present a joy, and the future a blessing.

An earlier version of the section on Foucault in the introduction first appeared in "Sounding Conscience: *Walden*'s Global Bottoms," *J19: The Journal of 19th Century Americanists* 4, no. 1 (2016): 41–63. An earlier version of the section on Rousseau first appeared in " 'Melancholy Wildness': The Failure of Cross-Cultural Engagement in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and Brown's *Edgar Huntly*," *Early American Literature* 49, no. 1 (2014): 121–47. An earlier version of the section on Hegel appeared in *Intersubjectivity Volume 2*, ed. Katherine Rochester and Lou Cantor (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018).

# Introduction

This discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration. I don't know if I can guarantee that some other such discovery will not be made in the future, so many personages greater than ourselves having been mistaken about this one. I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but clasp only wind.

—Michel de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals" (1578)

This right, to present oneself for society, belongs to all human beings by virtue of the right of possession in common of the earth's surface, on which, as a sphere, they cannot disperse infinitely but must finally put up with being near one another.

—Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795)

The civility of no race can be perfect whilst another race is degraded. It is a doctrine alike of the oldest, and of the newest philosophy, that man is one, and that you cannot injure any member, without a sympathetic injury to all the members.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Address on Emancipation in the West Indies" (1844)

The modern world must . . . remember that in this age, when the ends of the world are being brought so near together, the millions of black men in Africa, America and the islands of the sea, not to speak of the brown and yellow myriads elsewhere, are bound to have great influence upon the world in the future . . . If . . . the black world is to be exploited and ravished and degraded, the results must be deplorable, if not fatal, not simply to them but to the high ideals of justice, freedom, and culture.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, "To the Nations of the World" (1900)

> Human dignity enters with knowledge, the whole world changes for the enlightened man and he becomes more effective. When one is enlightened, he does not stand out from the rest of the world, but embraces it . . . The very moment of enlightenment experience takes in the whole world and is totality.

—D. T. Suzuki, Lecture at Columbia University (1952)

> The Negro-African . . . does not observe that he thinks; he feels that he feels, he feels his *existence*, he feels himself. Because he feels himself, he feels the Other; and because he feels the Other, he goes towards the Other, through the rhythm of the Other to know-him-in-being-born-with-him [*con-naître*] and the world.

—Léopold Senghor, "The Negro-African Aesthetic" (1956)

Our existential condition is a global one.[1] To reflect on the self is to reflect on the world. To be alive today is to be connected to processes across the globe that remain always beyond one's control. As the sampling of quotes above shows, this relation of self and world has a long history in modern thought from around the world. Whether from France or Brazil, Germany or Japan, Senegal or the United States, those who have asked what it means to be human have placed at the center of their reflections how humans relate to each other across time and space. The resulting questions are not easy to answer: What does it mean to have a self if that self is so diffused to all the corners of the globe? How do the histories of power and domination unevenly shape the histories of global self-making? What kinds of concepts would we need in order to be aware of these differences while simultaneously appreciative of our extensive connections? The following pages demonstrate again and again that these types of questions are inseparable from modern self-making.

And yet the claim that the modern self is a global one might sound strange to some readers. We are accustomed to thinking of who we are in modernity as either intensely personal—as in the Cartesian self, founded precisely by turning away from the world—or deeply cultural—as in the anthropological understanding epitomized in Marx's expression "social being determines consciousness." The questions this volume poses in response are: What if the Cartesian moment of turning in is not the founding moment

of modernity, but the evasion of its global demands? And what if our "social being" is mediated not just by our nation or culture, but also by our global connections? The questions are raised not so much against these other formulations, but rather as part of an attempt to tell other parts of the story of who we (fragmented, uneven, but global nevertheless) are. There of course would be many histories of such global selves, many positions within this global frame that are denied access to it, many denials of the very idea of having a "self" in the first place. But my claim here is that such questions are part of the general problem that confronts us in the modern world: How are we to relate who we are to individuals across a finite planet, whose existence and meaning are connected to ours, whether viscerally or not?

I have learned how to tell this history in part through my reading of two canonical histories of the self that take as their geographic orientation the history of Europe and the invented tradition that links Europe to the Greek and Roman past: Michel Foucault's lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981–82); and Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989). In the pages to follow, I engage more closely with Foucault than with Taylor and disagree with both of them. But from each I have taken the central idea that to tell a history of the self is to tell a cultural, philosophical, and political history; that is to say, that to speak of who we are is to speak, as much as possible, of the totality of our condition. Moreover, I have learned to think of our ideas of who we are as having histories constituted in part by our cultural and philosophical inheritance. What I have denied are simply the ideas that our most important modern inheritance has to do with Greek and Roman sources and that the most significant context of modern Europe had to do with changes in the scientific worldview.[2] Rather, following globalist and postcolonial[3] scholarship, I have tried to show how the making of the modern self was profoundly framed by global encounters both violent and peaceful, and that taking this into view can change how we understood who we are, what constitutes our condition, and what liberatory practices may entail. This story, then, is not about our relation to the philosophical past or how the mathematization of nature changed our role in the world. Rather, I speak of how the modern self was made by uneven, violent, overlapping, hopeless, hopeful, loving, confusing, dominating, liberating, skeptical, mystical, universalizing, pluralizing, and revolutionary crossings of people and places across space and time.

Readers more aligned with these varieties of global and postcolonial theory might find this claim rather banal. Have we not known since at least the opening pages of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that Europe

made itself "by setting itself off against the Orient [and other Others] as a sort of surrogate and even underground self"?[4] Indeed, at the heart of postcolonial theory has been the claim—again in Said's vocabulary, borrowed from Raymond Williams—that the modern world and those in it were "*constituted*" by colonial encounters.[5] To be sure, there is a vast amount of literature on how modern ideas of selfhood were constituted globally, and I am indebted to it here.[6] But, for reasons that become increasingly apparent in the pages to follow, I think there remain significant gaps in our understanding of this global constitution. There simply does not exist, for example, a narrative that highlights the historical linkages that would bind together the six seemingly disparate thinkers quoted in my epigraphs, as I do here. The extent and specificity of how ideas about global life constituted the history of Euro-American thought still require further exploration, and so do the complex ways in which thinkers from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere were part of this same global conversation. In calling the object of this study the "modern self," I follow recent critics like Gary Wilder and Shu-mei Shih, who register this fact of a shared—if violently different—history of the modern world.[7]

This book thus speaks to both the traditional and the postcolonial versions of intellectual history. It also works to show both of these traditions why they should engage seriously with Buddhist thinkers. To do so, I have demonstrated how some of the canonical Euro-American thinkers of the modern self—such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. W. F. Hegel, and Ralph Waldo Emerson—formed their major ideas in the crucible of international relations. In *re*constituting this global history, I thus continue to pry open the canon and show how the question of global self-making is at the heart of even the most Eurocentric thinking. Europe, then, is not the founder of modernity, but is itself a reactive formation created in the face of global pressures.[8] This in turn allows me to show how figures like W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and D. T. Suzuki are not outsiders to the Western tradition clamoring to make their voices heard, but rather part of a single, shared, wildly uneven, and violent history of global self-making.

This basic reframing leads me to critically engage with a number of the leading thinkers in both critical and postcolonial theory across the breadth of this book. Too often, I find, even those who think about global concerns still place a deglobalized European philosophical history at the center of their theorizing. This happens either by locating the problems of the world solely in "Western metaphysics" or by "using" critical theorists to analyze global conditions without considering the global histories that

inform their theories in the first place. By suggesting that the philosophical history of modernity is a global one, I hope to push contemporary theorists to remap their critical analyses of the present. If the problem is not just Western metaphysics but more specifically particular ways of configuring global relations, then the proposed solutions will need to respond to these ideas about global life.

## Essaying the Globe

Thinkers coming from such radically different times and places will of course produce different ideas about the global self, and that's the whole point: the history of the modern self is a pluralist history of attempts to make who we are adequate to the task of being global. I sometimes refer to taking up this task as "essaying the globe," in part because the writers I consider all worked in the essay form. They likely did so because the essay, as an attempt or trial that works through the many parts of an object, is a form ideally suited to trying to understand one's place in the extensions of the global. The challenge of these essayists was to understand the whole world from their limited position on it, and to do so not merely at the level of intellectual understanding, but also by transforming themselves into subjects at once humble and critical, at once local and far-flung, at once firmly directed and open to the wild contingencies of life. I follow an interconnected series of essayists who took up that challenge with greater and lesser success from Renaissance Europe to modern Japan and Senegal. I consider skeptics, rationalists, universalists, pluralists, revolutionaries, and mystics as they responded to each other (either with praise or critique) across five continents and four centuries. These thinkers were appalled by specialization and had no interest in limiting themselves to one country or century or genre or discipline. I follow their provocations to think so broadly in this book.[9]

To understand their relationship to the world, the whole world, and nothing less was their task. This was not hubris on their part (although some of their propositions are hubristic). Rather, they believed, as Cornelius Castoriadis put it, that theory should be "the always uncertain attempt to realize the project of elucidating the world."[10] For Castoriadis, elucidation does not mean explanation; it means that we are constituted by forces outside ourselves (heteronomy), which we must work through in order to make them clear (lucid) and our own (autonomy). Essaying the globe is the difficult

practice of gathering up the fragments of the world that make us who we are and developing concepts and ways of life that can come to terms with this connectedness. The task of these writers was to make the unbearable mass of the world's impression on their souls something that they could come to shoulder. This essaying required them to turn fragments of others into some real understanding. They restlessly pursued as much knowledge about as many peoples and ideas and things as they could.

Still, the essay—in spite of the excessive praise it sometimes receives—is no perfect form, and it may be put to as many different ends as any other form.[11] In the chapters to follow, I look at five modes of global essay writing: skeptical (in which the essay leaves us in a state of doubt with regard to all given cultures), teleological (in which the essay tries to move us toward a singular, global vision), alternating (in which the essay enjoins us to move back and forth between different visions of the world without attempting to synthesize them into a single whole), revolutionary (in which the essay attempts to intervene in and transform a given reality—ideally through pluralistic alliances) and emptying (in which the essay seeks, through silences, nonsensical asides, anecdotes, repetitions, and other means, to undo the ego of the reader and provoke an enlightenment experience). A single essay can, of course, embody components of each, but most essays studied here tend toward one specific mode. Sometimes the essaying attempts led these writers to achieve understanding; sometimes they did not. That uneven progress is the history of essaying the globe.

While the book thus aims to present a rival account to the "Ancient Greece to modern Europe" framings of Taylor and Foucault, it does not share their ambition to tell a complete history of the present. To the contrary, my claim here is that such denials of one's own partiality are part of why we continue to have such skewed visions of the modern self. I do not think it is possible to exhaustively tell a history of the "sources of the self" precisely because those sources are so vast and global and mean different things for different subjects—and often, of course, for the same subject at different times in her life. Rather than attempting to synthesize some general movements like Taylor's disengaged reason versus Romanticism or Foucault's rise of biopower and loss of the practices of the self, I aim to show how different solutions were broached in response to the problem of what I call "unbearable identities." These are the various ways in which global being overwhelmed the subject and made life for her intolerable. I do not pretend that the problem of "unbearability" is the *ur*-problem of the modern self or that my list of solutions (skepticism, universalism, pluralism,

revolution, aesthetics, mysticism) is exhaustive. I merely suggest it as one plausible narrative vocabulary for understanding how global connections have constituted and continue to constitute who we are. More specifically still, I suggest it as a way of understanding the strange and surprising history that will connect essay writers from Montaigne to Kant to Emerson to Du Bois to Senghor to Suzuki.

## Unbearable Identities

Identities are understood here as how personhood is conceived and crafted in relation to the world. I am not particularly concerned—as Taylor is, for example—with whether the very idea of a deep, internal self is a unique invention of modernity. However one conceives of personhood—and we come across a great many differing conceptions here—what concerns me is how this diverse set of thinkers has conceived of what it means to be any kind of individual since the sixteenth century, when, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam tells us, the long-standing human fascination with cultural difference "crystallized around the idea of a world that had been 'encompassed.' "[12] By this he means the realization that there were not just different people "out there," but that we were all bound to eventually run into each other on this finite, "encompassed" sphere. My question is: How did our thinking about identity respond to this condition?

The answer I am suggesting here is that, quite simply, it became unbearable, and in several different ways. Of course the primary sense of this unbearability was the exacerbation of the all too human will to dominate others. The focus of this study is in how this will interacted with other transformations of self-understanding. The first, such as we find in Montaigne, is when we realize that our inherited knowledges cannot bear the weight of these new connections. The kinds of identities one might once have sculpted—a Greco-Roman man of letters, for instance—do not have the resources to make sense of being alive in this new configuration. The Cartesian response to refind certainty in the self, which is supposed to be the founding of modern subjectivity, is thus in fact only its evasion. This did not mean, however, that engaging the global necessarily overcame the problem. Another path, such as we find in Kant, is a universalism that seeks to make sense of the situation by attempting to bear on its shoulders—or in its mind—a basic set of truths to govern the whole world. This, too, proves unbearable, and in two senses: first, because it is simply too much for any

one thinker or cultural system to bear the world's diversity, and, second, because in attempting to do so, one tends to impose unbearable demands on others to live up to one's ideals. This thus produces another kind of unbearable identity, such as we find negotiated in Du Bois: the unbearable burdens of having a degraded and often violently oppressed position within someone else's universal scheme. (This will in turn produce potential forms of self-essentializing, which I consider with Senghor, although I believe he ultimately avoids this self-imposed version of unbearability.)

Overcoming these primary forms of unbearable identities will produce other possible modes of subjectivity, including, on the conceptual side, a traditional pluralist way of both respecting and maintaining difference, and, on the more active side, the revolutionary subjectivity of attempting to overthrow the conditions of unbearable imposition. Indeed, without social transformations, practices of the global self fall back into mere changes in subjectivity that are equally incapable of bearing the needs of the modern world. Thus, while social change is not the immediate focus of this book, it is a crucial context that I discuss throughout. Traditional pluralism and revolution also each have their own constraints in turn: pluralism runs the risk of encasing others in static—if no longer denigrated—identities. And revolution, when it does not proceed through pluralistic alliances forged in deep organizing, may impose its rightful transformations in an unbearable manner.[13]

The final form of unbearability that is my focus here is that of mysticism. In this model, such as we find in Suzuki, unbearability is overcome through the negation of the very idea of a subject that is separate from the world. Only such separation, Suzuki suggests, lets one feel the world as other than oneself and thus as a possible burden to oneself. While this model may have great efficacy, it runs into a limit—one that Suzuki admits—when it has to deal with the difficult questions of everyday political choices in the face of human suffering. The mystical release simply cannot bear the burden of these demands.

In cataloguing these modes of unbearable identities throughout the book, I do not suggest that they are entirely flawed. There is within Montaigne's skepticism, Kant's universalism, Suzuki's mysticism, and so forth values that can be named and upheld as methods within themselves for overcoming the unbearability of global relations. And indeed, this kind of radically pluralist response, one that insists on the plurality of all ideas, peoples, individuals, and natures and thus can engage with different ways of being at different moments without dissolving into infinite particulars, is

what I suggest as the most fortuitous method of overcoming the unbearable identities found in this history.

## Radical Pluralism

I later trace the roots of radical pluralism to the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and W. E. B. Du Bois. The idea of radical pluralism is that plurality is not just between things, but within them as well. We all know that cultures have drastic differences within themselves and that individuals are hardly ever consistent. Nevertheless, cultural theory tends to minimize these internal differences in the name of "ideal type" analyses that can summarize a cultural moment. Our era as one globally saturated with neoliberal rationality is a good example. And indeed, critical theory requires our ability to demarcate cultural trends so as to be able to support or fight against them. Otherwise we are lost in the empty and muddled multiplicity of the present moment. We need to reconcile the demands of critique with the reality of internal and external difference.

There are of course a great many writers who have theorized individuals and cultures in these terms, and I have learned from each of them.[14] However, I have often found that we lack the language to articulate both the reality of constituted entities (be they individuals or cultures or ideas) and the fact of their internal multiplicity. This leads to an ensuing failure of our critical vocabulary to be able to denounce those aspects of any entity that create unbearable conditions for others without denouncing the totality of that entity. To properly articulate this dual relation is the hope of a radical pluralism. It is "radical" in the etymological sense of the term—it goes all the way down to the roots (radicals) of things. There is no essential substrate to be found, only the ceaseless multiplicity of life. But it also insists that real entities, themselves plural, emerge from these infinitely plural roots, and these entities must in turn be ethically and politically negotiated. Thus it is also radical in the sense that it does not accept any given strata of a plurality simply because it exists. It demands that all strata of a society be accountable to the tasks of liberation in a globally connected world.[15] In the ethical language of this book, that means that radical pluralism contributes to the overcoming of unbearable identities, and that it effectively does so is my argument in the chapters to follow.

The existence of concrete realities does not reduce those entities to singular traits. Radical pluralism posits that each resulting, worldly entity—

individual, society, nature—is made of infinite constituent parts. These constituent parts form concrete, conventional designations such as table, self, world. No such entities have an essence. (Readers of philosophical Buddhism will recognize the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality here, and I return in the chapter on Suzuki to the role of this philosophy in the generation of radical pluralism.) A table may be used as much for writing as for eating; a person may vacillate between fits of generosity and miserliness; the world may teeter between hope and apocalypse. Radical pluralists do not simply throw up their hands at this relativity, however. They analyze the ways in which entities congeal around specific nodes. Within each constitution there is a variety of strands, threads, voices. Each takes priority at different times—Emerson calls these "master-tones."[16] But there are also minor keys and unheard sounds. The trick, as we will see more deeply in Emerson, is to learn to move between these different sides both internally and externally and, furthermore, to see the world as this alternating complex with which our plural selves engage. It is this capacity of alternation that at once ensures and endangers progress, and the task of radical pluralists is to lend their weight to the elements of the world that overcome unbearability without, in the process, neglecting to encourage the freedom to be plural.

Traditional pluralism assumes that there are multiple ways of being in the world, and it sometimes suggests that "modernity" is the site of the mixing of these ways of being. Traditional pluralism tells us to be aware of the other ways of living, but the internal plurality of those other ways is not emphasized. It can thus become unbearable because, especially when coupled with dominating powers, it can force people into a prescribed role as much as universalism can. This was the case, for example, with South Africa's terrifying Bantu Education Act (1953), which furthered apartheid by enforcing prescribed "tribal" rules for educating nonwhite South Africans.[17] There are already many good theories of pluralism that have moved past traditional pluralism. In addition to classic works by William James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Hannah Arendt (and I would add Léopold Senghor to this list for reasons that may not yet be apparent to all readers), we might also include recent theorists like Richard Bernstein, William Connolly, Janet Jakobsen, María Lugones, Mariana Ortega, and James Tully.[18] My point is not so much to disagree with these authors as to build on and extend their insights into the histories of global-self-making.[19]

The consistently pluralist approach I present here can be schematized in nine claims. First, that all cultures are within themselves plural, dynamic,

and not definable by a single essence.[20] Second, that every individual is plural within themselves because we are all made up a series of competing or complementary dispositions and desires. By combining these first two claims, we arrive at the third: that within a given culture, any individual has the capacity to move, or, as Emerson put it, "alternate," between the different ways of being within a culture. (That freedom requires an openness to alternation is a theme that is especially evident in the sections on Du Bois, Fanon, and hooks.) Fourth, that the plural forms of life that come into being within one culture do not exhaust the totality of the ways of being. This is what requires us to engage with a plurality beyond the plurality into which we are born. Given that cultures have always mixed, it is rarely the case that there is an idea to be found in one archive that is completely absent in another, but there are certainly modes of life that have been deepened in one site or another. (We will see a version of this argument in Senghor's aesthetics in chapter 3.) Therefore, fifth, that any individual who is open to it can alternate to another way of being outside of their own cultural space (where avoiding the risk of projection and appropriation requires great vigilance). Just as cultures and individuals grow, interact, and mutate, so do concepts, and thus, sixth, that concepts are themselves plural. Seventh, and related to this, that pluralism itself is plural. As we will see with Emerson and Du Bois, for example, different subjects in different times and places will develop different emphases in their articulations of pluralism. (They also sometimes need to ignore their plurality for political or personal reasons; I call these "strategic partialisms.") Eighth, that all of these cultural mutations do not take place on a single substratum, Nature, but rather within the context of what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls "multi-naturalism," or the idea that the world itself is plural.[21] Finally, ninth, the concept of radical pluralism has appeared in different forms in different times and places. This does not make it eternal or a transcendental form of human life. It is a way of understanding the world and our place in it, and as those things both change, radical pluralism may itself disappear. I offer it here as a universal in the sense that radical pluralism intends all universal claims: as strategic partializations of ontology. This way of thinking about diversity calls on us to constantly negotiate the multiplicities that we are with the multiplicities that the world is. It is a difficult and never fully resolvable task, but it is the intellectual challenge posed by the plurality inherent in our lives.

If we apply this model to the idea of "the West," for example, what we see is that "the West" is a real entity with historical power that has emerged through global constitutions. At the same time, we can appreciate

that its reality effects are plural and that they are received differently in different times and places and even differently by different subjects within the same time and place.[22] Furthermore, we can appreciate the multiplicity of what has come to be within the West and the fact that different ideas were generated there, ideas that are worth finding and rearticulating.[23] The result, as I discuss in the context of Foucault below, is that our aim becomes less about "overcoming Western metaphysics" and more about overcoming certain versions of global life that were produced in the West (although certainly not only there—terrible ideas come from all corners of the globe).[24]

To sum up: the claim here is that all entities are plural and global, constituted by the multiplicity of the world. Radical pluralism enables global subjects to overcome unbearable identities, for its practitioners are no longer trying to bear the burden of the world in a single vision, nor are they forcing others to have singular places within our schemes. Rather, they learn that they are always already sharing the burden of global being, and the task becomes learning how to share this better. The tragedy of life is that this sharing is not particularly easy either. But it is, at least, bearable.

## Reconstitution

These epistemological and ethical claims about the plurality of existence are coincident with a historical methodology that I, following Said, call "reconstitution." The aim of reconstitution is to show how constituted entities—like "the modern self"—were formed through a multiplicity of processes and interactions. Unlike a standard comparative method in which the givenness of two constituted entities is taken for granted and then each is analyzed (as in Erich Auerbach's wonderful exposition of the differences in time consciousness between Greek and Hebraic forms of representation), the reconstitutive method begins by first showing how interactions across boundaries *produced* these entities in the first place.[25] It thus affirms that differences are real, but also that their reality is dependent on multiple factors. Unlike a dialectical method, which might seek the shared ground of these differences via a third category that unites them, or a deconstructive method, which might rest content with exposing the fact of mutual constitution, reconstitution thus aligns with a radically pluralist view of the world that holds reality and transformation together in a single vision.

Reconstitution shares a fair amount with what theorists like Jane Gordon, Michael Monahan, and Neil Roberts call "creolization" and what Shu-mei

Shih calls "relational comparison."[26] I have used the term "reconstitution" for two primary reasons. First, because it leads more logically to a sense of maintaining difference than these other categories because of its link to what is "constituted." Second, because I view this work as part of a tradition that uses Said's thinking about mutual constitution to understand how concepts seemingly formed in only one place in fact have their origins in global interactions. A long tradition of scholarship has attempted to show precisely this constitutive role, including Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987), Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Gayatri Spviak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Susan Buck-Morss's "Hegel and Haiti" (2000/2009), Peter van der Veer's *Imperial Encounters* (2001), Sankar Muthu's *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003), Antony Anghie's *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (2004), Kevin Anderson's *Marx at the Margins* (2010), Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacy of Four Continents* (2015), and Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time* (2015).[27] But in spite of this extensive work, David Scott noted in 2010 that such claims still remain outside the mainstream accounts of European intellectual history: "It is not typically imagined that knowledges and institutions in these worlds [outside Europe] . . . might have had a role in the shaping of Europe and the discourses that *constitute* its cultural and philosophic identity."[28] Part of my work here, then, is simply continuing to do the constitutive work that these other scholars have called for. But I also want to keep advancing the conversation through critical engagements with these critics. I thus hope to expand this field in several ways: by giving a broader narrative of this history of European thought in works stretching from Montaigne to Foucault; by taking up, revising, and disagreeing with some of the specific claims about these authors by previous global postcolonial critics; and by showing the connections between this constitutive history of European thought and its ramifications for how we understand American Transcendentalism, Africana thought, and modern Zen.

One example of these claims can be seen in the alternative history of dialectics that I trace across this book. Dialectical thought, of course, has been a critical resource for thinkers of the global since Hegel and Marx. The dialectical insight that history progresses through struggles generated by complex relations between self and other certainly speaks to how we might understand the modern history of global interactions. Recent critics including Buck-Morss, Timothy Brennan, and George Ciccariello-Maher have offered renewed visions of the power of dialectics for advancing radical critiques of philosophical traditions and our present conditions.[29] But while all of these works push dialectics beyond their Hegelian origins, and while Buck-Morss

and Brennan argue that Hegel frequently had colonialism on his mind, none of them argues that dialectics *itself*, as a way of understanding the world, was constituted in global interactions. For them the dialectic might have been *applied* to these interactions, but it was not itself formed in them.[30]

But of course dialectics as a way of thinking does have origins. Most scholars would argue that those origins are in the science of the times (polarity and magnetism), or the history of Greek or Medieval philosophy. What I argue (in chapters 2–4) is that the very idea of the modern dialectic itself was (in part) constituted by geographic thinking. I trace a history of dialectics from Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre's colonial ethnography into Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and then on to Schiller and Hegel. I show the specific ways in which dialectics developed through ideas about primitive life and how, simply by looking for it, we can see clearly the global origins of modern dialectical thought. Having established this history, I argue that key moments in the history of dialectics do not include just their Marxist revisions, but also the various refutations and reformulations of dialectical thought that we find in thinkers as diverse as Senghor, Fanon, and Suzuki.[31]

Rather than "deconstruct" dialectics, then, I reconstitute its history. And I am thus less interested in the ongoing debate in postcolonial studies between deconstruction and dialectics and more concerned to show how both of these philosophies were *themselves* formed in the modern history of global interactions.[32] Nevertheless, throughout this book, I engage this debate as it occurs around some of the authors considered here and argue for why a radical pluralism that is aware of this constitutive history offers a powerful alternative route out of some of the impasses of contemporary criticism.

The other broad argument being advanced through the example of dialectics is that the history of thought is in part a history of geographic claims about how cultures can and should relate to each other, and that by ignoring this history we ignore the work of the theories themselves. As Linda Martín Alcoff puts it in a discussion of modern philosophy's relation to colonialism: "If . . . the meaning of philosophy is simply the history of philosophy . . . then European philosophy does not understand what philosophy is because it does not understand its own history of philosophy."[33] The aim of constitutive criticism is, following Alcoff, to make a stronger case for why the appearance of other cultures *matters* for the history of thought.[34] In the past few decades, several other methods have been used to understand the place of global cultures within the history of Western thought. Said, for example, focused on the *representation* of others

and how those representations went hand in hand with the political regime of colonialism.[35] Spivak, meanwhile, investigated the *rhetoric* of others, showing how admittedly marginal moments in texts create the conditions of possibility for their arguments.[36] Others asked what *resources* a thinker provides in spite of their hostile representations, as in, for example, recent works by Judith Butler on Levinas, or Brennan on Hegel, or Amy Allen on Adorno and Foucault.[37] All of these methods have a certain power and logic that I do not intend to dispute. My concern with them is that they allow us to continue to write and read as if these moments are discardable: "If our focus is not politics, why engage with representations?" "If this is just marginal rhetoric, then it does not touch the philosophy itself." "If the resources are there, why does it matter what people actually said?" I believe that focusing more and more on questions of constitution can help rebut the logic of such questions. That is to say, we need to "rummage" back through intellectual history to reconstitute texts whose claims about others have been discarded.[38] In so doing, we can begin to reconstitute the canon itself, showing how these are not just matters of external representation, marginal rhetoric, or latent resources, but concerns at the heart of the texts themselves. Combined with a radically pluralist approach to criticism, this can also allow us to be up-front about what is problematic in theorists whose work in other domains we might appreciate.

Such a reconstitution does not work to determine once and for all the meaning of a concept or movement, but rather creates a narrative whose reconstruction shows the ongoing effects of these prior moments in our present. We constitute ourselves by reconstituting the forms that already inhabit our thinking. And in this reconstituting we also open ourselves up to new forms simply by following other possible implications that we might not, or even could not, have otherwise considered. Thus, for example, reconstituting the globality of Zen led me to need to reconstitute the globality of the European thought that preceded it. In turn, I have reconstituted a history that does not stretch from Rousseau to German and French critical theory, but rather from Rousseau to postcolonial critique and modern Zen.

## Practices of the Global Self

This act of reconstitution thus forms a challenge to the history of critical theory. Critical theorists have often taken as their target some problem in "Western thought" whose overturning they view as central to new forms of

political liberation. This takes many forms, such as the framing of the world by technology and the "forgetting of being" in Heidegger (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 1), phallogocentrism and "the metaphysics of presence" in Derrida, biopower in Foucault, disembodied viewpoints in Haraway, the state of exception in Agamben, or neoliberalism for Wendy Brown. Across all the different diagnoses of how to name the failures of modern life, these thinkers all take as their central object of critique something whose origin begins in European thought. It is of course the case that all theories only diagnose an aspect of the problem, and most critical theorists would admit this. Still, there are moments, especially in the excessive concluding words of some of Agamben's books, when it seems that theorists might just believe that overcoming a problem in the philosophies of Europe could bring about the revolution tomorrow.[39]

But if the claims I make here, building on these traditions of reconstitution, have any value, then there must be something askew in this mode of critique. For, as van der Veer puts it, "[a] Eurocentric philosophical history . . . however brilliantly presented, ignores the importance of the global dimension of the issues it discusses."[40] It is of course the case that in discussing global dimensions, one will equally miss some more specific and local issues, and I return to this problem below. My point here is not that the "truth" of our concerns lies in the global. Rather, it is that this work of reconstitution allows us to see problems otherwise obscured when the focus remains on supposedly internal European dynamics.

Throughout this book, my main example of what this change of focus could look like is with reference to the late work of Michel Foucault, whose research into what he called the "technologies" or "practices" of the self has been influential for my thinking about the global self. For Foucault, such practices mean that the truth is not available to us as we are, but that we must change who we are to be adequate to the tasks of truthful living. To be sure, becoming global requires transformations of the self; it requires us to become new kinds of subjects who can relate to global processes. Thus it requires us to develop practices (such as new forms of writing, new ways of thinking, and new practices of meditation) to enact those changes. Foucault, however, never once mentions such global transformations. Instead, he follows a standard Eurocentric trajectory, arguing that the rich practices of the self developed by Hellenic and Roman authors have been lost in modernity. I break with Foucault by arguing that what we witness in modernity is not so much a disappearance as a transformation: ancient techniques give way to modern practices of the global self. In other words, self-transformation

in the modern era is about making oneself the kind of subject who can overcome the unbearability of identity produced by global connections.

Foucault developed these ideas in his late work, especially in the lecture course "The Hermeneutics of the Subject." In these lectures, he worked to understand what he called a transformation in the "history of truth."[41] He argued that philosophy seeks to know not what is true and false, but rather "the conditions and limits of the subject's access to truth." What Foucault found in his excavation was that there was a long tradition of "spirituality," understood as "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth."[42] He argued that the modern era of this history—which he heuristically dubbed the "Cartesian moment"—began when spirituality split off from philosophy, and it was assumed that the subject, as she is, is capable of the truth without any work of transformation. We have enshrined "know thyself" above all and have forgotten how to care for ourselves.[43]

Foucault wanted to excavate and reassert the importance of these lost "practices of the self," but he found in the modern era a series of binds that limited such a reinvention: "I do not think we have anything to be proud of in our current efforts to reconstitute an ethic of the self . . . I think we may have to suspect that we find it impossible today to constitute an ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task."[44] This was, and remains, an urgent need for a number of reasons according to Foucault's analysis of the functioning of power since the eighteenth century. In brief, Foucault was concerned that our analyses of political power had limited themselves to the question of the "juridico-discursive," or the top-down legal institutions of a society.[45] He believed that these mattered, but also wanted us to turn our attention to the ways in which "power mechanisms . . . took charge of men's existence, men as living bodies." There we would see "new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique."[46] Because power operates at the level of our existence, we must also confront it there by developing different techniques or practices of the self. This meant combating ossified notions of truth as they manifested in madness, criminality, or sexuality in Foucault's early and middle works. In these late lectures, he began to focus on a more general theorization of the lost "relationship of self to self" through spiritual techniques.[47]

We can see here the correspondence between Foucault's analysis and his proposed solutions. Because he, like Agamben and Brown after him, focuses on transformations in Western social, legal, and economic formations, he

develops his solutions on these grounds. Indeed, Foucault is explicit about this: his concern is with a problem produced by "the set of phenomena and historical processes we call our 'culture.' "[48] In spite of the scare quotes and the genuine sense that a "culture" is a complex and heterogenous assemblage of forces,[49] Foucault, whose analyses on so many other topics were dedicated to taking apart the presumptions he inherited, nevertheless believed strongly in this idea of "our culture." Indeed, Foucault's most famous analyses in many ways spring from an insight, recorded in the very first sentence of *The Order of Things* (1966), about the constrictions imposed on thought by Western methods of classification: "This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—*our* thought, the thought bears the stamp of our age and our geography."[50] It is only by isolating "*our* thought" as only one possible mode of thought that Foucault can name and describe it and thus find the leverage through which to pry it open.

Foucault's enormous success in illuminating the systems of thought that undergird ideas of madness, of language, of sexuality, and of punishment, among others, shows that this is far from a futile task. Indeed, because "the West" *is* a constituted entity whose formation *is* in part through local and immediate concerns, such local analyses can of course produce tremendous results. But, as critics since at least Ann Stoler have pointed out in response to Foucault's histories of the self, taking into consideration "a wider imperial context resituates the work of racial thinking in the making of European bourgeois identity."[51] Indeed, as historians of philosophy like Robert Bernasconi and Peter Park have shown, racist thinking was the primary reason why thinkers from outside Europe have been excluded from the canon of "philosophy," and why someone like Foucault, constituted by global connections he did not fully grasp, would come to presume "the West" as "his culture."[52] Building on these scholars' research, my argument here is that focusing the question of the practices of the self on their Greco-Roman roots ignores the very precise ways in which these practices were constituted globally. And if *part* of the modern self is a global self, then at least *part* of the solution to its problems must be sought in new forms of global relations.

What is ironic here is that Foucault himself seems to have known this. In his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978–79), for example, he was explicit that the eighteenth century saw the rise of "a new type of global calculation in European governmental practice . . . a new form of global rationality . . . a new calculation on the scale of the world."[53] If part of the techniques of power were globally constituted for the past several centuries,

then it makes sense to say that Foucault should have devised practices of the self that were formed in this same, ongoing global constitution. And, in a sense, he in fact did. The Borges passage mentioned above, after all, references a "Chinese encyclopedia." Throughout *The History of Sexuality* (1984), Foucault contrasts the "Western" approach to sexuality with those of other cultures. And, especially in the mid- to late 1970s, he began explicit and ongoing engagements with Zen Buddhism and what he called the "political spirituality" of the Iranian revolution.[54]

However, when Foucault looked beyond the West, he did so not as a point of contact, but rather as a space of rupture. When he speaks of "political spirituality" in the context of Iran, he speaks of "this thing whose possibility *we* have forgotten since the Renaissance."[55] And when he considers the possibility of comparative philosophy in dialogue with a Zen monk, it is only in its possible future birth: "if philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe."[56] Foucault's theorizing the loss of practice in the West while at the same time practicing global engagement is the fundamental irony of his study. Whereas he theorized that the West lost its spiritual practice and therefore had to locate spirituality elsewhere, I argue that *what happened to spirituality in the modern era was that it became precisely this global task. Modern subjectivity is not devoid of spirituality; it practices spirituality (for better and for worse) through attempts to make itself adequate to the globe.* The problem is not, or is not just, "our culture"; it is also how we relate to the world. Contemporary theory in general needs to understand this broader history in order to make more cogent interventions.

Several of Foucault's excellent readers have similarly followed his partition between the question of globalism and the act of self-transformation.[57] Thus Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life* (2004), argues that we are in a moment "in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global community."[58] She continues, "I confess to not knowing how to theorize that interdependency," but then gives a very interesting theorization:

> I would suggest, however, that both our political and ethical responsibilities are rooted in the recognition that radical forms of self-sufficiency and unbridled sovereignty are, by definition, disrupted by the larger global processes of which they are a part, that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value.[59]

There would be reasons to question some of the terms of this statement, but that is not my present concern. Rather, what interests me is that this text appeared shortly before Butler's extended engagement with Foucault's late work in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005).[60] But although Butler had just the previous year called for a development of global subjectivity, this concern disappears from her account of self-transformation, and she accepts (or at least does not pause to question) Foucault's basic notion of "the West" as a tradition of thought that shapes certain people's subjectivity.[61] The question of how one's subjective life is constituted globally thus does not, at this point in her work, get raised. This partition marks the history of critical theory in the present, even in thinkers as committed to global questions as Butler.

Some of the purpose of this book is to connect these two lines of thought through a long history of the methods used to theorize global interdependency and what that means for subjectivity. Foucault thinks that we can read a history of thinkers from Montaigne to Heidegger along the lines of attempted "practices of the self" that continually founder.[62] We need to be able to have a new spirituality, but we are unable to define one. For Foucault, this is because of the regimes of disciplinarity and control and the discourse of science, and because we simply have not yet done what Foucault is attempting: to set out the explicit terms of the discourse.[63] Another problem, I am suggesting, is that we have not yet fully set these concerns within the actually existing geographic frame of modernity, that is, our fraught global condition. It is not that we do not have practices of the self in the modern era; it is that those practices are aimed at developing diverse modes of global subjectivity. To analyze the successes and failures of those practices, we must, at the very least, acknowledge their existence. Hence I have rewritten Foucault's historical stretch from Montaigne to Heidegger to that from Montaigne to Suzuki, globalizing each figure along the way.

## A Partial History: The Narrative of this Book

A word on the choice of figures represented in this book. It might seem that the task I embark on—to trace the attempts at global subjectivity in a series of essay writers from Montaigne to Suzuki and his followers—is an impossibly ambitious project. To my mind, however, it remains unbearably parochial. Although this book is informed by the complex pasts of the

peoples whom Europeans once called "without history," the pre–twentieth century writers studied here are largely European born. Little mention is made of the global subjectivities being enacted *simultaneously* in the Americas, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Levant, the Pacific, or the Maghreb, or elsewhere. I do not in the least mean to imply that no such indigenous accounts exist—even some sixteenth-century European writers were aware of and engaged with them.[64] I discuss the importance of such engagements in the section on Montaigne but then focus mostly on how the willful misunderstanding of the lives of these peoples shaped the philosophical history that follows him. My aim in doing so, again, is to continue the work of reconstituting the fraught global origins of what is still taken to be a self-contained European history of philosophy.

There are other limits here. The liberal tradition, so important in shaping the colonial world, has also been relegated to marginalia.[65] There remains, further, a complete absence of noncanonical theorists and enacters of "planetary consciousness," such as those painstakingly detailed in Linebaugh and Rediker's *Many-Headed Hydra*.[66] And, while references are given to original language works for the major figures considered, the debates engaged here are grounded in the bibliography of primarily Anglophone scholarship.[67] Nor do I address the question of the World Wide Web, or the digital more generally, which is perhaps the most significant way in which global selves are being sculpted (if not essayed) minute by minute today. And the question of climate change, perhaps *the* global issue of the day, is not discussed until the coda.

There is, further still, a general absence of female writers in the primary figures studied (with the exception of bell hooks), although I raise questions about the role of women in a number of the authors considered here. In this context, it is also important to mark a debt in the methodology of reconstitutive reading that I owe feminist studies as much as to the postcolonial theory mentioned above. The general concern is well expressed in an essay by Hazel Carby. Carby questions the idea that the problems with patriarchal ideas "speak for themselves." If that were the case, Carby argues, then such ideas "are merely superficial, easily recognized, and quickly accounted for, enabling real intellectual work to continue elsewhere." The result is a space in which male intellectuals maintain "a politically correct posture of making an obligatory, though finally empty, gesture toward [feminist critique]."[68] Although my main focus is not on gender or sexuality, Carby's criticism of the idea that the "real intellectual work" is "elsewhere" has guided my reflection on understanding how global cultures formed modern selves. Thus

feminists like Carby taught me to read for othering—for how the act of othering *mattered*, for how we could not insulate the philosophical insights from this act's constitutive force—and it is this sensibility that I bring to the philosophical texts that have mattered for so much contemporary theory, feminist and otherwise. I have no doubt that *other* histories of the global origins of the modern self can be told, have been told, and should be told.

As I wrote in the preface, the selection choices were animated by my aim to reconstruct the global intellectual history that resulted in Suzuki's own writing. As such, the development of a fully fledged understanding of practices of the global self beyond a certain number of canonical, mostly male figures remains beyond the scope of this book. It is instead primarily concerned with how a series of male writers—a number of them racialized as white—attempted to come to terms with global identity, and largely through their encounters with peoples and traditions outside white identity. One-half of the book, then, is a study of a kind of white, masculinist practices of the global self. But it is not blindly so, and thus the other half of the narrative is concerned with how this construction of the self was one among others. Equally, all of this is undertaken in the context of radical pluralism, which again is the insistence on layers of plurality all the way down. This means, first, that none of the positions offered here is represented as *the* truth. Second, it is not presumed that simply because the identities of the thinkers considered are white and male that the totality of their positions can be circumscribed by their identities—any more than Fanon's or Du Bois's thoughts are circumscribed by theirs.[69] My hope is that this canonical focus does not detract from the work so much as continue to open mainstream critical theory to other writings.[70] By opening up the canon to these same concerns of self-making in a global world, I hope this book might further other investigations by showing how deeply practical, global concerns were to even the supposedly most abstract thought.

I make these qualifications along the lines of what the novelist Wilson Harris has called "confessions of partiality."[71] In admitting to our own limitations, Harris argues, we refuse the instinct to universalize our own ideas, and, at the same time, we unravel claims to sovereign universality that others might make. The claim that I am making about practices of the global self is true for a *part* of modern subjectivity, but it is, on the whole, only a part. The idea of a *partial history* is based on the fundamental multiplicity of any historical epoch. It is partial both because it is a part and because it is *not* impartial—it represents the concerns of just one author when faced with the history of attempts to essay the globe. As Emerson admonishes, "You

have not got rid of your parts by denying them, but are the more partial."[72]

The chapters of this partial history are as follows.

In chapter 1, I suggest that the realization that we live on a single, interdependent, rapidly connecting planet led early writers like Montaigne to realize that private wisdom could no longer bear the weight of modern responsibility. The book begins with a reading of his "Of Cannibals," as an essayistic practice of the self in which Montaigne attempts to transform who he is so that he can understand his relation to the Tupi people he meets in 1562 in Rouen, France. I look especially at how Montaigne uses the method of skepticism to break down his prejudices and then eclecticism to build an early pluralist mode of thought. I conclude my reading of Montaigne by responding to the criticism of him levied by Sankar Muthu in his important work on enlightenment and colonialism. Then, in a comparison with ideas of subjectivity found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Descartes's cogito, I polemically suggest that Montaigne's essay, more than these other writings, ought to be understood as the foundation of modern thinking. Hamlet and Descartes are representatives of the attempt to hold onto singular identity in the face of globality. As a result, they produce a line of identity thinking connected to the anxiety of trying to bear the truth of the whole world in a single subject that I follow into the work of Martin Heidegger. Despite his famous attempt to overcome the Cartesian self, Heidegger remains wedded to its evasive, monocultural practices. I am especially concerned here to question the common use of Heidegger as a theorist of modernity given his unrepentant Eurocentrism.

Following this argument, I work to reposition a line of post-Montaigne global thought stretching from Rousseau to Marx. Montaigne left a pervasive impact on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose earliest essays register the same desire to transform his thinking in order to comprehend global cultures. A large part of this book is dedicated to unpacking the wide-ranging yet underappreciated influence of Rousseau's ideas about the global self on writers around the world. Rousseau broke with Montaigne's open approach and began to plot a specific evolution for human subjectivity. While still a pluralist, Rousseau came to believe that there is a singular true path for Europeans. That path is staked along the route of evolutionary history, and Rousseau's key intervention is to use conjectural histories (speculative histories about human origins based on colonial ethnography) to understand how to construct a global self. Willfully misreading missionary accounts from the Americas, Rousseau suggests that "savage" life is happy but without reflection or justice. Civilized life, meanwhile, is unhappy and alienated,

but contains the seeds of perfection. Rousseau's solution is to combine the best of both conditions through the dialectical sublation of the savage and the bourgeois into the cultured state of "instinctual reason." (This is a term I use throughout the book. By "instinctual reason" I do not mean an essential human instinct for reason. Rather, I refer to the achievement of making reason a kind of instinct.)

The remaining chapters detail how extensive the influence of Rousseau's narrative was on seemingly unrelated concepts, including Kant's enlightenment, Schiller's aesthetic, Hegel's dialectic, and Marx's communism. It will also be central to those who opposed or repurposed his vision of the modern self, including Emerson, who suggested we alternate between reason and instinct rather than combine them; Fanon, who refused the reduction to instinct; and Suzuki, who kept Rousseau's aim of instinctual reason but critiqued his methods. I conclude this chapter with the significant response to Rousseau by Immanuel Kant. Kant's use of conjectural history informed his theories of progress, cosmopolitanism, and enlightenment, as he argued that both individuals and nations needed to combine instinct and rationality in their constitutions. In so doing, Kant connected practices of the global self to global practices for the self, which is to say that he prescribed a general way of being for the entire world. In concluding the chapter, I discuss how this global history of Kant should shift his place in contemporary theory. These brief remarks are part of my overall attempt to show how telling a more global history transforms how we theorize the present.

In the next two chapters, I then discuss how Rousseau's implicit concept of sublation is a fundamental idea that underpins German idealism in the work of Schiller and Hegel. At the same time, I begin to bring other voices into the conversation, showing how the globalizing visions of these thinkers were contested by Senghor (paired with Schiller) and Marx and Fanon (paired with Hegel). Schiller argues that aesthetic experience can create the kind of instinctually rational subject imagined by Rousseau. His argument for the role of aesthetics in the making of the subject is in fact inseparable from the conjectural history he tells, in which the goal of the aesthetic life is to combine the best aspects of primitive instinct with the best aspects of rationality through the use of beauty and play. Senghor provides a powerful, if implicit, response to Schiller by arguing that Idealist aesthetics fundamentally misunderstood the importance of intuition as a meaningful way of being in itself. Rather than seeking to sublate intuition and reason into a single mode, Senghor instead embraced a plurality of ways of engaging the world—each of which, he argued, had developed more profoundly

in different geographic spaces. In rewriting the racialized philosophies of modernity, he sought to remap the geography of aesthetic theory. Building on trenchant analyses of Senghor's work by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Gary Wilder, I argue that Senghor's work is part of the "radical pluralist" tradition and that his insights on aesthetics as a mode of global thinking remain an untapped resource for the practices of global selves.

Hegel, meanwhile, brings Rousseau's individual pedagogy onto a grand historical scale, showing how contradictions in each moment of development lead to new stages in world history. The trouble with both Schiller and Hegel, as with Kant, is that they prescribe this teleological movement for the entire globe. While recent theorists such as Timothy Brennan, Susan Buck-Morss, and Andrew Cole have argued for the liberating potential of Hegel's "Master Slave Dialectic," I show how his work is another form of conjectural history that risks creating unbearable identities for the colonized. Rereading Hegel in light of contemporary research, I suggest that a reconstitution of dialectics allows us to see how his ideas are premised, in part, on racist beliefs. We cannot simply "negate" those parts, but we can constitute new, more pluralized forms of dialectics that develop in their absence. This, I argue in the rest of the chapter, is what we can see at work in Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon. In responding to Hegel, Marx, though he largely began his career as a traditional Idealist, eventually came to understand that his youthful universalism would mean the horrific destruction of whole ways of life and that communism must in fact proceed through multiple forms of social organization. He also made the fundamental claim that practices of the self cannot be thought of as separate from the economic systems in which they are formed. I conclude the chapter on dialectics by showing how Frantz Fanon offers a counterhistory of being to what we find in Heidegger and others, one that understands the profound need of global research and denies the claim that there is an ontology of being to be found outside historical and geographic interactions. It is on these grounds that he will partialize the applicability of the dialectic. Fanon's essaying also pushes back against the unbearable identities created by Rousseau and others by showing how the encasement of people by "epidermalization" destroyed their identity and reduced them to their skin.

Marx's reformist ideas were coincident with the development of "radical pluralism" in the essays of Emerson and, later, Du Bois, which I analyze in chapters 5 and 6. Radical pluralism, again, is the idea that the plurality of existence goes all the way down. All cultures are pluralities; all individuals are pluralities; all natures are pluralities. The task for radical pluralists is

thus not solely to respect difference, but also to learn how to engage with different elements from different traditions. What interests Emerson is the capacity of "alternation," or the ability to move between the different modes of life that each collective plurality makes possible. Reconceiving conjectural history, Emerson posits multiple dispositions rather than singular instinct at the origins of humanity. This is what opens his thought to a radical pluralism. He thus seeks a mode of essay writing that brings out the many layers available and coexistent in the present. His essays seek to make subjects who can both discern and move through these layers. I argue that Du Bois was one of Emerson's most perceptive readers and that his idea of "double consciousness" grows out of Emerson's use of the same phrase. However, Du Bois was also critical of Emerson because Du Bois understood that alternations require different practices for those who have been forced to "alter nations" through slavery and exile. His complex essay form thus seeks to enable global identity formation while simultaneously working to overcome the debilitating identities of modern racism. Freedom here becomes the subject's capacity to alternate without compulsion. Radical pluralism, Du Bois proved, is itself plural and requires different practices for different life situations. Such pluralism, I ultimately argue, manages to overcome the unbearable identity by learning to share the burden of global subjectivity—never abandoning the task, but never claiming a final solution either.

It is in this broad context that I situate the global mysticism of D. T. Suzuki. Suzuki departed from both synthesis and pluralism in his version of essaying the globe. According to him, the only path to global enlightenment was through the undoing of all our inherited concepts. This required a "pure experience" of the world, unmediated by language. Whereas all the other thinkers sought a resolution *after* contact, Suzuki argued that our ability to bear the world would only be possible if we got in touch with a moment *before* the division of subject and object even began. Suzuki's essays used anecdote, repetition, nonsensical asides, and other tactics to try to jolt readers out of their conceptual world and into the world itself. The chapter explores Suzuki's relationship to idealism and transcendentalism and investigates the fraught relationship between this nonconceptual experience and the historical contexts of Japanese imperialism and neoliberal capitalism. In these contexts, Suzuki's Zen also becomes an unbearable identity because such difficult times call for an active and discriminating intellect. Suzuki believed, nevertheless, that even a momentary experience of egolessness could

produce global subjects more concerned with equality and justice than with individual gain. By shifting the framework of our understanding, we can stop reading Suzuki as a mere Westernizer of Zen and recognize him as an important theorist of global subjectivity worthy of further study.

I conclude the chapter by showing the importance of Suzuki's reworking of Zen for John Cage and bell hooks. In Cage I find a performative exploration of Suzuki's ideals as he seeks "world-enlightenment" through his music and writings. Cage also used Suzuki's notions of silence to develop a way of working through his sexuality outside what he found to be the unbearable frames of psychoanalysis and the disclosure of identity. The analysis of hooks similarly follows how Zen helped in her development of what she calls an "identity in resistance" because Zen foregrounds the fact that politics is about overcoming suffering that is both psychic and social. Like Cage, hooks shows how subjects within different social groups can use practices of the global self for purposes beyond their original intention. She is an important critical voice warning against a nonconceptual practice that could blindly write over the realities of sexism, racism, and classism.

Finally, in a brief coda, I argue that our practices today should be guided toward "being-toward-bequeathment." Rather than the individual angst of "being-toward-death," in other words, we should develop ways of being on this planet that guide our subjectivity toward the creation of sustainable futures. This "being-toward-bequeathment" must be matched by the next generation's capacity to "bear" the "responsibility of inheritance," as Stanley Cavell puts it.[73] This reciprocal structure is perhaps the best way to preserve the very globe on which we, collectively, can develop ourselves.

The resulting narrative functions both diachronically and synchronically. It works across time to show the historical and thematic connections that unite these diverse thinkers into a single tradition of engagement and debate. In turn, it shows how our reading of each figure changes when seen from the angle of this unfolding narrative. While each section thus should be meaningful on its own, the book makes most sense as a complete narrative. Most chapters also have an engagement with contemporary theorists or critics at the end to show how the reading within this narrative might help resituate some of the themes and concerns of contemporary criticism and theory. While the general trajectory of the narrative is chronological, I have moved thinkers around to draw out the connections between them through immediate comparisons. I also wanted to avoid the impression of a teleological narrative toward resolution: there are insights to be gleaned

across these writers.

The task I have set myself is to evaluate these forms in my own essayistic engagements. I have used the notion of unbearable identity to understand the normative limit against which all attempts to essay the globe in this partial history will be judged. That is to say, I consider the extent to which authors manage to produce a vision of global subjectivity that does not result in the production of a new unbearable identity for themselves or others. The argument, again, is that radical pluralism best satisfies this demand. But because radical pluralism itself depends on the constant production of new ways of being in the world, this is not a teleological story leading to its invention. Indeed, this book that started with trying to understand Suzuki and his influence now ends with a chapter on his thought. Although I ultimately critique Suzuki, this does not exclude the validity of his claims any more than Kant's production of the unbearable identity of primitive life destroys the value of his universalism. A radically pluralist analysis seeks to find as much value in a form of thought as it can while always remaining vigilant against master tones that drown out others. It restlessly seeks out new forms of life that may add to the richness of existence. Such an essay of essays is the project of this book.

1

# Montaigne and the Other History of Modernity

In his essay on education, Michel de Montaigne provides a critique of what radical pedagogue Paolo Freire would later call the "'banking' concept of education."[1] Montaigne, like Freire, is concerned that we are taught to memorize deposits of facts rather than to become conscious and active subjects. "Our tutors," Montaigne writes, "never stop bawling into our ears, as though they were pouring water into a funnel." Against this he would have the trial and error method of experiential education that we now associate with Freire and others: "I should like the tutor to correct this practice, and right from the start . . . to begin putting it [the student's mind] through its paces, making it taste things, choose them, and discern them by itself; sometimes clearing the way for him, sometimes letting him clear his own way."[2] This critique of education is central to Montaigne's way of thinking and writing in general. His essay—his attempt, or test, or trial—is not so much about getting the "right" answer as it is about becoming the kind of subject who can engage with and make judgments about the world around her.

His three books of *Essays* are thus scattered with a combination of knowledge and practices of the self.[3] He does not merely state facts about the world, nor does he simply show how facts can change his way of thinking. He realizes an even deeper truth: that he cannot even recognize a fact unless he continually transforms his very being. This transformation becomes his abiding goal: "To compose our character is our duty, not to compose books, and to win, not battles and provinces, but order and tranquility in our conduct. Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately."[4] Although Montaigne frequently disparages books and learning, his real point is that we should not merely have passive knowledge accumulated in our head, but should only read or write to the extent that those activities

help us to live better. (This is equally a warning for today's scholars: "This fellow, all dirty, with running nose and eyes, whom you see coming out of his study after midnight, do you think he is seeking among his books how to make himself a better, happier, and wiser man? No such news. He is going to teach posterity the meter of Plautus' verses and the true spelling of a Latin word, or die in the attempt.")[5]

Throughout his *Essays*, Montaigne is concerned with the particular kind of learning that is also my concern here: how to develop global subjectivity. And he is concerned that just as scholars and pedagogues narrowly focus on minutiae, so travelers miss the real meaning of their travel. They bring back measurements, accounts of riches, and gossip, but really they should "bring back knowledge of the characters and ways of those nations, and to rub and polish [*frotter and limer*] our brains by contact with those of others."[6] "Of Cannibals," perhaps Montaigne's most famous essay, is concerned with this task of confronting his knowledge with the knowledge of others. It is his record of meeting three Tupi people in France in 1562 and his struggle to reconcile his classical learning with his discovery of these people and their continent. Only through a complex set of practices of the self will he be able to accomplish this task of engagement.[7]

## Montaigne's Global Self

As we see in the quotes above, Montaigne dedicated his life to the task of tranquility. He wanted to compose and arrange his moods and thoughts such that, by constant self-reflection and awareness, he could maintain his resolution in the face of difficulties both large and small. "Greatness of soul is not so much pressing upward and forward as knowing how to set oneself in order and circumscribe [*circonscrire*] oneself."[8] The essay is precisely this form of circum*scription*: Montaigne is writing around his life, encircling it, strengthening it. And yet he is very much aware that there is no all-encompassing circle. In the words of his disciple Emerson: "Around every circle can be drawn another one."[9] This is precisely what Montaigne believes has shocked his age. Around the geographic circle they thought they lived in, another one—the globe itself—has been drawn. It makes him wonder if this globe is in fact the whole and if other entire worlds will yet be found.[10] And also like Emerson, he believes that the loss of a circle is something to celebrate, not mourn, if we manage to recognize it as an opportunity to transform our imperfect ways of life.[11]

How does one become circumscribed within this new circle? How does one circumscribe others within one's own circle? Moreover, how does one circumscribe others without dominating them? These are the questions that drive Montaigne's reflections. In answering them, he provides us with an early blueprint of how one might essay a global self. Central to Montaigne's writing are two practices: eclecticism and skepticism. I mean eclectic here in a very specific sense, one that is close to what we find in Diderot:

> The eclectic is a philosopher who, trampling underfoot prejudice, tradition, antiquity, general agreement, authority . . . dares to think for himself, returns to the clearest general principles, examines them, discusses them, admits nothing that is not based on the testimony of his experience and his reason.[12]

Diderot here could practically be describing the structure of Montaigne's essay, except that Montaigne is not trampling anything. On the basis of his reason and experience, Montaigne interrogates assumptions and prejudices, but his eclectic method extends even to these. His task is, again, "to rub and polish" knowledges by each other, not discarding anything that might be useful. In "Of Cannibals," he tests and compares what wisdom he has inherited against the world in which he has found himself.

And Montaigne knows that he cannot simply circumscribe this new world within his present existence: he must go through a transformation of his thought to do so. This is the role of his skepticism, described well by Emerson:

> I neither affirm nor deny. I stand here to try the case. I am here to consider . . . to consider how it is . . . This, then, is the right ground of the skeptic,—this of consideration, of self-containing [circumscription]; not at all of unbelief . . . He is the considerer, the prudent, taking in sail, counting stock, husbanding his means . . . The philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility. We want some coat woven of elastic steel.[13]

To be an eclectic one must also be a skeptic. That is to say, to choose what is best, one must continually consider the possibilities of the world, their meanings, their consequences, their contingencies. This does not mean relativism. It does not mean that everything is in doubt. It means only that all sides will be judged with respect to each other and with respect for each

other. And this becomes a "coat" because these are ideas and practices that must be tried on. They cannot be judged abstractly and from a distance, but only through engagement.

This, in turn, should make us doubt one standard reading of Montaigne's essay: that the space of the New World is only a fantastic projection that allows him to critique his own society.[14] Such a presumption goes against Montaigne's creed that "it is a common vice, not of the vulgar only but of almost all men, to fix their aim and limit by the ways to which they were born."[15] Montaigne is not simply imagining another world by which to compare his own; he is testing it to see if it offers other ways of life, or means of emending his own faults. As a skeptic who considers all, he is also not shy of criticizing: "This long attention that I devote to studying myself [*me considerer*] trains me also to judge passably of others, and there are few things of which I speak more felicitously and excusably."[16] Montaigne is not projecting, or at least he hopes he is not. Rather, he is criticizing customs by bringing them into contact with each other. Indeed, one of the customs he is criticizing is projection itself. This, in fact, is where the essay begins.

The opening paragraph of the essay describes the reactions of Greek and Roman kings who, when they thought they were fighting barbarians who lacked order or logic, were suddenly overrun by well-ordered opponents. This bit of ancient wisdom serves as a propaedeutic for the work of the essay: "Thus we should beware of clinging to vulgar opinions, and judge things by reason's way [*voye*], not by popular say [*voix*]."[17] The homonym here (at least in contemporary pronunciation) of *la voye* (way or path) and *la voix* (voice) is not merely clever. It also shows the unwanted but necessary proximity of the two. Reason's way is not something that one can just jump into and access; it is mixed up with, indeed informed by, the voices of society that inhabit us.[18] There is no "reason," after all, that can simply be separated out *from* the world, because the whole point of reason is to enable our ever improving engagement *in* the world. The place of the world in us must be "elucidated" in Castoriadis's sense. The problem is not that our reason is mixed up with our language, but that it is mixed up with a language we have not made our own.[19] The key is to transform the "popular say" (what is "vulgar") so that it aligns with this better engagement. As we will see, the transformation of language itself remains central throughout the essay.

If our reason is polluted with opinions about others, then we must learn to transform our subjectivity in order to be able to think globally. Montaigne teaches us to begin with not only skepticism, but a skepticism that is born of the experience of others:

> This discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration. I don't know if I can guarantee that some other such discovery will not be made in the future, so many personages greater than ourselves having been mistaken about this one. I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but clasp only wind.[20]

It is not simply that the discovery calls into question what Europeans think about other peoples. It calls into question the entire tradition of knowledge in which Montaigne has been trained. Plato claimed to know the truth of the invisible world, but he did not even know the shape of the visible one. He claimed to be able to build a perfect republic, but he did not know that one that surpassed his vision was already existent on this planet.[21] If Europeans are to judge the peoples of these new lands, they should first remember that they are not only ignorant, but also ignorant of their ignorance. Because of this double ignorance, they attempt to bear more than they possibly can and thus to *claim* (both philosophically and geographically) more than is their right.

This is part of Montaigne's analysis of the unbearable identity. On the one hand, the identity bequeathed to him—that of a man of Greco-Roman knowledge—is simply not able to bear the weight of the world in which he finds himself. And so he must develop new practices. At the same time, he is remarkably aware that the solution to his problem is not to rush in and presume that he understands these new spaces or these new peoples. This would be unbearable in the second and third senses of this concept: that it would be more than he has the capacity to hold and that, in his attempt to hold more than was his share, he would destroy others. "So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper!"[22]

This is one of the several meanings embedded in Montaigne's evocative phrase "We embrace everything, but clasp only wind." The Europeans clasped the wind that brought them to the New World and quickly preceded to reduce everything there to wind and ashes. The irony for Montaigne is that this is the opposite of actually "clasping the wind," which is to say, learning its lessons: "We are all wind [*nous sommes par tout vent*]. And even the wind, more wisely than we, loves to make a noise and move about, and is content with its own functions, without wishing for stability and solidity, qualities that do not belong to us."[23] We are *all* wind in that we are alive by our

breath, and *we* are all wind in that all humans are composed of the same elements. Thus while we, like the wind, by the aid of the wind, may travel the whole earth, we must, like the wind, by the aid of our understanding of the wind, remain content with our functions, and not try to establish ourselves masters over what, and whom, we are not.

Montaigne proceeds by way of what appears to be a digression into accounts of lost islands mentioned in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The most obvious context is again to test the knowledge of antiquity against the knowledge of the present. But it is also important that Montaigne carefully selects the details of these accounts. The account from Plato is about the kings of the rumored island of Atlantis and how they attempted to "subjugate" a number of nations until they lost to the Athenians. When he speaks of Aristotle, Montaigne mentions an island of great fertility and wealth to which many escaped until the "lords of Carthage . . . expressly forbade anyone to go there any more."[24] With these stories, he marks the two poles of European exploration: on the one hand, the desire for global dominance; on the other, the desire for alternative modes of life outside governmental or economic exploitation. That the first story ends with "the Flood" perhaps suggests that it is in part the sin of empire that caused the Flood.[25] And that the lords of Carthage came to forbid the alternative life practiced in antiquity perhaps signals the destruction of alternative lifeworlds that European conquest was unleashing.[26] Thus, although Montaigne rules out the possibility that the New World was known in antiquity, he subtly hints that antiquity provides lessons for the lost hopes and actual horrors of discovery.[27]

This twin potential of subjugation and the creation of free autonomous spaces is directly linked to one of the more complex features of Montaigne's essay: whom he claims as his informant about "cannibals" (actually, the Tupi of Brazil). Although it appears that Montaigne closely read the travel accounts of some of his contemporaries, especially Jean de Léry, he tells us that his best informant was a servant of his who had spent a decade or so in Brazil.[28] What he praises about his servant is this man's simplicity: he is "so simple that he has not the stuff to build up false inventions and give them plausibility; and [he is] wedded to no theory."[29] If he were cleverer, Montaigne suggests, he could not but add his own thoughts to things and not present them as they are: "to give credence to their judgment and attract you to it, they [clever people] are prone to add something to their matter, to stretch it out and amplify it."[30] Now because there is in fact no evidence of this servant ever having actually existed,[31] one wonders if what

Montaigne, the too-clever man, has added here to give credence to his account is nothing other than this servant himself.

For Stephen Greenblatt, this cross-identification that Montaigne performs between his servant and the Tupi is part of his general attempt to overcome possession—of labor, of land, and of self. Greenblatt deals elegantly with the complexity of privilege that allows Montaigne to attempt this overcoming:

> To be sure, this circulation is paradoxically intertwined in Montaigne with a powerful sense of what it means to possess the estate and the title of Montaigne. But that possession, constitutive of his name and essential to his identity, is none the less shot through with intimations of loss . . . [He is] one who has abjured the desire to possess the souls of others and, for that matter, to possess himself.[32]

The attempt to overcome one's self by way of identification with others of course always runs the risk of both appropriation and essentialization. That is to say, it risks reducing others to a single, identifiable trait (simplicity) and then taking from them the one thing power has reduced them to when it proves useful to you (something like literary gentrification). I think we can safely say that Montaigne is guilty of this, though he does take steps against it: he attempts to see the world differently than his habits and his class have disposed him to. This is not a question of positively valuing what had been once negatively valued (the folksiness of the plain folk, say), but rather of leveling the distinction between folks and seeing that we are all the admixture of our natures and nurtures and that those natures and nurtures are never themselves pure and essentializable so much as constantly varying within themselves the ranges of human reason. "Human reason is a tincture infused in about equal strength in all our opinions and ways, whatever their form: infinite in substance, infinite in diversity."[33]

We are being apprised here of another fact that will prove central to the closing sections of the essay, namely, that transforming himself in relation to the New World will also force Montaigne to transform his relation to his own immediate surroundings. For he has realized that his difference from "[his] manual laborers" is no vaster than his difference from "Scythians and Indians."[34] "I often say it is pure stupidity that makes us run after foreign and scholarly examples . . . [W]e have not the wit to pick out and put to use what happens before our eyes."[35] Here is another element of his

eclecticism—to consult ancient philosophers, but also to consult the ordinary: "from the most ordinary, commonplace, familiar things, if we could put them in their proper light, can be formed the greatest miracles of nature and the most wondrous examples, especially on the subject of human actions."[36] Long before "the ordinary" became a subject of Romantic fascination, or a critical site of the critique of labor, Montaigne understood that within the most quotidian moments of our lives roared the toil and wonder of the whole globe. For him to understand himself, or a Tupi man, or a man who worked for him, required equal strengths of attention and grace. That the practices of the global self are intimately related to the question of class, and that, conversely, the question of class requires a new relation to our global self, will remain crucial into the work of D. T. Suzuki.

Montaigne never gives us easy answers; the interpretations always slip away. He is duplicitous here, telling us he hasn't consulted the cosmographers when we know he has. He is not simple or plain; he is cleverer than he has told us he wants to be. But perhaps this is precisely where his honesty lies. He is not trying to pretend to be able to do more than he can. He is telling us that in spite of his efforts he cannot but project, that he has failed to register fully, that he cannot become transparent, and that he cannot, in a sense, tell the truth. He is trying, still. And he should remind us that we are no better. We, too, have prejudices about others, both local and distant. We, too, are formed differently by our lives, all of which offer advantages and disadvantages. Our task is to learn to sort through these, live within limits, and transform what we can. He lies to remind us that he cannot but lie—clever people, after all, "cannot help altering history a little."[37] And he exposes his prejudice because he is trying to write through it; because he is trying to recircumscribe himself in a new, more just, more global circle, and he knows that he is not there yet.

One of the reasons for his limitation is the ambiguity of language itself. Turning back to the subject at hand—the accounts of the New World—Montaigne offers a preliminary conclusion that "there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation . . . except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice."[38] Barbarian itself once simply meant "foreign, non-Hellenic," and it referred to those who did not speak Greek.[39] The idea that the barbarian, the outsider, the non-speaker, was also rough, vicious, or crude was a meaning that slowly accrued on the word.[40] This etymology of the arrogance of barbarism had been used in 1559 by Joachim du Bellay in his *Defense and Enrichment of the French Language*. Du Bellay noted a similar reversal to what we find in Montaigne: "As Anarchasis

said, the Scythians were barbarians among the Athenians, but so were the Athenians among the Scythians."[41] For du Bellay, the "vulgar" French that both he and Montaigne use should not be thought of as barbarous in the pejorative sense. It is simply not Greek, and perhaps for that the better. Montaigne implicitly draws on the fact that his own language was once considered barbarous to underscore the relativity of the appellation.

About language more generally, Stanley Cavell has argued that "our words are our calls or claims upon the objects and contexts of our world."[42] Montaigne's point is precisely that calling some peoples barbarian makes a claim on our right to possess their world. To question the word barbarian is to question this claim. There can be no practice of the global self that does not interrogate the language that we use to speak of others or ourselves. This will not always mean that the language we need is available. Our languages alternate too quickly between the poles of singularization and collectivization to be able to speak meaningfully about the plurality of existence. Knowing this, and knowing that he cannot jump out of language, Montaigne will ask us to consider it: what it does, how it shapes our thought, how we repeat it without making it our own. Cavell continues: "This mode of controlling ambiguity shows that our mind is chanced, but not forced, by language. The point is to get us to assess our orientation or position toward what we say."[43] And, equally, whom we say it about.

Montaigne returns to his conjecture about why we are chanced by language: "it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in."[44] This is *not* a lament about our knowledge. This is not about escaping customs in order to find some universal truth outside custom. This is a statement of fact about our knowledge. There simply does not exist a way [*une voye*] of thinking that is outside the language [*la voix*] of our countries.[45] But there does exist the possibility that by confronting that language with other languages, we may begin to develop a more complex understanding of the world.

And then again, we may not. There is nothing intrinsically just about the attempt to essay the globe. One might quickly fall prey to prejudice, or domination, or presumption. Montaigne follows the above sentence about custom: "*There* is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manner in all things." Grammatically, "there" should refer to "the country we live in" that precedes it. And, indeed, the sentence reads like an ironically stated critique of chauvinism. But it might also be seen to spring forward, with "there" referring not to one's own country, but

rather to one's imagination about the perfection of another. Thus he continues: "Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course."[46] And because Montaigne then proceeds to an encomium to nature, it would seem that perfection *is* "*there*"—in that other world that has just been encountered in his century.

This is one way at least to understand an ambivalence in the essay. In the following paragraph, Montaigne gives his famous account, cited by Gonzalo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, of a land without any of the trappings of civilization, yet still exceeding the "idealized . . . golden age" of Greek philosophers and poets.[47] Montaigne would seem here to present the new world as one of natural perfection and harmony, without human artifice or reflection. And yet, a few pages later, he criticizes this very conception: "And lest it be thought that all this is done through a simple and servile bondage to usage and through the pressure of the authority of their ancient customs, without reasoning or judgment . . . I must cite some examples of their capacity."[48] This "capacity" is demonstrated not only by their own poetry, valor, and practices of love, but also by the critique of French society that Montaigne hears three Tupi men give in 1562. We will return to this. The question for now is, why does Montaigne begin by insisting on the naturalness of people, only later to revoke and critique that very description?

One plausible answer is that the essay itself charts the progress of his learning—from reading accounts, to listening to witnesses who had been there, to finally meeting and discoursing with men from Brazil. This movement also appears less linearly within the essay, perhaps because it represents a dance between his constituted self—who makes claims—and his constituting self—who is trying to feel the claim of another on him. But the key point, I believe, is that we can see the famous passage of primitive idealization as a performance of the very kind of thing that a clever as opposed to an honest witness would say. Indeed, the citations to Propertius, Lycurgus, Plato, Seneca, and Virgil that wind through the brief encomium to nature would seem to demonstrate that this is Montaigne's imagination, and not his servant, who is speaking. Moreover, we know that the list of attributes—"no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority . . ."—is not in fact Montaigne's. As Margaret Hogden has noted when arguing that someone other than Montaigne might have influenced Shakespeare's Gonzalo: "[This kind of description] was on the tip of every pen whenever the peoples of the New World were under discussion; or when the qualities of early, or far-off, or barbarous, or uncivil, or primitive man were subjects of debate."[49] The formula was so much in

circulation that Hogden, a chronicler of sixteenth-century anthropology, avoids suggesting a definitive, original source.

This perhaps explains why Montaigne separates out this passage from the factual description of the ways of life of the Tupi people that follows. In nonromanticized terms, he describes their climate, architecture, daily routines, food, activities, hobbies, crafts, religious beliefs, ethical codes, and then, finally, within the context of warfare, anthropophagy. He does nearly as well as anyone could at his time to understand this practice.[50] The work of contextual understanding is certainly part of essaying the globe. Montaigne uses what evidence he can, and the way that he shifts positions throughout "On Cannibals" perhaps shows less his inconsistency and more his willingness to admit that he might be wrong. At the same time, he is perfectly willing to take a position. Like Emerson's "coat of elastic steel," he is both flexible and willing to make assertions. But because he knows that his knowledge is imperfect and that he himself is imperfect, he will not make judgments that are not also self-reflective: "I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own."[51] In a time and a place such as I live in, the bellicose United States of the early twenty-first century, this kind of judgmental humility is a practice of the global self that many of our political leaders and private citizens should strive harder to embody. Indeed, even looking back in time, we might note that Montaigne's representations remain inadequate and flawed, while also recognizing that our own culture, and our own representations, will always struggle with difference.

One more practice for handling this is to turn it to an advantage: we, like Montaigne, might leverage difference for the purposes of critique. At the essay's close, Montaigne reveals that he met three Tupi men in Rouen, France, in 1562. He dialogued with them, albeit through an interpreter whose competence he severely doubts. Language here, as ever, is the means by which customs speak for themselves and compare themselves with other ways of life. And it also marks another moment of Montaigne's insistence on humility against the presumption of comprehension about how others live when we don't even understand what they say. But of what Montaigne does manage to grasp, he tells us that there were three things, "of which I have forgotten the third, and I am very sorry for it."[52] George Hoffmann speculates that the third thing may have been the Tupi's critique of Christian practices, which he takes as the fundamental subtext of the essay.[53] But it seems equally plausible that Montaigne really has forgotten and simply wants to mark for us the contingency of knowledge—a knowledge that he,

so to speak, hungers after, because he knows that imbibing it will help to "rub and polish" his thought.

That he wishes to remember the third thus serves to underscore the importance of the two things he does recall: first, that the Tupi cannot understand why so many men serve a child-king; and, second, how the impoverished of France, "emaciated with hunger and poverty," can "endure such an injustice," and why they "did not take the others by the throat, or set fire to their houses."[54] The movement of the essay's close is abrupt. Montaigne mentions these drastic acts, seeming almost to praise them, and turns away from the point to discuss briefly some practices of war. The essay then ends with the ironic remark "All this is not too bad—but what's the use? They don't wear breeches."[55] It's as if Montaigne suddenly throws up his hands, realizing the worthlessness of his contemporaries, and decrying that even the most important practices—the abolition of hierarchy, the overcoming of injustice, the dispossession of possession that Greenblatt commends—are unachievable by countrymen who won't even take them seriously because of a difference as absurd as clothing.

But perhaps by mentioning that he has forgotten the third point, he has something else in mind linked to his essaying practice. I began this section with a discussion of his essay on education because I believe these two essays to be deeply linked. After all, if Montaigne's contemporaries cannot solve the problems of injustice, perhaps a new generation will be able to. This is his final lesson about essaying the globe: that it must gesture toward the future as much as it relies on the past. Here is the significant passage from the education essay that glosses his method:

> There are in Plutarch . . . a thousand [insights] that he has only just touched on; he merely points out with his finger where we are to go, if we like, and sometimes is content to make only a stab at the heart of the subject. Just as that remark of his, that the inhabitants of Asia served one single man because they could not pronounce one single syllable, which is "No," may have given the matter and the impulsion to La Boétie for his *Voluntary Servitude*. Just to see him pick out that trivial action in a man's life, or a word which seems unimportant: that is a treatise in itself.[56]

Here are all the practices of "Of Cannibals" lovingly condensed: consult the ancients, consult cultural difference, read beyond what is given, compare

one's image of one's self against how one actually lives, pay attention to language and the ordinary, and bring all this to bear on the political limits of one's own life and time. Neither Plutarch nor La Boétie nor Montaigne can rip apart the world and resuture it with justice. But they can gesture us toward the kinds of practices that, with due diligence of application, might enable us to be the kinds of subjects who can be just both at home and abroad. And here is a final reason for Montaigne to mark that he has forgotten one of the three things he learned—to prod us to go out and find it. For "if learning is to us any good, we must not merely lodge it within us, we must espouse it."[57]

## Montaigne's Anti-Imperialism

A very different reading of Montaigne has recently been offered by Sankar Muthu in his book *Enlightenment against Empire*. Muthu's widely praised account was significant for several reasons. First, it helped transform the canon of European political thought by insisting that non-European peoples and the question of imperialism were central (and not merely marginal) interests of European Enlightenment thinkers. He also helped move us away from too constraining a view of *the* Enlightenment as a monolithic enterprise and focused on understudied writers like Diderot and Herder. A central claim of his study, however, is one that goes directly against what I have argued here. For Muthu, a thinker like Montaigne is part of the "noble savage tradition." This tradition is said to view the peoples of the New World as not fully human, because it considers them "natural" and not what Muthu calls "cultural agents." The former may be noble, but they are so because of contingent nature and not any genius of their own invention. The latter are "beings who, by their nature, diversely exercise their reason, memory and imagination, and who are necessarily embedded within and yet are also able to transform social practices and institutions."[58] By rendering the Tupi "naturally good" rather than as cultural agents, Muthu finds that Montaigne writes them out of humanity itself.[59] Montaigne, in spite of his protestations against imperialism, cannot properly generate an anti-imperial *theory*, because *only* the notion of humans as cultural agents can do that.

There are several things that can be said in response to this. First of all, it is, as we have seen, a weak reading of Montaigne. It ignores the complexity of his positions and the ways in which the essay embodies his auto-critique and development. For example, consider Muthu's reading of

the moment when Montaigne inveighs against his reader's assumption that the Tupi lack "reasoning or judgment": Montaigne cites only the songs of war and love "to prove that Amerindians are not simply creatures of custom (note that he does not, of course, aim to challenge the view that they are largely creatures of *nature*)."[60] This very idea that there exists a pure nature outside custom is of course one of the targets of the *Essays* as a whole. If we have not seen enough evidence already, we can also note that Montaigne even argues that this is true of animals: "Moreover, what sort of faculty of ours do we not recognize in the actions of the animals? Is there a society regulated with more order, diversified into more charges and functions, and more consistently maintained, than that of the honeybees?"[61] If he says this of bees, it's hard to see how it wouldn't apply to the Tupi! Furthermore, Montaigne does not just cite the songs, he also cites the Tupi's critique of French society. He is saying that these are a people not only as barbarous as we, but as capable of cross-cultural critique as we. They have philosophies of love and justice, and their philosophies challenge ours. This is erased from Muthu's summary. In an ironic moment, then, it is Muthu who silences the Tupi voice, not Montaigne.

My point is not, however, that Montaigne in fact fits within Muthu's category of anti-imperial thought as the idea of cultural agency. Quite to the contrary, Montaigne troubles this very conclusion that anti-imperialism relies *solely* on this notion. For Montaigne, after all, there is no such strict separation of agency and instinct, as Muthu claims. They mix into each other. But even in those instances where we rely more on nature than on reflection, what, exactly, is wrong with the spontaneous production of virtue? Should we always have to rationally reproduce it? And in the attempt to do so, is there not a real possibility that we will find ourselves too alienated from reality to be able to implement the desired changes? As Jean-Jacques Rousseau will come to suggest, there is a very plausible argument to be made that reflection is in fact injurious to virtue. By alienating us from our actions, "rationality" produces the possibility of distance, distraction, estrangement, and indifference. As Rousseau writes: "Reason is what turns man in upon himself. Reason is what separates him from all that troubles him and afflicts him. Philosophy is what isolates him and what moves him to say in secret, at the sight of a suffering man, 'Perish if you will; I am safe and sound.' "[62] In his writings on Montaigne and Rousseau, Muthu never submits reason itself to the kind of analyses that they both did.

Moreover, the idea that only the theory of cultural agency can fight imperialism is itself a kind of "ontological imperialism," or the idea that

only one's own theory of human nature is the only correct one. Never broached in Muthu's account is what it is exactly that the Tupi themselves may have believed. In insisting that Montaigne was only ever concerned with his own society, Muthu is in fact admitting that this is *his* only concern. As anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro puts it, "[B]y thinking that under the mask of the other it is always just 'us' contemplating ourselves, we end up contenting ourselves with a mere shortcut to the goal and an interest only in what 'interests us'—ourselves."[63] Recent anthropological and archival work by Viveiros de Castro has challenged Muthu's proposed universal idea in at least two ways. First, it has suggested that the idea of a specifically human notion of cultural agency is entirely foreign to the Tupi worldview, wherein the relationships between humans are no more important than the relationships between humans, animals, plants, and the earth.[64] This is explicitly disavowed in the tradition Muthu advocates, as when he approvingly cites Herder's idea that "[n]either the pongo nor the gibbon is your brother: the American and the Negro are. These . . . therefore you should not oppress . . . for they are humans, like you; with the ape, you cannot enter into fraternity."[65] But what does it mean to enter into fraternity with Amerindians or others who believe themselves to be in fraternity with nonhuman and even nonsentient beings? What would it mean to not merely accept the fact of this difference, but to learn to essay it—to try it on—as part of a practice of the global self? How many of us are truly capable of thinking not just "inter-species being," but the humanity of all "species"?

Second, Viveiros de Castro has called into question the ethnocentric idea that primitivism is the province of Europeans alone: "The Europeans offered to the Tupi an opportunity for self-transfiguration, a sign of the reunion of that which had been rent asunder at the origin of culture . . . Thus it was perhaps the Amerindians, not the Europeans, who saw the 'vision of paradise' in the American (mis)(sed) encounter."[66] I take "(mis)(sed) encounter" to mean both a "mis-encounter"—the ways of life in the Americas were not properly understood—and a "missed encounter"—the opportunity for exchange was lost. Montaigne's cross-cultural critique shows the possibility of an encounter in which peoples try their best to understand each other and, in so doing, truly shift their very notions of what it means to be human. I believe that Muthu unwittingly continues the (mis)(sed) encounter by relying solely on the notion of cultural agency as the grounding of universal politics. My point is not that this is a uniquely European idea or that it is entirely a bad one. But it is simply not the only one available to us. We might conceive of human subjectivity as spread across a number

of different potential relations to nature, as Philippe Descola has shown, or we might insist on "other modalities of agency," as Saba Mahmood has done. Or we might think of the human not as singular agent but as intersubjective node, as Hakugen Ichikawa has suggested, or we might follow Gandhi in insisting that the uniqueness of humanity is not agency but rather our ability to overcome violence.[67] The real question lies in the interstices of these conceptions, that is, in trying to see how such different visions of humanness can meaningfully speak to each other. As I come to argue, global relations are less about a single mode of understanding and more about learning how to negotiate what is shared and what differs across cultures. In this negotiation, sometimes we will rely on instinct, sometimes on reflection, and sometimes on any of our many other human capacities.

Finally, critiques like Muthu's do not give us any ability to parse the ways in which peoples invent their own past golden ages replete with critiques of modern rationality. Writers working on vastly different regions, such as James C. Scott in rural Malaysia, Partha Chatterjee in urban Bengal, and Frantz Fanon in revolutionary Algeria and colonial France, have all shown how this mode of nostalgia functions as a critique of actually existing exploitation.[68] We see this also today with "*buen vivir*" movements in Latin America, where there is a strong focus on renewing "indigenous ecology" and ways of life and reintegrating them into contemporary practices. Again the point here is not that these movements call for an anachronistic return, but rather that they oppose a single, dominant model of capitalist or even socialist rationality as the supreme value.[69] It is also the case, as Scott has argued based on his fieldwork on Zomia (in the steppes of central Asia), that what is often called "primitive" is often a "secondary" phenomenon. Scott's point is that people live what appear to be primitive lives not because they are evolutionarily "stuck" but rather because they have, in their own times and ways, rejected the pressures to state formation and its attendant oppressions and inequalities (although they may keep and create still other problems in the process).[70]

Pluralism, or at the least the kind of radical pluralism that I am advocating in this book, cannot simply mean respect of others' customs. It must insist that the plurality of humanity goes all the way down and that the challenge of a pluralistic politics includes ontological and cosmological diversity. As I argue more extensively when looking at the work of Immanuel Kant, this is precisely what is foreclosed by the tradition that Muthu advocates. Montaigne partakes of another tradition, one that, through complex practices of the global self, seeks to become the kind of person who can inhabit multiple ways of thought with a "fallibilistic" sense.[71] There are no

ahistorical values here, and there is no reason to praise ourselves or others for abstraction. After all, only a culture of war needs a theory of peace. Only a culture of economic stratification needs a theory of economic justice. Only a culture of slavery needs a theory of liberation.

This is not to say, of course, that Montaigne manages to accomplish a completely just essay of the globe. For example, the place of women in "Of Cannibals," as throughout his *Essays*, relegates them to the status of male fantasy and desire: "Being more concerned for their husbands' honor than for anything else, they [Tupi women] strive and scheme to [find their husbands] as many companions as they can, since that is a sign of their husbands' valor."[72] For Montaigne, this functions as a critique of the jealousy of French women rather than as a point at which "to rub and polish" the different possibilities for gender relations against each other. Many of the authors who attempt to "essay the globe" fail precisely on this front: they construct ideas and practices that, while not necessarily gendered in themselves, they often mark as being "for men only." This is a problematic traced throughout this book.

Montaigne, limited though he may remain, opens our discussion because of the fundamental role he played in establishing the relationship between the essay form and the construction of global subjectivity. Erich Auerbach wrote of Montaigne and his *Essays*:

> His book manifests the excitement which sprang from the sudden and tremendous enrichment of the world picture and from the presentiment of the yet untapped possibilities the world contained. And—still more significant—among all his contemporaries he had the clearest conception of the problem of man's self-orientation; that is, the task of making oneself at home in existence without fixed points of support. In him for the first time, man's life—the random personal life as a whole—becomes problematic in the modern sense.[73]

This task of self-orientation in a suddenly expanding world is precisely what I track through the rest of this book. But the tremendous excitement of it was of course not wonderful for all. Some, like Montaigne, were the recipients of a world that shook their parochialism and forced them on the thrilling path of self-transformation. Others found themselves encased and enslaved in identities that they are still fighting to overcome. Others still never took up this challenge at all. It is to this last group that I now turn.

## The Evasive Mood: Descartes, *Hamlet*, and Heidegger

It is perhaps counterintuitive for Auerbach to locate Montaigne as the first modern thinker because of his worldliness. Is not the modern, after all, the rise of the private, bourgeois subject, of individualism, of nationalism? To be sure, these transformations are part of the story of modernity. We see in texts like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) and Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637) the distinct turn that Charles Taylor has called "inwardness"—"the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths, and the connected notion that we are 'selves.' "[74] Taylor has argued that this is a form of thinking about humans that not only marks modernity, but is a unique modern invention that arose in a given time and place and may expire sometime in the future.[75] *Hamlet* and the *Discourse* are in some senses the two poles of this notion of the self. In the latter, we find the idea that the inward turn guarantees not only personal identity, but also the very possibility of truth. In the former, the inward turn is expressed as a prison house that vitiates our capacity to think clearly or act perspicaciously. But while the *Discourse* presents inwardness as a success story and *Hamlet* frames it as an abject failure, both mark the modern subject as a being whose truth is in her own mind.

As we have seen, this "Cartesian moment" is also where Michel Foucault located the loss of practices of the self in modernity. The subject became capable of thinking the truth within herself and therefore did not have to transform who she was to become a truthful subject. For Taylor, the difference between Descartes and Montaigne is between two visions of this inward turn: Montaigne's "forms of self-exploration" and Descartes's "forms of self-control."[76] In either case, the question of the global is not factored into these accounts.

Some years ago, Cornel West spoke of the power of American pragmatism as what he called its "evasion of philosophy." The pragmatists, following Emerson, avoided the Cartesian turn, with its quest for certainty and secure foundations of knowledge.[77] Emerson instead turned philosophy into a form of social criticism, focusing on "power, provocation, and personality."[78] While appreciative of how this makes sense of one possible narrative of modernity, I want to suggest in this section that Cartesianism *itself* was the evasion. Descartes is not the founding point of modernity that must be gotten around to ground new ways of thinking. Rather, his thought itself is an evasion of the need to become a global subject that marks modern thought. Descartes, like Hamlet, exists in the evasive mood—a kind of