

*Trapped and Troping:
Allegories of the Transnational
Intellectual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's
"Nervous Conditions"*

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A NUMBER OF postcolonial writers have produced fictional texts in which their narrators or protagonists function as surrogates for writers as transnational intellectuals. The embeddedness of this figuration is fraught with the material conditions of the very production and publication of these texts. That is to say, postcolonial intellectuals inhabit the "structures of violence"¹ which define their situatedness and serve as the site of production for this discourse. They inhabit a Western intellectual structure, all the while questioning and ejecting the very structure they inhabit. In such a position, these intellectuals are particularly susceptible to the possibilities of resolution offered at the level of transcendent categories. As transnational intellectuals, they shift ground and refer themselves to the category of consciousness and subjectivity even if consciousness of the material conditions that structure their existence does not necessarily lead them to alter these conditions and in fact may encourage them to elide the materiality of this contradictory position.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is meticulous in its attention to physical space, both geographical and bodily. The text details relentlessly the process of enculturation as a material process. Yet equally insistently, it deploys the category of a transcendent consciousness and refers to a liberated subjectivity. This ultimate gesture of reconciliation at the level of consciousness and its tortured syntax, read as an instance of postmodern reflexivity, remain unconvincing. And it may appear as a moment of narrative failure only if we invoke exclusively some rather arbitrary aesthetic criteria. It may be read, instead, more

instructively, as a textual transaction, a cultural document that maps the institutional spaces through which the shifting positions of the transnational intellectual must be plotted. A formal problem, a specifically narrative difficulty, arises out of the materiality of the intellectual's position.

Frantz Fanon pays particular attention to the materiality of this position,² to the spaces that intellectuals inhabit, and even to their bodily constitution. He observes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that for the "man of color," the colonial encounter is marked by "difficulties in the development of his bodily schema," that is, he experiences a "slow composition of [his] *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world."³ The difficulties arise out of a "corporeal malediction" inflicted on him by the colonizer, who had "woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (111). Conversely,⁴ Fanon contends, "the Negro, because of his body, impedes the closing of the postural schema of the white man" (160). Here then is a figure of the colonial *agon* in the form of two interlocked bodies. Fanon's perception that discursive formations proliferate around the body, that the density of "a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" impinge on the "bodily schema" underscores the materiality of his analysis of power. This power, moreover, is also directed toward the organization of space. Emphasizing both colonized bodies and colonized space in the opening pages of *The Wretched of the Earth*, he observes that the colonial world is one "cut in two." An analysis of this rigorous demarcation reveals its lines of force, "its ordering and geographical layout" (37-38). The effects of discursive power then are both somatic and geographic.

Moreover, Fanon recognizes that a specific modality of power operates at the metropolitan centre. He notes that in developed countries, certain disciplinary formations—such as education, religion, and the family—produce what he calls "aesthetic expressions of respect for the established order." These institutions as well as "a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs" (*Black Skin* 152). In other words,

power operates as discipline and insinuates itself through a multitude of banal mechanisms and induces "respect for the established order." This discipline, however, is not limited to the centre. It becomes, with colonialism, a planetary project and infiltrates the peripheries. As Benedict Anderson points out, on a global scale, through nineteenth-century map-making practices, "the entire planet's curved surface had been subjected to a geometrical grid" (173). Further, colonial cartography "put space under the same surveillance which the census-makers were trying to impose on persons" (173). Disciplinary power proliferates globally through the casting of a "totalizing classificatory grid" (184) which places both land and people under surveillance.

Fanon acknowledges that in an early phase of colonialism, "the agents of government speak the language of pure force" (*Wretched* 38). With the first anti-colonial uprisings, however, he expects the more brutal manifestations of colonialism to disappear—but at a high price: "the price of a much stricter control of the country's future destiny [and] a servitude that is less blatant but much more complete" (142). Although Fanon is addressing colonialism, his perception of the shift from pure force to a power "less blatant" clearly anticipates what Michel Foucault describes as the shift from punishment as the spectacular vengeance of the sovereign to the more efficient bureaucratic administration of discipline. Foucault observes that punishment is replaced by a "technology of reform" (48) that penetrates the body and inserts it into the "circuit of bio-power." This shift in modalities of power, Fanon observes, turns out to be "a saving of expense to the colonial power" (142). His remark that a number of postulates and propositions shape the individual's view of the world through the technological and institutional minutiae of everyday life directs our attention to what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges," ones that are "low-ranking" or "disqualified" (82).⁵

While Fanon at times does appeal to a people's consciousness, a collective consciousness, his work demonstrates that colonialism primarily constitutes a material intervention. He repeatedly refers to land and labour as the primary objects of colonialism,

and accordingly, he continually draws our attention to a specific conceptualization of space and a rigorous administration of the body. Fanon and Foucault are helpful in defining both the object of study and the method of analysis.⁶ Their emphasis on the body directs our attention to the materiality of power and disentangles us from a web of discursivities where progress and freedom are always projected in terms of a subjectivity invested with consciousness. Foucault points out that when “power takes hold on the body, this isn’t through its having first to be interiorized in people’s consciousness.” Rather, it operates through “a network or circuit of bio-power, or somato-power” (186). The point here evidently is not to dismiss consciousness but to displace it strategically from its privileged status as a category for analysis. With such a displacement and the consequent deflation of a series of exalted categories, we are equipped better methodologically to turn to the subjugated and disqualified, to the realm of the banal.

Contemporary postcolonial fiction has responded to colonial cartography not only by questioning the adequacy of its classificatory grid but also by demonstrating that surveillance is a technique through which power operates as a positivity. It is not limited negatively to objectification but positively to subjectification; through technologies of self, it produces subjects. Consciousness of these processes, moreover, is not effective as a means of resistance. While Dangarembga herself speaks of “the consciousness of being a woman,” for example, she adds that this consciousness must be situated in “a wider context” (Veit-Wild 105). Further, she is wary of the benefits of a specific type of education, particularly as it is presented in its liberal aspect as a consciousness-raising project. Commenting on one of her characters, Maiguru, she observes, “Her education enables her to see, to become conscious of it [colonialism], but it really doesn’t enable her to do anything about it.” She points out that “consciousness always has a very great individual cost” but hopes that someday consciousness will provide “a basis for action” (qtd. in Petersen 346). While the narrator of *Nervous Conditions* invokes the exalted categories of consciousness, emancipation, enlightenment, and such, the text is steadily corporalized, the narrative moves into the space of the banal, and language itself is represented in its materiality.

Decolonized space, though especially dense, consists not of a spectacular density but of a uniform, a dispersed density. This space is a corporalized space in which the technologies of discipline proliferate and attach themselves to the body, hence its density and its banality.⁷ The exercise of disciplinary power must be apprehended not at the level of the subject endowed with consciousness but in the space of the banal. Disciplinary mechanisms are not aimed at the transformation of consciousness, and discipline is not internalized at the level of consciousness. These mechanisms are aimed at bodies, and discipline is, we might say, epidermalized. In the process, bodies are trained, bodily functions regulated, gestures are acquired, postures cultivated, styles are adopted, and attitudes assumed.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga articulates a tertiary space of the homestead, the mission, and the Convent. The relationship among the three spaces is fluid. The spaces, traversed by lines of force carrying their own intensities, are subject to constant and repeated deterritorializations and reterritorializations.⁸ Tambu moves through all three spaces as a figure of the transnational intellectual in the making; Nyasha, caught in the intermediate space, has travelled in the Western space and occasionally visits the "native" space of the homestead. Nhamo's movement from the homestead to the mission, though a relatively minor movement, anticipates these larger movements and their finely calibrated differences. Because of "something that he saw at the mission" (7), he "refused to come home" (6). A year later, "no longer the same person" (52), he was not only "several tones lighter in complexion," but he "had forgotten how to speak Shona" (52). These details—such as his skin tone and his mother tongue—serve metonymically to signal the process of expatriation that is a central concern of the novel. Although we are informed rather humorously that Nhamo has not really forgotten Shona, we are told that "he did not speak to [his mother] very often any more" (52). Only his father is impressed: "the more aphasic he became . . . the more my father was convinced that he was being educated" (53). Whatever the "something" is that Nhamo sees at the mission, at his death, his mother is uncompromising in her indictment of it: "First you

took his tongue so that he could not speak to me. . . . You bewitched him and now he is dead. . . . You and your education have killed my son" (54).

This movement from the homestead to the mission, however, is enfolded in a simultaneous movement, that of Nyasha from the mission to the homestead. Her return to the homestead is exacerbated moreover by a long stay in England: "I missed the bold, ebullient companion I had had who had gone to England but not returned from there" (51). And Nyasha too has forgotten Shona, as Tambu registers indignantly: "Shona was our language. What did people mean when they forgot it? . . . I remembered speaking freely and fluently before they went away, . . . Now they had turned into strangers" (42). Even though Nhamo is disposed of fairly early in the novel and Nyasha's movements are mapped in detail, the same "something" that Nhamo sees is deployed in a series of statements both from and about Nyasha. Tambu, for example, tells us, "I could not help wondering what my cousin had seen that I had not" (96-97); later he says, "Nyasha gave me the impression of moving, always moving and striving towards some state that she had seen" (152). Nyasha herself insists that "when you've seen different things you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing" (117).

"Something," "some state," "different things," "the right thing" are the only expressions the text offers by way of explanation for certain severe disjunctions in the narrative. This is because the something that Nyasha has seen does not show itself clearly in its objective existence. It is a movement—related to power—that courses through an intricate and compelling network. In order to elude this network, Nyasha, as we have seen, is "moving, always moving and striving." She explains: "'You have to keep moving . . . getting involved in this and that, finding out one thing and another. Moving, all the time. Otherwise you get trapped'" (96). Making clear what she means by moving, she asserts, "You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. . . . But once you get used to *it*, well, *it* just seems natural. . . . You're trapped. They control everything you do" (117; emphasis added). Further, the narrator observes that Nyasha is "experimental," always insisting on "alternatives"

(178), always engaged in the "probing of this and that and everything" (97); she thrives "on inconsistencies" (116) and is "at times stormy and turbulent" (151).

Above all, Nyasha is mobilized against being "trapped," against what she calls "it" in the passage above. The text does not simply oppose mobilization and fixity, dynamic and static. Rather, it posits the pairs as two types of movement. While the "it" may arguably have a direct reference to "being an underdog," the progress from "it" to "they control everything" suggests a larger referential framework. What seems natural is the individual's subjection, the disciplining of the subject, and the normalization and routinization of disciplinary power. What individuals get used to is the stricter control; their internalization of discipline results in complete servitude. The novel documents the ways in which the body is implicated in the mechanisms of power, and to this end, it maintains a level of materiality, of corporality. The site of the most furious contention between Nyasha and her father, Babamukuru, is precisely the body. It often has to do with what she wears, how she talks, what she eats (or does not eat), and whether she dances (or whether she does not). The body is also the site on which Nyasha enacts her resistance. She wears short dresses, smokes cigarettes, and goes dancing. When forced to eat, she withdraws to the bathroom, "gagging and choking," using her toothbrush to disgorge (190).

In the schizophrenic language of the climactic passage of the novel (200-01), the referential framework is completely dissipated. In spite of this referential slide, however, the moment is entirely lucid. If we extract a series of statements, represented in direct discourse, as Nyasha's speech, we have the following:

I don't want to do it.
 They've done it to me.
 They did it to them too.
 Why do they do it . . . to me and to you and to him?
 Do you see what they've done?
 They've taken us away.
 They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other.
 They've trapped us. They've trapped us.
 Look what they've done to us.
 I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you.

In spite of the rigid polarization of “they” and the progression, me-you-him-us, there is no identification between “me” and “you”: “but I’m not one of you.” Rather, the sliding of references throughout the passage and the substitutions of pronouns serve as a mapping of the micropolitics of power. The disappearance of the “brutal manifestations” of power leaves only its circulation, the lines of which are marked along a series of innocuous pronouns. Even if there are certain moments of ostentatious brutality in the novel, Nyasha’s resistance is directed not at the individual agent (“it’s not his fault”), but at a structure of relations. Earlier in the novel, she says, “It’s not really him, you know. I mean not really the person. It’s everything, it’s everywhere” (174). The lexicographical diffuseness in general and the referential obscurity suggest the nebulousness of agency and trace the circuits of power only by marking out its effects.

In this scene, as technologies of discipline are implanted on the body and power courses through its network of bodies, literacy as a technology provokes a violent reaction on the site of its implantation. In fact, as we shall see, the syntax of the narrative simultaneously deploys the body and the book, food and literacy, eating and reading. The novel ostensibly is about Western education, Christian education specifically. Throughout the novel, education is associated with emancipation (56) and progress (147). It is concerned with developing backward sectors of the community (151) and, perhaps more grandly, with freedom (183). While education is, to be sure, consistently perceived as a means out of economic deprivation, the language by which it is articulated unmistakably invokes the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment. These are the narratives that Nyasha questions relentlessly. While Tambu is “plunging into these books . . . everything from Enid Blyton to the Bronte sisters,” Nyasha, although herself absorbed in her reading of D. H. Lawrence at one time, is more interested in “history”: she thinks that Tambu is “reading too many fairy-tales” (93); she prefers to read about “the condition in South Africa,” about “Nazis and Japanese and Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” and about the “Jews’ claim to Palestine.”

The climactic passage of the novel must be understood in such a context. The violent image at the centre of this scene is the

culmination of the relentless interrogation that Nyasha directs at the processes of colonization:

She rampaged, shredding her history book between her teeth ("Their history. Fucking Liars. Their bloody lies"), breaking mirrors, her clay pots, anything she could lay her hands on and jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh, stripping the bedclothes, tearing her clothes from the wardrobe and trampling them underfoot.

(201)

Colonialism attempts to discipline the "native," and the technologies of reformation are applied at diverse points. The most tenacious point of implantation, however, the point of deepest penetration, is the colonized body. As Foucault remarks, "nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power" (57-58). We are reminded that in her unswerving judgement, Ma'Shingayi is quite clear about what the mission at Umtali did to her son: they "took his tongue." The points of implantation of colonial technologies of discipline define a logic and syntax which culminate in Nyasha's bizarre "shredding [of] her history book between her teeth." Since the colonialists mutilated the native body and "took [the native] tongue," Nyasha reciprocally mutilates "their history," taking the pages of colonial history "between her teeth" and shredding the process in an unanswerable corporalization of that history. In this scene of violent, carnival degradation,⁹ while "stripping," "tearing," and "trampling," she is also "jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh."

While Nyasha's movement is from the West (the outside) to the native (the inside) in the form of an "immersion," Tambu moves conversely from a native interior to a Western exterior, in the form of an "emergence."¹⁰ In the hybridized, intermediate space of the mission, Tambu undertakes a "slow composition" of a bodily schema in response to the technologies of discipline directed at her body. In the only instance of her resistance to the authority of Babamukuru, Tambu, caught between conflicted claims, experiences acutely the destructuring of a bodily schema, the "splitting into two disconnected entities" (167)—"the body on the bed" and "the mobile, alert me" who "had gone somewhere where he could not reach me" (166). However, this post-

colonial and neocolonial space—a “capillary form” of power—constitutes the lines of force, encircles the subject, and produces docility (Foucault 39). A specific regime of discipline saturates the space and directs its attention to a meticulous management, a thorough administration of the body. This form of power, as Foucault puts it, “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (39).

The homestead and the mission, however, are not strictly “compartmentalized.” The first chapter of the novel, in fact, offers a semiotics of colonialism by presenting a topography of the native landscape. The prominent signs are the “river, the trees, the fruit and the fields” (3). On either side of the road, there are “acacia, lantana, msasa and mopani” (2). The river Nyamarira has a special place in the life of the village, particularly in the life of its women. There the women collect water, wash clothes, bathe, and sun themselves. The riverbank is their gathering place: “the women had their own spot for bathing and the men their own too” (3). The landscape, however, is disrupted, first, by “District Council Houses” built “to enable administration” (3), then by the more banal signs of metropolitan encroachment: “Fanta and Coca-Cola . . . a gramophone . . . a beer-hall.” As a result, in “the interests of decency bathing was relegated to further up the river” (4).

The prevailing signs in the semiotics of the intermediate space are those of a technology that relentlessly “reaches into,” “touches,” “inserts itself into” the bodies and everyday lives of those in the “contact zone.” Tambu thus experiments with the “panelled toilet” (79), discovers “bedclothes” (91), and delights in the “joy of that bath!” (90). She is impressed by the “glossy and dark” appearance of the dining table and by “its shape and size,” marvelling that “no-one who ate from such a table could fail to grow fat and healthy” (69). She marvels also at the way her cousin “work[s] her way daintily through egg and bacon and tea” (91). After some initial trouble, she herself learns to use knife and fork (82). Her growth in this rich environment produces the expected result: she becomes “quite plump.”¹¹ She notes that she

begins to menstruate (95), which causes her to be anxiety-ridden, not because of her menstruation per se but because she might be "making a mess" in the "white bathroom" (95). Nyasha offers her a tampon, and after an initial hesitation about the consequences of inserting into herself the offensively shaped object, she nervously does so "with minimum discomfort" (96).

Even before Nhamo's death, that is, before the prospect of "emancipation" presents itself to Tambu, she has what she calls "complex, dangerous thoughts . . . not the kind that you can ponder safely but the kind that become autonomous and malignant if you let them" (39). When Nyasha has a violent confrontation with her father, Tambu is able to "leave tangled thoughts knotted, their loose ends hanging. [She doesn't] want to explore the treacherous mazes that such thoughts led into" (116). What Tambu does is deploy a strategy to impede the momentum of a movement that threatens to erupt into action. To subdue "malignant" and "treacherous" thoughts is to safeguard her complicity with authority, with her benefactor, Babamukuru. As she observes, such thoughts, "if considered too deeply would wreak havoc with the neat plan [she] had laid out for [her] life" (76). Once she is induced into the circuitry of banality, once she is seduced by a specific libidinal economy, she adopts a posture of "greater virtue" (88). Her complicity with disciplinary authority and reverence for the emancipatory project stunted "the growth of [her] faculty of criticism"; this "happened insidiously" (164). Thoroughly enmeshed in the lines of force that traverse the terrain and the body of the intermediate space, Tambu turns docile, even if it is a docility performed with "masochistic delight" (169).¹² As figure of the transnational intellectual in the making, she yields to the seduction of power and seeks desperately to assert a vestigial agency in masochistic complicity.

The novel begins with Nhamo's and Nyasha's alienation from their community and Tambu's anger over their alienation, which she experiences as her own "exclusion" (39). Yet Tambu repeats precisely their movements. Tambu the adult narrator,¹³ though sympathetic to young Tambu, distances herself from her, observing her complicity and the irony in her complicity. This is evident in the portrayal of her sense of alienation and exclusion in her

relationship with her mother and Nyasha. Tambu is rapidly assimilated into life at the mission: "I always hated leaving the mission and all my friends and Nyasha" (108). When she does go home for Christmas, as she listens to her mother talk about her illness, her mind drifts away from her mother and her suffering (129). At a gathering of the women at the homestead, Ma'Shingayi is characteristically direct and perceptive, if somewhat strident in speaking with Tambu: "You think your mother is so stupid she won't see Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her white ways? . . . If it is meat you want that I cannot provide for you, if you are so greedy you would betray your own mother for meat, then go to your Maiguru" (140-41).

The movement from homestead to mission is augmented by the second movement from mission to Convent. The mission, as intermediate space, serves as the ground for recruitment into the Convent. It produces "good Africans" (107). When Tambu's departure for the Sacred Heart Convent is imminent, her mother's health breaks down completely. Tambu knows that she can restore her mother's health by not going to the Convent, but this, she protests, is "asking too much of [her]" (184). Nyasha responds ironically to Tambu's admission to the Convent and to Tambu's musings about what an opportunity it would be: she says, it "would be a marvellous opportunity . . . to forget who you were, what you were and why you were that" (178-79). She calls the "recruitment" a process of "assimilation" in which those "who might prove a nuisance if left to themselves" are accommodated in "an honorary space" in which they would make sure that students behaved themselves (179).

The intermediate space, marking a stage in the process of discipline, is a space of seduction. Tambu's mother and Nyasha apprehend her being selected to go to the Convent as a process of expatriation. Although Nyasha's response may imply conspiracy, it cannot be read at the level of intentionality. Rather, she examines the structure of this process and comments on its effects. Those who demonstrate the greatest potential are selected for the Convent. Their selection serves simultaneously as their containment. Thus the elect few enter the Sacred Heart Convent, where they are the only "natives": "I looked and looked

and searched carefully through the crowd, but I could not find a single black face which did not belong to our party, except of course for the porters." We also learn that the Sacred Heart is a segregated domain: pointing to a particular section, a nun explains to the family that "the Africans live in here" (194). The movement into this third space may thus be read as a movement into Western space.

Once at the convent, Tambu practically repeats the movements she rehearsed when she moved from the homestead to the mission. She finds that reading takes up so much of her time that there is none left "in which to miss Nyasha" (195). If Tambu does feel a pang of guilt, it dissolves quickly "in the stream of novelty and discovery" into which she has plunged (197). When Nyasha has a nervous breakdown, Tambu knows that Nyasha needs her, but she tells herself that she has "to go to school" (202). She is assailed by guilt because the thought of returning to the Convent fills her with pleasure: "The books, the games, the films, the debates—all these things were things I wanted" (203). In the intermediate space of the mission, discipline insinuates itself through everyday physiological processes signalled in the series of activity comprising toilet-bedclothes-bath-egg and bacon-tampon. In the space of the Convent, the series now comprises activities related to literacy: reading-discovery-school-books. The two series, however, are in fact complementary not contradictory.

In *Nervous Conditions*, though there are moments of physical confrontation and eruptions of violence, the prevailing procedure of the narrative is one in which the body is caught in a continual process of encirclement, a process in which a "technology of reform" impinges directly on the body. It is not so much an internalization in consciousness as an epidermalization of discipline. Discourse as an emblematic instance of the productions of technology is thus corporalized. Literacy is represented in its materiality. Utterance is tied to its physical coordinates, and these physical coordinates describe the syntax of the narrative. The "tongue" finds its syntactical coordinate in "meat"; and tongue and meat describe this syntax. Likewise, books are "devoured"; Babamukuru is described as "having devoured English letters with a ferocious appetite!" (36) and

Tambu as “eat[ing] the words that come out of her [Maiguru’s] mouth” (140). And, as we have seen, Tambu “plunge[s]” into books (93), “plunge[s]” into a stream of novelty (197)—an enthusiasm that Ma’Shingayi identifies as “greedy.”

Against this steady corporalized discipline, we have an incipient insurrectionary mobility; we have thoughts that are described as “stirring” (39), “loose,” “treacherous” (116), “distracting” (69), and with the potential to “wreak havoc” (76). But this mobility is stilled by nothing as profound as progress or emancipation or freedom. Rather, the rebellious mobility is weighted; and the non-productive expenditure of energy is disciplined and directed into productive circuits entirely at the level of the banal. This discipline is achieved at the level of the body; it is a meeting of corporal need, a fulfillment of appetite. The body is the prioritized site for the implantation, for the attachment of technologies of discipline, and this attachment occurs almost imperceptibly with a surreptitious complicity, “with minimum discomfort.” At the first remove, homestead to mission, the series of toilet-bath-egg and bacon-tampon culminates in Tambu’s declaration, “I grew quite plump.” At the second remove, mission to convent, discipline is achieved at the level of novelty and discovery, and pleasure is derived from material things.

If Tambu, as adult narrator, adds a dimension of self-consciousness, and thus of irony, to the narrative, the last paragraph of the novel does not suggest irony but confession. After the precise and meticulous depiction of the movements we have observed, the final paragraph has Tambu telling us, “Although I was not aware of it then, no longer could I accept Sacred Heart. . . . my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed” (203-04). The narrator then claims an “aware[ness],” a consciousness, even if it is projected beyond the narrative time of the text. This appeal to consciousness as a strategy of resistance, however, contradicts the dominant mode, the prevailing syntax of the narrative, one that relentlessly documents the process of colonialism as a material, corporal one.

In spite of the narrator’s early assertion that this “story is not after all about death” (1), Tambu’s movement in the syntax of the novel is punctuated first by death, then by her mother’s

mental illness (which requires shock treatment), and finally by Nyasha's nervous condition. Only the figure of rebellion and the moment of revolt are violent: Nyasha, periodically disgorging that which is forcibly inserted into her body, initiates a counter-movement to the prevailing syntax of the narrative. She launches this counter-movement, this resistance, precisely from the contested site, the body that would be disciplined. She shreds the book with "her teeth"; she "plunges into" "her flesh" and jabs "viciously" at it in a carnivalesque and schizophrenic deterritorialization of her body. In spite of the assertion in the introductory paragraph that this story is about the narrator's escape, about other characters' entrapment, and about Nyasha's rebellion ("[which] may not in the end have been successful"), it is Nyasha's violent rebellion that initiates the lines of flight from the territorialized body of the colonized native.

A central trope of the text then is entrapment, rebellion, and escape. Nyasha rebels against the naturalizing of the trap: "once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural" (117). Whether Nyasha's rebellion is successful or not, she accurately registers the workings of a disciplinary regime in general and the potential for discursive violence in the project of literacy in particular. The narrator, however, is careful to distinguish between Nyasha's resistance, which she considers less than successful, and her own form of escape, which, as we have seen, is predicated on an appeal to the category of consciousness that "really doesn't enable her to do anything about" (qtd. in Petersen 346) her subjection. In fact, the narrator's assertion of awareness may be read as her subjection to a micropolitics of power, as her subjectification in a process of discipline. If power is apprehended not *negatively* as repression, prohibition, or objectification but *positively* as producing subjects, the narrator's rhetoric of consciousness signals this subjectification and serves to elide the materiality of her contradictory position.

The reader, to be sure, cannot overlook Tambu's "escape" from the brutalizing patriarchy and dehumanizing poverty of the "native" space, but the bulk of the narrative is enacted once she enters the intermediate space, and from then on, in the making of a postcolonial intellectual (the postcolonial artist as a young

woman), she is increasingly consolidated in a specific economy, subject to a specific regime of discipline, that of the Western intellectual enterprise. And the postcolonial and transnational intellectual is peculiarly prone both to submit to a corporalized and banal regime of discipline and, having done so, to escape this normalization and neutralization by deploying the category of consciousness as a mechanism of escape. The intellectual attempts to escape his/her neutralization by asserting, questioning, refusing, all the while, inhabiting the very structure he/she questions and refuses. In other words, the text, with its narrator, trapped and troping, inhabiting a Western intellectual structure and engaging specific discourses, may be read as an allegory of the postcolonial and transnational intellectual.

An exacerbated issue in postcolonial studies has been the centrality of discourse,¹⁴ and a particular type of postcolonial fiction has been produced in which the narrator or the protagonist serves as a figure of the intellectual. These texts, directly implicated in the “structures of violence,” need to be read not as instances of postmodern auto-referentiality but as texts with a narrative and critical difficulty arising from a specific historical circumstance. To read texts such as Tsitsi Dagarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* as allegories of the transnational intellectual is to plot the proliferation of the technologies of discipline in the tertiary spaces of the transnational and to acknowledge that the intellectual is particularly prone to the blandishments offered at the level of the banal, while simultaneously eliding this position by an appeal to a unique subjectivity endowed with consciousness. These texts remind us that as intellectuals trapped in powerful institutional structures, we may in practice be desperately troping.

NOTES

¹ The term is Spivak’s; see 138-51.

² Although Fanon is sometimes caustic about the “facile internationalism” of a cosmopolitan position (*Wretched* 83), his strenuous efforts to establish a relationship with “the masses” are themselves indicative of his ambivalent position. Thus when he asserts that the “peasant’s cloak will wrap [the militant nationalist]

around with a gentleness and firmness that he never suspected" (126) and that intellectuals must "bury themselves" in "the hearts of the people" (187), perhaps he tells us more about himself than about the peasant. It is equally important to note, however, that he also underscores the "fluctuating movement" of the people, "this zone of occult instability where the people dwell" (227). While "occult" may still suggest a distance from the people, his emphasis on fluctuation and instability remove him from the essentialism of the "peasant's [maternal] cloak," from the desire to be wrapped and buried.

- 3 He continues with a graphic representation of this composition of a bodily schema: "I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly" (111).
- 4 Strictly speaking, according to Fanon, the converse is not true—that the white man is constituted in relation to the black man—because the "black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (110). Nonetheless, the appearance of the black body within the parameters of this bodily schema does have some effect. Generally, there is an "influence exerted on the body by the appearance of another body" (160). The effect is that the body "experience[s] a destructureation" (161).
- 5 In a different context, Toni Morrison says that if her work is to confront a "Third World cosmology as [she] perceives it," she "must centralize and animate information discredited by the West" (388). What is interesting here is the notion of discredited knowledges and of a hierarchy of knowledges.
- 6 For a review of the "successive appropriations" of Fanon in postcolonial theory, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (457).
- 7 I do not use the term "banality" here in precisely the same way as Achille Mbembe does in his essay, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony." Ostentatious public display is one aspect of banality, but another is its almost imperceptible regularity, not only in the postcolony but in the hybrid space of the transnational.
- 8 On territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.
- 9 "Carnival degradation" in the sense that Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term.
- 10 Signifying on the dynamic of immersion and ascent that Robert Stepto identifies in African-American texts, Paul Gilroy observes a simultaneous movement of immersion and emergence in, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (137-38).
- 11 Using a psychoanalytic framework, Sue Thomas offers some interesting comments on the novel's emphasis on food and the body (28). See also Heidi Creamer.
- 12 For example, she is "masochistic" in using her sense of inferiority and shame as a "fine lash of guilt to whip [herself] on with" (89). For not attending her parents' marriage, Babamukuru decides that she must be "punished" and she receives "fifteen lashes" (169). He decides that she has to be "disciplined" (172) and she takes over the maid servant's work for two weeks. She performs these "chores grimly, with a deep and grateful masochistic delight" (169). When she insists that Nyasha should not help her with these chores, Nyasha, in fact, retorts, "I'm sorry to deprive you of the pleasure" (170). The entire narration is, in fact, tinged with this masochism. While it is not the purpose here to explore the implications of this, it must be said that the masochist is not entirely powerless and, in fact, may often be the one in control in S/M (McClintock 226).

- ¹³ It is, of course, important to note the distinction, as Heidi Creamer does, between the naive and the informed narrator. The novel and, as we shall see, particularly its ultimate paragraph, suggest that this distinction may be the most compelling motivation, the central conflict that informs the structure of the novel. It is not the reconciliation of these voices, but precisely the irreconciliation that is of interest here for its representation of the fraught position of the postcolonial and transnational intellectual.
- ¹⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. foregrounds this preoccupation when he comments, "You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonized, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism" (462).

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