1. Echo

> So it happened that a nightingale sang in the garden of a country home. Her voice could be heard clearly in the house. A radio company that discovered the nightingale decided to place a microphone next to the tree where the bird had its nest. The tenant of the house, listening to the broadcast and the live voice of the nightingale at the same time observed that the broadcast nightingale was heard earlier than the live one,—the difference being due to the different velocities of electrical and acoustical waves. The real nightingale sounded like her own echo.
>
> —ADORNO, *Current of Music*

The accent I have placed on the problem of how sound challenges our thinking about context calls for elaboration and development. Although concerned here to trace the catachrestic loop between the contextualization of sound and the pressure of sound on the work of contextualization, my attention to echo is meant to tease out of the emergent field of sound studies not just another phenomenon of scholarly or aesthetic attention—the echo—but a supplemental concept for thinking the work of contextualization in the humanities as a whole. The value of the audit will be put to the test, quietly (that is, on the expository periphery), in helping fix (on) the constraints brought to this problem by the gaze and the logic of specular reflection.

I open this line of inquiry by reading an early "novel" of Michael Ondaatje's, *Coming through Slaughter*. What strongly recommends this text for consideration is the fact that, in exceedingly intricate ways, it addresses the problem of thinking the origin of jazz by connecting it to the figure of Charles "Buddy" Bolden and, in turn, connecting Bolden to New Orleans at the beginning of the twentieth century. The text, in short, is a snarl of contextualization and sound, and what attracts attention is the place of echo in this snarl. Or, stated in terms put in play in my epigraph, the text sings and walks like a nightingale.

For those unfamiliar with Ondaatje's text, a sketch of some of its defining contours will prove useful. Generically, and according to Barthes, this is what Goldmann means by form; the text exhibits qualities of a police procedural or detective novel. Not far into the text we are introduced to a

character named Webb, who is a cop looking for Buddy Bolden, a friend who has gone missing under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Ondaatje works the discrepant relation between story and plot to give us insight into Bolden as a person but also to deepen the enigma around his disappearance. The reader is coaxed into caring about the question: why would a guy like this just up and disappear?

The text is divided into three sections, and in the first we are introduced to Bolden, who is depicted as a caring father (he walks his kids to school); passionate husband (he is a dexterous and attentive ravisher of his bride); talented, if inebriated, barber (his shop, "N. Joseph's Shaving Parlor," buzzes with activity); and a daring, even dangerously talented, cornet player. In large part this section is focalized through an omniscient narrator but one whose omniscience is constantly interrupted by "testimony" from friends of Bolden who narrate from within the narration, hovering between first and third person. Webb appears in this section setting the dynamics of the narrative in motion around a double enigma: where is Bolden, and why is he there? In a deft metafictional gesture Ondaatje has the reader following the steps of Webb's investigation. In strict conformity with Hitchcock's dictum, "never give away the beginning," the text—apparently narrated after the fact of the resolution of the enigma—solves the mystery by insinuating that, despite all appearances, Bolden is mad. It is not that he has gone away; it is that he is put away. Significantly, this positions the reader ahead of Webb, but it does so before one knows quite what to do with this information and, in effect, after the fact.

Sections 2 and 3 of Ondaatje's narrative trace out the pertinent plot details. We learn that Bolden's wife, Nora, is a former prostitute; that he has a friend, Bellocq, who photographed prostitutes and other denizens of Storyville and who, after being visited by Webb, immolates himself in his shop; that a friend of Bolden's, Tom Pickett, sleeps with his wife and that Bolden retaliates by taking a straight razor to Pickett's face and body; that during a gig in Shell Beach—not far from New Orleans—Bolden abandons his band and moves in with the Brewitts, a married couple; that Bolden is seduced by Robin Brewitt and reconstructs the fateful triad of his own home (Bolden-Nora-Pickett cum Bolden-Robin-Jaelin); that Webb finds Bolden and convinces him to return to New Orleans and to his family; and finally, that while struggling to reestablish himself, Bolden, as he is blowing his horn in a street parade, succumbs to his demons and is institutionalized at the East Louisiana State Hospital, where he dies. Unlike section 1, sections 2 and 3 are focalized through multiple narrators, including Bolden himself. Although there is considerable reported speech, none of it—with

the exception of recorded testimony—is marked as such through punctuation. This touch draws direct attention to the problem of punctuation in the "novel," a problem to which I will be compelled to return.

What makes this text vital for my purposes is the fact that it quite explicitly seeks to contextualize the origin of a sonic practice, of jazz. Charles "Buddy" Bolden is largely recognized—most recently in Ken Burns's monumental *Jazz* from 2001—as the horn player who synthesized the decisive musical components—ragtime, the hymnals of the black church, the Afro-Caribbean rhythmic patterns (the so-called Big Four), and the call and response structures of field hollers—that modulated the blues up into jazz. In Bolden, Ondaatje is attempting to inscribe the relation between a music and a place into a text. Indeed, Bolden is depicted as someone whose "mind became the street" (Ondaatje 42). But Ondaatje is also and above all trying to write a text that meditates in a distinctly metafictional register on its *own* relation to the work of contextualizing jazz. It is here that *Coming through Slaughter* engages most directly the structure and logic of the echo.

While one might certainly want to draw attention to the turn-taking among multiple narrators that organizes the text so as to capture the peculiar way in which the text "solos," more important I would argue is the shape, the syntax of the text when considered from the point of view of its source material. Here is what I mean. The text opens with two mechanically reproduced images: a photograph of Bolden's band (the very photograph Webb goes to Bellocq to secure) and three sonographs of a dolphin's "voice" taken from John Lilly's *Mind in the Water.* It closes with reels from a film and a list of credits, sources, and acknowledgments. The mechanically reproduced images are indices, that is, signs formed by having entered into what Peirce called actual physical contact with their objects. As such they underscore the text's ambition to render the causal connection linking Bolden, jazz, and New Orleans.

Even as the text puts these indices to work, however, it interferes with their functioning. The photo, the only really existing image of Bolden, appears in the plot as the object of Webb's quest: he wants an image of Bolden so that as he approaches people along the path of his search, he can ask, "Have you seen *this* man?" Significantly, the photo fills the space of a disappearance. Bolden, thus, both is and is not where jazz begins. In fact, after Bellocq prints a copy of the negative for Webb, he destroys the negative saying of Webb, "Hope he don't find you" (Ondaatje 53). But a further detail of this exchange bears emphasis.

Once Bellocq decides to accommodate Webb, they develop a print. The narrator describes the process thus: "Watching their friend float into the

page smiling at them, the friend who in reality had reversed the process and gone back into white, who in this bad film seemed to have already half-receded with that smile that may not have been a smile at all, which may have been his mad dignity" (Ondaatje 52–53). Here the development process is compared directly to Bolden's absence, but just as importantly, it has Bolden "floating" into view, coming not so much through Slaughter (a nearby town) but through water. I stress this because it helps us think about the syntactic function of the sonographs of the dolphin's voice, the other mechanically reproduced images with which the text begins.

The text that accompanies, even captions, the sonographs reads:

> Three sonographs—pictures of dolphin sounds made by a machine that is more sensitive than a human ear. The top left sonograph shows a "squawk." Squawks are common emotional expressions that have many frequencies or pitches, which are vocalized simultaneously. The top right sonograph is a whistle. Note that the number of frequencies is small and this gives a "pure" sound—not a squawk. Whistles are like personal signatures for dolphins and identify each dolphin as well as its location. The middle sonograph shows a dolphin making two kinds of signals simultaneously. The vertical stripes are echolocation clicks (sharp, multi-frequency sounds) and the dark, mountain-like humps are the signature whistles. No one knows how a dolphin makes both whistles and echolocation clicks simultaneously. (Ondaatje, no pagination)

While these too are indices, they are indices of sounds, sounds humans can hardly hear. Like Bolden they are present, but as absences *for us.* If this were all they were, little more comment would be warranted, but one of the intriguing features of Ondaatje's text is that it seeds itself insistently with material from this unpaginated page, the zero degree of the text.

One senses this first perhaps in a passage like the following, where Bolden is narrating an interaction with Webb and the Brewitts: "and me rambling on as they were about to leave, leaning against the driver's window apologizing explaining what I wanted to do. About the empty room when I get up and put metal into my mouth and hit the squawk at just the right note to equal the tone of the room and that's all you do" (Ondaatje 101). This is the first of four "human" squawks that punctuate the text. The last, in fact designated as the "last long squawk" (Ondaatje 131), marks the moment of Bolden's collapse in the parade, his last performance. Not only is this squawk tied to Bolden's instrument, the "impure" sound of his cornet, but it is also depicted as "emotional," just as the sonograph commentary specified. Bolden's squawk is at once a signal in a lonely room and a death rattle.

A similar point can also be made about echolocation or, more particularly, the echo. In a passage narrated by Frank Lewis, the clarinet player in Bolden's band, Lewis muses about Bolden's music: "We thought it was formless, but I think now he was tormented by order, what was outside it. He tore apart the plot—see his music was immediately on top of his own life. Echoing. As if, when he was playing he was lost and hunting for the right accidental notes. . . . He would be describing something in 27 ways. There was pain and gentleness everything jammed into each number" (Ondaatje 37). The stress here on "pain and gentleness" restates the theme of the squawk, its emotional character, but the sound's lack of purity is given important detail. Specifically, Bolden's notes, earlier described by Lewis as calling out to be "cleaned," are here characterized as oxymoronic. This particular quality gestures back to a different sonogram, the one that prompts the narrator to observe: "No one knows how dolphins make both whistles and echolocation clicks simultaneously." Indeed, this double character of Bolden's sound—his signature (the whistle) and his situation (the echolocation click)—is expressly developed in the text as a way to describe jazz. The relevant passage, narrated by the trombone player in his band, reads as follows:

> Thought I knew his blues before, and the hymns at funerals but what he is playing now is real strange, and I listen real careful for he's playing something that sounds like both. I cannot make out the tune and then catch on. He's mixing them up. He's playing the blues and the hymn sadder than the blues and then the blues sadder than the hymn. That is the first time I ever heard hymns and blues cooked up together. . . . It sounded like a battle between the Good Lord and the Devil. (Ondaatje 81)

This "first time" is presented as a birth, the beginning or upsurge of jazz as the unholy fusion between the blues and hymn music. From a musicological perspective this may ring false, but in the text it is clear that Bolden's capacity to blow two sounds at once explicitly "echoes" the dolphin's capacity to whistle and click simultaneously, and both are connected to the emergence of jazz in New Orleans at the threshold of the twentieth century.

But other details in Frank Lewis's observations bear comment as well. Recall that he also drew attention to the dual character of Bolden's notes—at once gentle and filled with pain—and added that they sounded as if Bolden was lost, hunting for the right notes. The fact that he also invokes "echoing" as a way to describe the relation between Bolden's life and his music strongly suggests that Lewis understands Bolden's music, jazz, as a form of echolocation. The "right accidental notes" are not necessarily ones

that work musically but ones that articulate, even if accidentally, signature and situation, whistle and click. In this, Ondaatje's text offers up the echo as a figure for the work of contextualization. As Lewis says, Bolden's music and life were on top of each other, "echoing." Or, put differently, *Coming through Slaughter* urges us to think of the echo as a way to designate how jazz belongs to without reflecting the African American experience in the southern United States.

The figure of the echo echoes repeatedly in Ondaatje's text; in fact, at times it organizes the very logic of its sentences, as when, for example, Bolden bids farewell to one of his bandmates in Shell Beach: "They were shouting back and forth in musical terms. Crawley knew he was saying goodbye to his friend. He was saying goodbye to his friend" (Ondaatje 33). Although the Ovidian allusion is certainly interesting—the two subjects, the water, the incompletion and distortion of echo's utterance—I want to stress something else about the material narrated by Lewis—namely, the fact that this narrator appears in the text as one of its sources. He is not merely another narrating soloist; he is a "real person" who "really appears" in the only really existing photograph of Bolden and is a person whose contribution to the text is acknowledged, albeit implicitly, in the acknowledgments.

This bounces us back to what I referred to earlier as the syntactic structure of the text, the photos with which it opens and the acknowledgments with which it closes. If, as I have proposed, the text floats "echoing" as a way to think the relation between signature and situation, text and context, then the syntactic structure of the text—including, of course, the relay between story and plot, the past and present of narration—could be said to be structured like an echo. This means not only that the text's beginning and end echo one another but that Ondaatje's text, at a metafictional level, understands itself as the echo of its source material, some of which is charged with the authority of oral history. It is not, however, uninteresting that *Coming through Slaughter* places the echo in the beginning, and while it is certainly worth thinking about the specific way in which Ondaatje invites us to ponder the relation connecting cetaceans, language, and music, it is likewise important to recognize that Ondaatje's ontology insists that this relation is echoes "all the way down."[1] In other words, if the source material echoes the text matter, then the latter can hardly be said to "reflect" the context secured by such materials. Nor, I should add, does it make sense to simply reverse the problem and propose that the source material, the context, reflects the text, for the problem is with the specular character of reflection itself.

Certainly one of the more powerful theoretical treatments of reflection is found in Macherey's "The Problem of Reflection" from the mid-1970s. This is an intricately argued text, one that seeks to formulate an aesthetics consistent with the tenets of "structural Marxism," where, among other things, it is conceded that the lonely moment of the last instance may never come. Perhaps this is because it is echoing. Regardless, what bears emphasis here is the motif of a foundational distortion or disorientation. At bottom, reflection—modeled as it is on the logic of specular repetition—gives expression to an epistemological axiom consistent with "visualism." Mind mirrors world, and the putative task of human endeavor is to perfect this mirroring. This does not mean simply bringing mind and world into an alignment that is free of distortion but one that it is immediate. Reflection is, in effect, what Paul de Man meant by the symbol when he contrasted it with allegory in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," and it is on this epistemological basis that one sustains political evaluations of "correct ideas" or, for that matter, "realism."

The echo would appear to operate in accord with a different epistemological axiom, one that interferes with mirroring by insisting on a foundational (thus antifoundational) distortion. Although the point can always be dragged in the direction of positivism, where the difference between the transmission of light and sound becomes paramount, the fact is that echo is structured by delay, by time. Moreover, the delay always marks a decay. Something is missing from the sound source, and as a consequence the "mirroring" is more than simply reversed; it is systemically imperfect. This imperfectness might then be construed as the derivative or passive character of the echo, but as is clear in Ovid's remarkable poem, decay can also assume an ironic function, where delay displaces the authority of its source material.[2] In effect, echo, while not giving up on source, refuses to enshrine a simple principle of derivation at its core, thereby obliging literary or cultural sociologists of all stripes to respond to the theoretical gauntlet it throws down. Gilles Deleuze, puzzling over the problem of Destiny, puts it beautifully: "it [Destiny] implies between successive presents *non-localizable connections,* actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes, objective chances, signs, signals and roles which transcend spatial locations and temporal successions" (Deleuze 83; my emphasis).

Before turning to consider how echo might then bear on what in the introduction I called Barthes's split sociology, I wish to acknowledge that my own musings on echo are echoing those of Joan Wallach Scott, who in "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity" has proposed echo as a way to refresh feminist historiography. At the risk of casting Scott

in the role of Narcissus, my commentary will seek to deploy the decay between us as an opening, an opportunity to further clarify what echo is doing here.

Scott's piece begins with an anecdote. She explains her title by reporting that she stumbled upon it while working as a teaching assistant for George Mosse, whose multiply accented pronunciation of the French expression *fin de siècle* was transcribed in a student paper as "fantasy echo." Scott astutely comments that this transcription is itself an echo, thereby generating the need to define what about an echo could be said to describe the conceptual difference between fantasy echo and *fin de siècle.* After deftly summarizing how Western feminism has tended to articulate history and identity (the latter typically located in history but not itself historical), she turns to a theoretical discussion of both fantasy and echo. Fantasy is developed through a reading of its deployment in psychoanalysis from Freud to Žižek, and Scott presents it as a way to give tight, even theatrical, form to material premised on the foreclosure of difference. It is both defensive and enabling. Echo, however, Scott teases out of Ovid and important subsequent interpretations of the poem. She underscores many of the same points I have made above: delay, decay, founding repetition, and so on. Indeed, it is precisely the quality of decay that explains her interpretation of Mosse's student. Taken together, the two theoretical discussions justify a founding antimetabole: "The echo is a fantasy, the fantasy an echo; the two are inextricably intertwined" (Scott 287).

In her conclusion Scott moves to extend her observations beyond the field of contemporary historiography and Western feminism, proposing, "Fantasy echo is a tool for analysts of political and social movements as they read historical materials in their specificity and particularity" (304). Here, one might say, our interests echo one another most intently, and for this reason I am called to give some account of my relative lack of interest in fantasy.

Put succinctly, the matter comes down to "visualism." Although Scott, spurred by Laplanche and Pontalis, returns to Freud's discussion of fantasy in the essay "A Child Is Being Beaten," she pursues her elaboration of the concept by turning to Žižek's Lacanian-inspired treatment. This brings fantasy largely under the auspices of the imaginary, where it works to secure a precariously unified, because specular, identity. It incorporates what doesn't fit, in fact, what will never fit. Echo is then the foreclosed delay *within* this identity. I agree with this. But what happens if one retrieves the discussion of fantasy from Freud's correspondence with Fliess? There, fantasy is expressly counterpoised to dreams. As Freud puts it in a draft on the

architecture of hysteria: "They [phantasies] are built up out of things that have been heard about and then *subsequently* turned to account; thus they combine things that have been experienced and things that have been heard about past events (from the history of parents and ancestors) and things heard about the subject himself. They are related to things heard in the same way as dreams are related to things seen" (Freud 197–98). A formulation such as this would suggest that fantasy is better grasped by situating it not within the imaginary but within the sonic field of echoing (the subject's past echoing in its present). Indeed, the imaginary itself might be similarly resituated, a maneuver that would transgress the very logic of "visualism."

Of course, once thought within the sonic field of echoing, fantasy loses its status as the counterweight to echo, reducing the antimetabolic loop to nil. In Scott's text one senses something like her resistance to such a proposition but less in the text's explicit formulations than in the syntax of key sentences. For example, Scott has repeated recourse to sentences like "Yet there is no denying the persistent fact of identification, for echoing through the twists and turns of history is the fantasy scenario: if woman has the right to mount the scaffold, she has the right to mount the rostrum" (Scott 297). Here, the antimetabolic with its defining delay loop appears to be flattened out so that fantasy is a thing conveyed *by or through* the process of echoing. Thing is followed by process. True, this protects the loop from closing, but it also risks a different problem: phantasmatic capture. If one recalls that in her unpacking of the concept of fantasy, Scott has recourse to Žižek's characterization of the narrative of fantasy as that which resolves "some fundamental antagonism by rearranging its terms into a temporal succession" (Scott 289), then one might well wonder whether a version of this formula animates a locution like the one cited above, where the loop between fantasy and echo is, as I said, flattened. In short, is the fantasy echo more fantasy than echo?

If this is the case, and my question, while perhaps rhetorical, is not merely so, one needs to proceed cautiously in wielding the tool Scott has placed in our hands, especially when shifting from the terrain of identity construction, whether feminist or not, to the problematic of contextualization as such. Doubtless, certain aspects of the fantasy echo might be usefully deployed in thinking about *Coming through Slaughter*—a Sri Lankan author in Canada might well "enjoy" (in the strong psychoanalytical sense) identifying with an African American musician and troublemaker in New Orleans—but as concerns the methodological question of how to situate a text in its context, other aspects of the tool, notably its missing aspects, might prove even more useful.

Here, reengaging Barthes's discussion of the two sociologies acquires fresh urgency. To reiterate, we are not dealing with the familiar differentiation between qualitative/hermeneutic and quantitative/positivist sociology. Instead, Barthes is differentiating between two sociologies of literature, one that attends to the literary institution and the other to the literary work. Nor, despite certain affinities, is this a restatement of the distinction between dialectical and so-called vulgar sociologies of literature to be found in Lukács and Mikhail Lifshitz. As I have noted, Barthes invokes the term *socio-logic* to designate the sociology of Goldmann's theory of the novel. While the distinction is sharp, Barthes insists that they are complementary, although in the last line of his review he hints that because a socio-logic thinks the activity of classification as such, it can assign sociology its value. But what precisely is a socio-logic?

Barthes introduces this term in another review (this generic repetition merits attention in its own right), one dedicated to two texts by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* and *The Savage Mind.* It predates the review of Goldmann by a year and, as with the later review, was written while Barthes was offering a seminar on the "system of objects" at the *École pratique des hautes études.* Yes, Jean Baudrillard wrote his dissertation under Barthes's supervision. As if predicting my interest in it, the review begins at the water's edge by discussing the formal logic of a beachside tent village. What is meant by *socio-logic* can be gleaned from a set of important formulas that mark out the geography of the text. I will simply list them: first, a socio-logic gives expression to a responsibility of forms. This implies a sociology attentive to form and function but also an analyst responsible for the system of objects thought to be comprehended through such attention. Second, a socio-logic proceeds on the assumption that because all societies (whether "primitive" or "modern") structure reality, all aspects of the social formation can and should attract "socio-logical" analysis. Third, whereas a sociology of contents places a premium on statistical averages and norms (especially when studying deviance), a "structural sociology" (a synonym for "socio-logic") is attentive to variation, aberration, in effect, the exceptional. And fourth, sociology is concerned with normality, typicality, while a socio-logic is a sociology "of totality" (Barthes, "Sociology and Socio-logic" 163). Taken together, these might all appear to be an elaboration of the gnomic formulation in *Mythologies:* "I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it" (Barthes, *Mythologie*s 112), where "History" serves as a metonym for *context.*

Of these formulas the ones that attract more than heuristic attention are those in which appear the words *responsibility* and *totality,* words often

understood to be anathema to devout "poststructuralists," at least from the vantage point of those who regard the latter as a late (yet oddly pre-Nietzschean) variant of nihilism. But even from the perspective of a more immanent engagement with Barthes's texts these terms are ones that also seem difficult to square with the tenets of "textuality." Does Barthes not rather directly confront totality with plurality and responsibility with pleasure in the programmatic statement "From Work to Text"? He certainly appears to, but he also begins this piece (he insists on calling it a "text") by indicating that the development whose tentative propositions he is attempting to distill is "linked" (his word) "to the present development of (among other things) linguistics, anthropology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis" (56). Moreover, in concluding the text, he also insists on the fact that Text (sans definite article and capitalized) constitutes a properly social space that leaves no language safely outside. In short, even as Barthes moves to leave aside what he had earlier counterpoised to the institution, namely the work, he retains a vocabulary utterly consistent with his earlier theoretical reflection on the two sociologies. Again, the problem is *not* the antisocial character of textual analysis but the problem of formulating a sociology of literature cut to the measure of textuality.

It is interesting that Barthes no sooner invokes the "link" between the text and the developments of linguistics, anthropology, and so forth than he draws attention to its function: "(the word *link* [in French, *liaison*, a term with significant linguistic and sexual resonance] is used here in a deliberately neutral manner: no determination is being invoked, however multiple and dialectical)" ("From Work to Text" 56). Thus, Barthes grasps Text as precisely the methodological field within which one needs to think carefully, not about whether text has a context but *how* it has a context and what might be the *responsible* way to establish this without appealing to the epistemology of determination, whether Freudian (the plurality of "overdetermination") or Marxian (dialectical). "Neutral" here, as we know from his late study on the topic, does not mean "agnostic." It means "confounding" when applied to the procedures of binary classification (i.e., neither marked nor unmarked), and in that sense Barthes is deliberately exposing himself to the task of refining what a "link" links. Again, the point is *not* indecision or denial but assuming theoretical and political responsibility for thinking the articulation of literature and society in a manner that eschews or delays appeal to the binary formulas of determination.

My immodest proposal is that echo might be a productive way to think about what Barthes calls "link." Given that I have hinted at this by proposing that "echo" functions in the metafictional register of Ondaatje's text as

the concept through which it thinks its own link to its material, it is crucial to note that both in "Sociology and Socio-logic" and in "From Work to Text" literature might be said to repeat, or echo, its function.

In the review of Lévi-Strauss, Barthes invokes literature as a way to concretize the distinction drawn between a sociology of normality and a "socio-logic" of totality. Drawing first on Foucault's *History of Madness* and the importance attached there to the social logic of exclusion, Barthes argues that even though literature is consumed by a small demographic, the social distinction between literature and popular fiction is, as Durkheim might say, a *total* social fact. In the end literature is "unintelligible" without such a distinction. His deft evocation of Goldmann (also an enthusiastic partisan of "totality") is designed to keep the debate over the sociology of literature in the wings of his argument, and what is achieved here is, among other things, the principle of the constitutive exclusion. Anticipating Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minority literature, Barthes here insists that a sociology driven to normalize the abnormal is a sociology doomed to misunderstand the relation between literary art and society, modern or not.

A decade later, in "From Work to Text," Barthes ties textuality and literature together in a remarkably similar way. This occurs in his second proposition regarding textuality, the one referred to under the heading of "genre" in his opening summary. With a symmetry that seems calculated, the evocation of Foucault in the earlier piece gives way to an evocation of Bataille, whose collected works were being edited by Foucault at the time. Why Bataille? As Barthes explains, his writing is difficult if not impossible to classify. More specifically, it is not clear that Bataille belongs to literature at all. In effect, the evocation of literature functions to again put in play the social logic of exclusion. What is different here is the metacritical twist by which Text is made more than the principle of a constitutive outside. As Barthes puts it: "If the Text raises problems of classification (moreover, this is one of its 'social' functions), it is because it always implies a certain experience of limits" (58). In other words if the logic of exclusion operates to manage a social formation by legitimating the demarcation of what is asocial, then Text is precisely what interferes with this by restlessly agitating the forming of any and all limits. Even this one. Crucial here is not *what* is excluded—the mad, literature, or the sacred—but the necessary social work of exclusion. Doubtless, this is precisely the kind of formulation that makes Text appear allergic to "totality," but it is crucial here to note that Barthes is not, thereby, prepared to abandon the social. In fact, in the parenthetical phrase cited above, Barthes specifies that the problematization of classification is *one of the "social"* functions of Text, suggesting not only that Text's

capacity to confront us with an experience of limits (one of Bataille's formulas) makes it social but that this is only *one* of the ways in which Text is social.

Or "social." Key here is that in and around Barthes's sustained engagement with something he persists in calling literature, he maintains contact with the Goldmannian legacy, even as he teases apart its conceptual tapestry. This is what it means to put *social* in quotation marks: he does not so much wish to put it under erasure as to attach "the social" to a different sociological paradigm, one closer to what we have seen that he earlier called a "socio-logic." Now, if this, too, is what warrants his knowing appeal to "link" as a way to attach Text and context, then what does echo help us grasp about this predicament?

Coming through Slaughter provides us with vital clues. As my reading of the text has established, it is not simply metafictional. It is concerned to think as part of its relation to itself (both its phatic and metalinguistic registers) its relation to a life, a place, a time, and a sound. It is all that jazz. At the core of this relation is a disappearance, an index that traces and then corrodes its object. The challenge for a sociology of literature is how to think the specificity of *this* relation. How to think the way jazz's relation to slavery, to New Orleans, to Congo Square, to Bolden repeats in Ondaatje's relation to the text woven of these sources?

It seems crucial to recall that when Marx took up the problem of the epic at the end of his introduction to the *Grundrisse* he quite deliberately complicated the question of context and in ways that have not always mattered to the dialecticians among us. He first urged that we recognize how the epic belonged to a specific moment in the history of myth (I am thinking here of his telling query about the impact of gunpowder on Achilles), but he then urged that we recognize how the tradition of the epic, something like the Western cultural tradition "itself," had other contexts. Indeed, the fragment concludes by pivoting on a distinction between *childish* and *childlike,* a distinction that matters only when we understand in what way epic does not and cannot "belong" to the society that determined its production. If we moderns (and Marx invests solidly in the primitive/modern distinction) still value the epic, it is because it resonates within our present in much the same way that Freud thought our childhoods remain active in our adult life. For reasons that might have "something" to do with the fact that, by 1857, Marx had lost four of his own children (one in July of that year), his discussion is more elegiac than it might otherwise be. That is, he links the enduring value of the epic to its capacity to index a historical past that has been absolutely sacrificed to modernity, the very point later made by the pre-Marxian

Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel.* In this sense the present's attachment to the epic is childlike, not childish.

What this brings out is the fact that the epic, as a form of literature, relates, one might say, repeatedly, not to its social context but to its social contexts. The point is not the trivial one about the need to pluralize concepts. Instead, what bears emphasis is the notion that in a certain sense literature and society are never *not* linked to one another. What the demand for determination achieves, whether in the first instance or the last, is the unwitting production of the very problem it then seeks to solve, namely, how to fix something that is not broken. At the very least, what the example from the *Grundrisse* makes clear is that Marx was aware of the intricate ways in which historical (the present's valuation of the epic) and social (the past's mythological discourse) contexts proliferate instances of determination, a proliferation that has only intensified as the cultural tradition of the epic (largely the Eurocentric cultural tradition) has been dispersed across the places and times of what Gayatri Spivak has called "planetarity" (Spivak 2003, 71). So much so, that the conceptual tool of determination and all the analytical devices supported by its causal logic—correspondence, reflection, homology, and so on—seem quite feeble, quite inadequate to the task of thinking how literature and society link with one another. Walter Benjamin, deeply caught up in the warring of the worlds that was to find its echo in the concept of "planetarity," seems concerned about the same problem when, in the last of his theses "On the Concept of History," he insisted—as if commenting on the relation between their insights and his own life—that "historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus among moments in history. But no state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated by thousands of years" (397).

To give credit where credit is due, Benjamin was also among the first to float the idea that *echo* might be a keyword in the fight against historicism, a position he explicitly associates with Ranke's demand that we recognize the past "the way it really was." In his second thesis he writes: "The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? . . . If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one" (4: 390). In concluding this aphorism by insisting that the historical materialist knows this, Benjamin positions echo in a quarrel that bears more than a passing resemblance to the one Barthes is engaged in with Goldmann. Benjamin wants to split history; Barthes wants to split sociology. If we split, as it were, the dif-

ference, we come rather abruptly to context and the problem of whether echo helps us think about literature or culture more broadly and society as articulations of delay, displacement, and decay. This is testimony, I should think, of how sound studies opens "unique possibilities of thinking."

Having already drawn attention to the important ways that Ondaatje's text points us forward on such questions, I believe a concluding series of observations about it are in order. In stressing the syntactic structure of the text—the placement of echo before its sources—I meant to emphasize that Ondaatje appears willing to entertain the Deleuzean proposition that echo is but another name for the "nonlocalizable." I hope it is now clear that by this I do not mean to breathe fresh life into the stale notion that since all that is human transpires within the immanence of representation, there is no point in making any literary critical appeals to society, or history, or politics. The issue is what invocation of such things one is willing to assume responsibility for in producing and disseminating a reading. I take this to be Barthes's "the responsibility of forms," where, lest it pass unnoticed, one is obliged to take responsibility for the *form* of one's responsibility. With this in mind, and here I retrieve an earlier thread, it seems unwarranted to over-look a conspicuous peculiarity of the punctuation of *Coming through Slaughter*, namely, that many of the text segments are set off by asterisks. Indeed, the text contains no fewer than sixty-nine such marks in its mere 157 pages. As the word suggests, the asterisk is the sign of the star, and, as this might in turn lead one to assume, the figure of the star assumes the-matic contours in the text.

Two important invocations of the star occur in part 2 of the text, and both involve Buddy's relation to the Brewitts. In the first, stars are listed as a topic of conversation among Robin, Jaelin, and Buddy. As the narrator goes on to report, Jaelin, at a certain point, revisits this topic by announcing that there is a new star called the Wolf-Ryat [*sic*] star, named after the two people who discovered it. Buddy responds by saying that "Wolf Star" would be a better name for it. In the concluding sentence of this section the narra-tor observes that they were talking about Robin.

In the second invocation Buddy is swimming with Robin, and they are discussing the impact of his presence on the Brewitt marriage. The passage opens with an echo: "As long as I don't hurt you or Jaelin. As long as I don't hurt you or Jaelin, she mimics" (Ondaatje 69). It then moves through the surrounding darkness to "the dull star of white water under each of us. Swimming toward the sound of madness" (69). Here, too, the star appears attached to Robin, or attached to Buddy's attachment to Robin, but in the second passage this attachment assumes the form of a sonic link to madness,

Buddy's madness. One might reasonably propose that this is what motivates the echo that sets the passage in motion.

What ties the passages together around the figure of the star becomes clearer once the Wolf-Rayet star acquires some specificity. First discovered in 1867 by Charles Wolf and Georges Rayet, Wolf-Rayet type stars are massive stars in the process of falling apart. Under certain conditions Wolf-Rayet stars can become black holes. They can be recognized by the spectacular and erratic emission bands that gather around and extend outward from them. In effect, these stars, the new star mentioned by Jaelin and the dull star beneath the white water, point either through madness or implosion to a text limit where Buddy stands as that which will go missing—the dead, mad star of jazz.

What brings these thematic treatments into association with the asterisk—aside from the fact that asterisks punctuate the sections in which these passages appear—is made evident in an earlier passage in the text. This is a passage in which the narrator reports an outburst of anger between Buddy and the other woman in his life, his wife, Nora: "Furious at something he drew his right hand across his body and lashed out. Half way there at full speed he realized it was a window he would be hitting and braked. For a fraction of a second his open palm touched the glass, beginning simultaneously to draw back. The window starred and crumpled slowly two floors down. His hand miraculously uncut. It had acted exactly like a whip, violating the target and still free, retreating from the outline of a star" (Ondaatje 16). Here, at a window, on the very surface that articulates the inside and outside of the structure in which it is set, two stars meet: the star of the cracked glass and the imprint of a hand, both teetering between the literal and the figural. The "outline of a star" draws attention to the specific graphic features of the splayed hand and thus the five points/digits that form the asterisks that appear in *Coming through Slaughter* (font selection is relevant here), linking the shattered glass, Bolden's madness, and the imploding massive star. While this thematic series might well urge one to think about the asterisk as a sign of disaster (literally, *dis* + *astro/star*), it seems even more pertinent to note the star's relation to the limit, the surface on which it is insistently outlined. From this perspective the asterisk, the figure of the star, marks the limits of the text within the text, both syntactically and philologically.

Philologically?

One of the more unusual pieces that appears in Adorno's *Notes to Literature,* from 1958, is the one titled "Punctuation Marks." It is unusual because, as his English translator, Shierry Weber Nicholson, points out, it is

an exercise in metacriticism. In it Adorno, who otherwise scrupulously follows the German scholarly protocol of referring to himself in the third person, appears here to be engaging with his own practice, and doing so under the general heading of "physiognomy." As in his radio studies from the late 1930s he is thinking about punctuation marks as faces behind which deeper text layers are discernible as sites or even sources of expression. If Nicholson is right, then these marks—exclamation marks, colons, dashes, and parentheses (to name ones he discusses)—are bits of his "own" face behind which, Hegel's hostility toward physiognomy notwithstanding, lie not only his thoughts but the matrix of thought and sound. As he says at one point: "There is no element of language that more resembles music than in the punctuation marks" (92).

It is interesting that although many marks are both mentioned and used (the typesetter at Columbia University Press has introduced elaborate text separators between each paragraph/fragment/aphorism that composes the text), Adorno does not discuss the mark of the asterisk. Of course, one might always conclude that this mark is physiognomically irrelevant—and I have not combed the corpus to determine whether the asterisk is entirely absent—but one might argue that Daniel Heller-Roazen's philological, as opposed to physiognomical, account of the asterisk in *Echolalias* offers a more theoretically satisfying explanation of Adorno's reticence.

Heller-Roazen's discussion occurs in the chapter "Little Stars," which begins: "It is always possible to perceive in one form of speech the echo of another" (99), an intertextual appeal to Benjamin that might suggest that he, too, wishes to comment on the problem of historiography. But he does not. Instead, his interest lies in the philological, even linguistic, problem of explaining *why* one language echoes in another. He observes, "No necessary logical link ties the consideration of the echoes between languages to that of their cause" (100), a problem that only compounded itself when, at the end of the eighteenth century, the project of thinking the continuities between Sanskrit and, say, Greek or Hebrew, situated, at least in principle, all languages on a plane of immanence. The political theology of this development has been well studied in Jean Oleander's *The Language of Paradise*.

But what does the chapter title "Little Stars" have to do with this? "Stars" here refers to asterisks, and as Heller-Roazen details, asterisks (in German *der Stern*) emerged as a typographical expression "that designates forms that have been deduced" (107). In effect, asterisks came to function in philological compendia, even dictionaries and lexicons, as the way to mark that a relation—typically etymological—between one language and another is, strictly speaking, unattested—that is, deduced. In my edition of

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language this function is realized by the mark of the dagger, a sign typically followed by the gloss: "origin obscure." Heller-Roazen is careful to differentiate the two signs (the asterisk and the dagger), but in both cases what matters is that the asterisk signals a problem: is there a cause outside of language for the echo of one language in another, and what might constitute decisive evidence for this? In the absence of such evidence one marks the surface on which it may or may not have been inscribed with a star.

For his part Adorno echoes this appeal to the echo by proposing that punctuation should be handled the way musicians handle "forbidden chord progressions" (Adorno, *Notes to Literature* 97). What is revealed through such handling is whether one is skilled or sloppy. "To put it more subtly, one can sense the difference between a subjective will that brutally demolishes the rules and a tactful sensitivity that allows the rules to echo in the background even where it suspends them" (97). Although he goes on to foreground the use of commas, his point clearly applies to the entirety of punctuation. All punctuation effects the choreography of sensitivity and will, and as such, effects the asterisk-function, the marking on the text surface of the text's relation to the causes that echo there. Perhaps it is because this function cannot assume the profile of a face, an identity that gives itself *to be seen;* and thus seen through, it eludes the attentions of physiognomy and therefore does not figure in Adorno's discussion.[3]

My point then is this: if the asterisk figures so prominently in *Coming through Slaughter*—both syntactically and thematically—this is because it is required by the metafictional protocols of the text. Not only is the text's narrative and hermeneutic development transferred by the device of the "small star" (where is Bolden, and why is he there?), but through the motif and practice of the echo it attaches itself both to itself and to a context that insists on being deduced, unattested. The point is not that there is no origin, no encounter with anything but language. Instead, whatever limit is ascribed is one that readers—whether close or distant—are responsible to and for. Ondaatje wrote under the pressure of this insight. If this is one way to think the "responsibility of forms," then it is also a way to think the socio-logic of textuality, one that took the emergence of sound studies to echo back—but is it back?—in our direction.

A closing thought: in ways that will require further attention (see chapter 6), throughout *Roland Barthes* Barthes refers to himself (the *lui-même* of the French title) in the third person: *he*. This linguistic and rhetorical rigor (in an opening aphorism he stresses its novelesque character) assumes an especially rich articulation in the aphorism/entry called "The Echo

Chamber," a formulation that in French *(la chambre d'échos)* evokes almost immediately the title of his last book, *La chambre claire* ("camera lucida" in Latin). Setting aside this enormously suggestive architecture of the adjoining rooms of clarity and echoes (Barthes's reproach to "visualism"?), I turn to the theme of this aphorism. It is stated in the opening line: "In relation to the systems which surround him: what is he?" (*Roland Barthes* 74). "He" responds by characterizing himself as an echo chamber. While it is clear that Barthes deploys the figure as a way to explain how and why he is such a fickle adherent to any of the grand causes of his day, one ought not ignore the fact that he is here repeating his concern about "the link" at a "personal" level. In presenting "himself" as an echo chamber, Barthes authorizes one to belong to any context, even to one's "own" context, in the medium of sound—not in the sense of noises or tunes that haunt one from Combray-like places but in the sense of a discursively mediated perception of what it is like to belong anywhere. Why deploy the concept of the gaze to think this predicament? I am not seeing it.