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## DEATH OF A DISCIPLINE

A review of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia, 2003. xii + 128 pages, \$23 cloth, ISBN 0-231-12944-0.

**D**EATH OF A DISCIPLINE IS COMPRISED of the Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory, delivered at the Critical Theory Institute of the University of California, Irvine, in May 2000. It is a quick yet disorienting read. I shall both describe the work and suggest how it can be read across disciplinary lines as a point of reflection for cultural and religious theory. Spivak's book will help answer questions like, To what does the study of religion respond?, and What is the responsibility of Religious Studies?

*Death of a Discipline*. The title insinuates a requiem, though one encounters instead something like a manifesto for a new comparative literature. It is an intervention into dominant discourses of multiculturalism traversing the arts and sciences, confronting a stubborn humanism that continues to organize cultural studies. As in previous works, Spivak argues that literary comparison performs a kind of looking (at cultural others) which instantiates and reinforces the origin of the look, i.e., the comparing subject or culture. The interest of comparison in cultural otherness not only generates knowledge and facilitates cross-cultural interaction. It enacts "the West" as a boundary that does not exist prior to comparison. Spivak radicalizes this now pedestrian critique of comparative ethnocentrism and cultural essentialism by observing that while cultural analysis readily acknowledges the way comparison reifies the distinctions it analyzes, there is a tendency for this reification to endure without troubling the narcissism of the comparative gaze. This persistence makes apparent an underlying humanism common to liberal multiculturalism, "muscular Marxism," and social scientific rationalism. Spivak's purpose, in short, is to suggest the literary practices of reading and translation as counter-measures, instruments for dissimulating and disfiguring the self rather than assimilating the other.

I shall first refer to cinema to illustrate what Spivak calls "othering the self," since this concept is at the heart of the work. I am choosing to read the death which

Spivak invokes according to a *noir* trope. Like *noir* films, death does not just litter this text in the form of the corpses of first world humanism and literary liberalism. In addition, a certain death occurs to the security of an invulnerable vantage point, the point of view of the metropolitan migrant. If the loss of a conjunctive *invisibility* and *invulnerability* characterized the *noir* universe, that loss also characterizes an ethic of alterity which may be taken up through practices of reading.

*Rear Window* addressed functions of the gaze. The great window at the rear of Jefferies' apartment bounded the voyeur (an injured and temporarily incapacitated photographer) from the outside world, but was intruded upon by the returned look of the suspect, a man whom Jefferies believes has murdered his wife. This event enacted a certain transgression. When the suspected man discovered Jeffries by peering across the courtyard into his window and making eye contact with him, it was as if the great window was transformed into a great mirror. Jeffries was no longer merely the subject of a gaze; he was also objectified by the look of the other.

Spivak's lectures incite a similar transgression within established modes of looking in fields of comparative cultural studies. The point is to interrupt the comparativist's look in order to make its otherwise anonymous origin visible, disrupting the gaze's hegemony by reconstituting the positions of subject and object (which is to say, of the one who merely sees and the one who is also seen). A suitable analogy within the visual narrative of *Rear Window* occurs in an earlier scene. Hitchcock foreshadowed the reversal described above through the effort of Jefferies' girlfriend to distract his voyeuristic obsession by marching in front of him with the jewels and the dress she would like to wear in their wedding. Putting on view a large jewelry box and holding open its lid so that its mirror faced Jeffries directly, she casually referred to her exhibition as a "preview of coming attractions." What comes? The other's gaze, reversed as in a mirror so that his own voyeuristic look is no longer anonymous but seen and objectified. The mirror anticipates the dissimulation of the voyeuristic look, which not incidentally culminates (as Slavoj Žižek has also noted)<sup>1</sup> in Jefferies dangling from the window as if propelled into the field of the other. *Death of a Discipline* similarly seeks to dissimulate comparative subjectivities by deploying the practice of literature as propulsion into the field of the other, or, "writing the self at its othermost."

In doing so, Spivak speaks to two intellectual communities—the social sciences

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Chapel Hill: Duke, 1993).

and the humanities. The social sciences fear radicalism in the humanities, which they repudiate for politicizing their subject matter. In turn, the humanities fear that the social sciences positivize their subject matter. She refers specifically to liberalism's concerns about diversity, plurality, and tolerance, as well as the Left's identitarian concerns about political empowerment, commonly asserted on the basis of national- or class-based collectivities (she associates Frederic Jameson with the first and Aijaz Ahmad with the second). Spivak criticizes these preoccupations with difference, because their promotions of "specular alterity" reflect the interests of the metropolitan migrant. The high-culture radical's view from above renders the terrain of otherness both palatable and intelligible within Western organizations of agency and meaning. For this reason, Spivak calls multiculturalism a late phase of dominant post-colonialism.

Two projects typify the way liberal pluralism and left pedagogy reconstitute Western ways of looking, in spite of their professed commitments to difference and otherness. In the first case, Spivak observes that strategies to extend and ensure equal protection of human rights are both well-intentioned and necessary. Indeed, she defends the indispensability of this problematic but somewhat effective mode of generalization. On the other hand, the human rights tradition will always do violence to the alterity of those to whom it extends the privileges of international liberalism, since it necessarily flattens the historical specificities of women around the world for the sake of abstract political recognition. In the second case, Spivak refers to various forms of the practice of gender training, in which first world feminists travel to third world sites and set up schools, workshops, or other sorts of local training programs designed to educate women about things like domestic abuse, gender discrimination, and sexual self-determination. Here again, Spivak acknowledges that the Left's approach to gender training has as its laudable goal the empowerment of women around the world, and this is not to be slighted. At the same time, the unstated premise at work in this model is that the goal of feminist intervention should be to refashion third-world women into first-world feminists.

Difference and otherness may be the catchwords of liberal humanities today, but placing on the agenda, protecting, training, and learning about others can and does reproduce modes of collectivity that do structural violence to singular figures, like the figure of woman, by virtue of their implicit fraternalism. What happens to the figural sister within this economy of fraternal collectives, i.e., liberal human rights, first world feminist empowerment? Spivak is reiterating the point Jacques Derrida made in *Politics of Friendship* that even in democracy we operate within a logofratrocentric notion of collectivity, and there are therefore unpredictable consequences to the insertion of women as women into

the questions of friendship and the political.<sup>2</sup> I would summarize the implications of this recognition by repeating Spivak's conclusion that "the most important thing, as far as I can tell, is knowing how to let go." It is to know how to treat the practices of literature—e.g., fiction, reading, translation, all incalculable exercises that involve giving oneself over to the otherness of language and to the language of the other—as exemplars in the art of politics.

A word that Derrida began to employ during the 1990s and that Spivak also makes use of here is "undecidability."<sup>3</sup> It assists her in saying that certain things, like figures in fiction, are not susceptible to hermeneutic or analytic procedures that render something utterly comprehensible, conclusively and exhaustively revealed for what they really are. Figures do not have bottom lines or last instances to be laid bare in the way one would search for symptoms of the operation of the economy, kinship, or linguistic structures. Not that figures are bottomless, not that they are transcendent, but figures do have a negative or quasi-transcendental quality about them, inasmuch as they cannot be pinned down to any definitive substance or content. Their operation is that of pure signifier, never a signified. Knowing "how to let go" when reading or translating the figure means recognizing the impossible and therefore provisional character of the undertaking. Just as a reading or translation is never conclusive, never the end of the story, so too is it necessary for the extension of human rights or the pedagogy of self-determination on the model of Western freedom and democracy not to assert political closure if it is to recognize the alterity of those in whose name it speaks. The figure of the other remains undecidable when not appropriated by the figure of the same (i.e., the human), and this, Spivak suggests, is the political lesson learned through literary education.

In 1979 Spivak wrote: "I thought the desire to explain might be a symptom of the desire to have a self that can control knowledge and a world that can be known."<sup>4</sup> Now, two decades into what became "postcolonial studies," she revisits that earlier feeling by arguing that the on-going clamor for the rational comprehensibility of the figure is analogous to globalization's imposition of the same system of exchange across the world. She is highlighting an intellectual and political situation in which Western universities desire to become globally engaged centers of knowledge production by endorsing pluralism, multi-

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice: The 'Mystical' Foundation of Authority*, eds. D. Cornell et al (New York: Routledge, 1992), and *The Gift of Death* (Chicago, 1994), as well as his response to Richard Rorty in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* by Ernesto Laclau, Simon Critchley, Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Culture and Explanation: Marginalia," in *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

culturalism, diversity, Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Comparative Literature, Area Studies, Ethnic studies, and we might also add Religious Studies. We who labor in the academy as good liberals or raucous radicals are made complicit with the extension of another kind of cultural and informational hegemony. When techniques of cultural knowledge-production (such as comparison) predicate recognition of difference on the ability to systematize otherness within codes of intelligibility that are not themselves subject to interrogation, knowledge of “the other” serves an ideological function: it reinforces the inevitability and stability of the center.

*Death of a Discipline* restages Spivak’s interrogation of Western political and academic representations of subaltern subjects in a way that cannot be ignored by Religious Studies. Furthermore, the summary judgment that she is stylistically unapproachable won’t do. For the difficulty one has in reading Spivak is inseparable from her effort to trouble the relation of reading to cultural agencies which go unnoticed within literary habits of the West. Reading the other should unsettle the agency of reading. It should problematize reading itself as a social site in the construction of identity and alterity. To take Spivak seriously in Religious Studies would be to ask, what are the practices of reading that structure conventions of looking and knowing within the study of religion? How might the tasks of translation, entering into the idiom of the other, and reading figures, perform the disfigurement of the seeing-but-unseen religion scholar? What techniques in a literacy of the religious will serve to propel the cultural study of religion into fields of visibility, i.e., academic, cultural, and historical self-consciousness?

For many, these questions surfaced as both imaginable and urgent in the late 1980s, when Spivak argued that those who do not confront the history of the West in a direct way “cannot speak,” because they do not exist within the structures of Western subject-constitution.<sup>5</sup> While many understood her to deny voice to the subaltern, Spivak’s purpose was to distinguish the *mechanics* of subject formation from invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other. On the level of techniques for the discursive constitutions of subjects as historical rather than authentic selves, what becomes visible is, in fact, the mechanics of the constitution of the colonizer (294). Spivak asked whether the conceptual frameworks of Western academics, and in particular Western Leftist intellectuals, foreclosed recognition of something like “correct resistance” among subaltern women in the cases she studied, or whether “the ideology of *sati*, coming from the history of the periphery, [cannot] be sublated into any model of

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<sup>5</sup> See Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Illinois, 1988:271-313) and a revised version in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999).

interventionist practice" (307).

I want to suggest that for more than two decades in Religious Studies, historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith was our Gayatri Spivak, and effectively the first postcolonial critic of religion. That the nature of his contribution has also been marked by ambiguity, however, may be dramatized by contrasting Spivak's post-humanistic task of "writing the self at its othermost" with Smith's squarely humanistic assertion that "nothing human is alien to me."

Smith prefigured, albeit in less immediately politicizing terms, much of what was to become associated with subaltern criticism. In "Map is not Territory" (1978) he already observed that the standard list of World Religions "correspond[s] to important geo-political entities with which we must deal" (295), and that "'primitives,' by way of contrast, may be simply lumped together, as may be so-called 'minor religions' because they do not confront our history in any direct fashion" (295).<sup>6</sup> Smith called this a condition of *invisibility*, and added emphatically: "I do not mean this word 'invisible' in any merely hyperbolic fashion. I mean, quite literally, that they may as well not exist" (295).

In 1982, in the book for which he continues to be most known (*Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*), Smith again contributed an early post-colonial critique of cargo cults. "A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams" (1982:90-101) addressed the problem of Europe's capital and colonial expansion, on the one hand, and the efforts of native, colonized communities to rectify disjointed narratives of temporality, equivalence, and exchange, on the other hand. The myth of Hainuwele told of ancestors returning bearing gifts, but the Europeans, to the surprise of the Ceramese, bore no gifts; instead they imposed taxes and forced them into serf-like relations. Smith renounced conventional interpretations of cargo cults as concerned with discrepancies between the world of the ancestors (the mythic past) and the world of men (the ritual present; 98). "It is," he said, "a witness to the confrontation between native and European economic systems" (98). Melanesian exchange systems, he continued, relied principally on the concept of equivalence, of zero sum relations, but in the forced encounters with European money and commodity exchange the possibility of such reciprocity was disrupted. Smith called this impossible condition a "cargo situation."<sup>7</sup> Why not call it incipient global capitalism, the precursor to sovereignty struggles throughout the ex-colonies of the West?

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982).

There is an enormous intellectual debt owed to Smith. It consists in an unnerving self-awareness of the fact that classifications of religion and race served a crucial function in the formation of Western political culture and identity.<sup>8</sup> They helped reify Europe's social boundaries through constitutive exclusions of differentiated others. This point was made again in "Nothing Human is Alien to Me:" in the so-called discovery of the Americas, Europe was confronted with something socially, theologically, politically, and geographically *surprising, unassimilable, and dissimulating*. What gets called "the West" was reconstituted in that encounter with the reality of its non-total and fragmentary status in the world. Smith concluded that it was in the context of this historical trauma that Europe began to develop all-new imaginaries of differentiation (e.g., religion, race) which provided Europe with the discursive tools with which to maintain the fiction of its cultural and social cohesiveness.<sup>9</sup>

And yet one encounters in Smith a tenacious assurance that the center holds, that one ought to view the responsibility of Religious Studies in strictly rational and analytical (meaning *non-political, i.e., non-normative*) ways. One instance I have in mind is the concluding section of "A Matter of Class," where Smith complained that contemporary Religious Studies has not met the challenge of Max Muller's admonition that "all real science rests on classification." "From the perspective of a late-twentieth century reader," Smith wrote, "there are assumptions in Muller's statement that invite principled rejection," e.g., the *positivism* of his appeal to science, the *universalism* of his concept of religion, and a "presumption of generality ... which some perceive as a sort of imperialism." Quoting Muller's own adaptation of "divide et tempera" to "classify and conquer", Smith acknowledged but rejected the "new ethos which eschews classification, comparison and explanation." In response to Kimberly Patton's essay, entitled "Thou Shalt Compare Neither Religious Traditions, Nor Elements of Religious Traditions, Lest Thou Totalize, Essentialize, or Commit Hegemonic Discourse," Smith retorted: "Nor shalt thou consider thyself a member of the academy."<sup>10</sup> That one knows better than to mistake maps for territories is beside the point. It is the responsibility of the scholar to produce them, Smith maintains, because not to classify would be to relinquish the rational center, to abandon "intelligibility" as a methodological (but is it not also political?) ideal.

The argument that classification is not sustained by similarities but by differences and that it is not driven by the discovery of sameness but of surprises, anomalies, etc., is misleading. (In "Map is Not Territory" Smith would

<sup>8</sup> Note the influence of Smith in the arguments of David Chidester in *Savage Systems*.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "Nothing Human is Alien to Me," in *Religion* (1996:26, 297-309).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Matter of Class," in *Harvard Theological Review* (Oct 1996: v89, n4, pp. 387-404).

“find the same conservative, ideological element strongly to the fore in a variety of approaches to religion which lay prime emphasis upon congruity and conformity [...]. Therefore it has seemed to me of some value, in my own work, to explore the dimensions of incongruity that exist in religious materials.”<sup>11</sup> Enthusiasm for difference is quietly circumscribed by the assertion of what Jacques Lacan frequently called the *sujet supposé savoir*, i.e., the subject that is supposed to know. This knowing subject confronted by difference performs a unifying function by organizing alterity into intelligible, reasonable constructions of knowledge. And this universal subject position underwrites, so to speak, the spectacle of difference that classifications perform. But within the organization of classificatory knowledge, difference remains purely specular. How does one translate this “specular alterity” (Spivak) into the disfigurement of the universal subject itself?

If one wanted to read Spivak back through Smith, and back through the study of religion, one place to begin would be an attempt to read *Rear Window* alongside an analogy Smith once made concerning the techniques and goals of Religious Studies. Smith has compared the scholarly study of religion to classical detective fiction. “Perhaps the earliest self-conscious methodologist,” he wrote, “is the redoubtable Sherlock Holmes”. Typifying his own attention to minutia, Smith examined a little-known journal piece written by Holmes himself on “the ashes of the various tobaccos:” “I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar, cigarette, and pipe tobacco, with colored plates illustrating the difference in the ash. It is a point which is continually turning up in criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a clue. If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder had been done by a man smoking an Indian lunkah, it obviously narrows your field of search.”<sup>12</sup>

One could argue that Smith in this instance is seduced by a version of the voyeurism which in *Rear Window* depends on a condition of not being seen. The Sherlock Holmes fantasy is that of a cerebral detective void of desire and culpability. In *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Joan Copjec’s examination of *film noir* suggests another implication. Copjec discussed a panoptic/Foucaultian thesis that the emergence of detective fiction corresponded to the rise of new mechanisms of modern power, namely statistics and bureaucratic democracies. Its rise reflects the convergence of a demand that people be counted as well as classed with the need for nations to manage a number of statistical risks that spiked in the modern industrial era, e.g., the threat of revolutionary collectives, levels of productivity, property crime, suicide,

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<sup>11</sup> “Map is Not Territory,” 1978:293.

<sup>12</sup> “A Matter of Class,” 387.

and murder. Detective fiction, one historian noted, lulls “us into the belief that everyday life - the one we ordinarily live and the one we read about in the realist novels - is free of surveillance. This blinds us to the fact that our ordinary life is structured by the very diffusion or dispersal of the same techniques found in detective novels ... the detective function is permitted to go undetected.”<sup>13</sup>

Like Copjec, I take a guarded stance toward uncomplicated ideology critiques like this one, and do not intend to apply such a critique to Smith. I am instead interested in an ambiguity internal to Smith’s work, made apparent by the comparison with classical detective fiction. What interested Smith was that Holmes used taxonomy to narrow the field of suspects, “to arrive at a class of possible offenders, not the individual perpetrator.” Holmes’ technique reflected the necessity for classes coupled with taxonomic constraint. Like Kant cautioning against confusing impressions for objects, Smith cautions against confusing maps for territories. According to this rationalist perspective, knowledge is always in contradiction; it must renounce itself at the same time that it asserts itself. Things can only be known by way of reason, but reason’s principle is its non-correspondence with things themselves. “Scholarly labor,” he cautioned more recently, “is a disciplined exaggeration in the direction of knowledge; taxonomy is a valuable tool in achieving that necessary distortion.”<sup>14</sup>

The tension in Smith is also Kant’s tension between the limitations and the necessity of thought, between the *necessity* of representation and the *failure* of representation to come up with anything substantive. But what one encounters instead in the final pages of Smith’s essays, as one does in “A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams,” for example, are those exuberant moments of evidential disclosure in which all of the pieces of the puzzle come together into an irresistible explanatory conclusion. In contrast to Kant, Smith gets to the bottom of the matter, solves the mystery, and captures the culprit. Smith’s enamor with the Holmes fantasy inhibits him from the darkly radical self-awareness that later became the trademark of the *film noir* genre, whose detectives found themselves deeply implicated in the deeds and desires they sought to explain. Unlike classical detective fiction, in *film noir* the detective’s search culminates in a confrontation with the detective’s own desire; detection itself becomes the object, not only the subject, of the forensic gaze.

With Smith, in other words, one never asks the noir-esque questions that Hitchcock forced spectators to ask in *Rear Window* and that Spivak forced readers

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<sup>13</sup> Copjec is referring in this case to the thesis of D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (1988), with which she does not agree. See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> “A Matter of Class,” 404.

to ask in *Death of a Discipline*: how does the anonymity of my look instantiate the “I” that looks? How does my invisibility serve to conceal and disavow the underlying instability and incoherence of myself? How does my “membership” enable the fiction of my inevitability, my neutrality, my legitimacy? And how might this organization of the gaze be transgressed, intruded upon by the other? How might these conventional ways of looking be traumatized and disrupted when the look of the other interrupts my gaze and renders me visible? How might the “I” that looks be both *bothered* and *othered* by the alterity of the other? How might “I” be *othered*? How might I, student and scholar of religion, write my self at its othermost?

Notwithstanding this critique of what I regard to be an indispensable precursor to postcolonial approaches to Religious Studies, Smith has also anticipated these transgressions of legitimate structures of academic looking. In doing so he has, in spite of a tendency toward conservatism, indicated how a more self-examining postcolonial study of religion can make its way at the margins of liberal Religious Studies. I shall conclude by recalling Smith’s interest in the task of *defamiliarization*, and then by commenting on the way this task was also proposed by Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* for an *ethic* of comparative cultural study.

In the routinely cited introduction to *Imagining Religion*, after the remark that “religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study,” Smith appealed to the concept of “defamiliarization” as a model task for the scholar of religion. The term “defamiliarization,” borrowed from Victor Shklovsky, suggested that the work of the historian is not to show that what seems different is really the same (as comparisons tend to do), but to make the familiar strange. To defamiliarize is to destabilize and reconstitute the familiar. Smith was calling attention to a comparative tendency to assimilate other religions into a grid structured by assumptions and distinctions that mimic those of Western Christianity. He was also writing against an implicit goal of the field at that time, i.e., to indulge Western fascinations with the alien and exotic. His point was that a more responsible goal for the discipline should be to make comparison an occasion to let the scholar’s own work, the grid itself, become visible *as a scholarly work*, and thus a reflection of the scholar’s own culturally conditioned ways of looking.<sup>15</sup>

Spivak recovers “defamiliarization” as an ethic of comparative cultural study in the context of a feminist take on Freud and the uncanny. The discussion occurs in the final essay of *Death of a Discipline*, “Planetarity,” a term Spivak proposes as an alternative to humanism. “Planet-thought” transgresses political imaginaries

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to the case cited here, from *Imagining Religion*, Smith also mentions “defamiliarization” in “A Matter of Class.”

predicated on a view of ourselves as global agents, in which species-identity and one-world-residence take precedence. Instead, to imagine ourselves as planetary creatures is to define ourselves with reference to underived alterity, opening us up to an embrace of inexhaustible difference (77). Planetary renders home uncanny, un-homelike, and unfamiliar; it defamiliarizes home. Defamiliarization, the translation of Freud's *unheimlich*, may also engage us in a literary-critical disciplinary exercise in othering the self. Unlike Smith, for whom defamiliarization never transgresses the humanistic thesis that "there is no other" or that "nothing human is alien to me," Spivak imagines the estrangement of the self and its implications for cultural study differently. She concludes that *there is never nothing but the self*; because the self is always "other" (as Lacan put it, "the locus of the self is in the other.")<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, the transgression of *Death of a Discipline*, which is also the transgression of *Rear Window*, is fundamentally a practice of translation. Rather than translating difference into the idiom of the self, the goal of translation in this case is to translate oneself into the idiom of the other, to "write the self at its othermost" (or, to be propelled into the visibility of the gaze). I am certain that translation implicitly and in practice has been axiomatic to the work of Jonathan Z. Smith. By pressing his thought in the direction of Spivak, his unstated intellectual companion in so many ways, we further develop the work of Religious Studies as an occasion to "engage the idiom of global others" (9). If there will be a "new comparative Religious Studies" to accompany Spivak's "new comparative literature," it will not merely satisfy the restive desire of the metropolitan migrant, but instead work to displace the discipline itself (10). To say, as Smith has said, that "there is always discrepancy; translation is necessarily incomplete,"<sup>17</sup> entails more than "mere methodology." It entails an ethic of alterity which even a materialist study of religion should not renounce. Citing Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Spivak described "the impossibility of translation" (88) as an insurmountable moment which undoes the division between those who look and the objects/agents whose alterity draws from us a response. Like the organization of the *noir* universe itself, *Death of a Discipline* identifies this propulsion into the visibility of the other as the founding gesture of a responsive and responsible cultural study.

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire," in *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 1977). Interestingly, Lacan also gives something close to a synopsis of *Rear Window*'s dialectic of the gaze: "In this 'rear view', all that the subject can be certain of is the anticipated image coming to meet him that he catches of himself in his mirror" (306).

<sup>17</sup> "A Matter of Class," 393.

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