



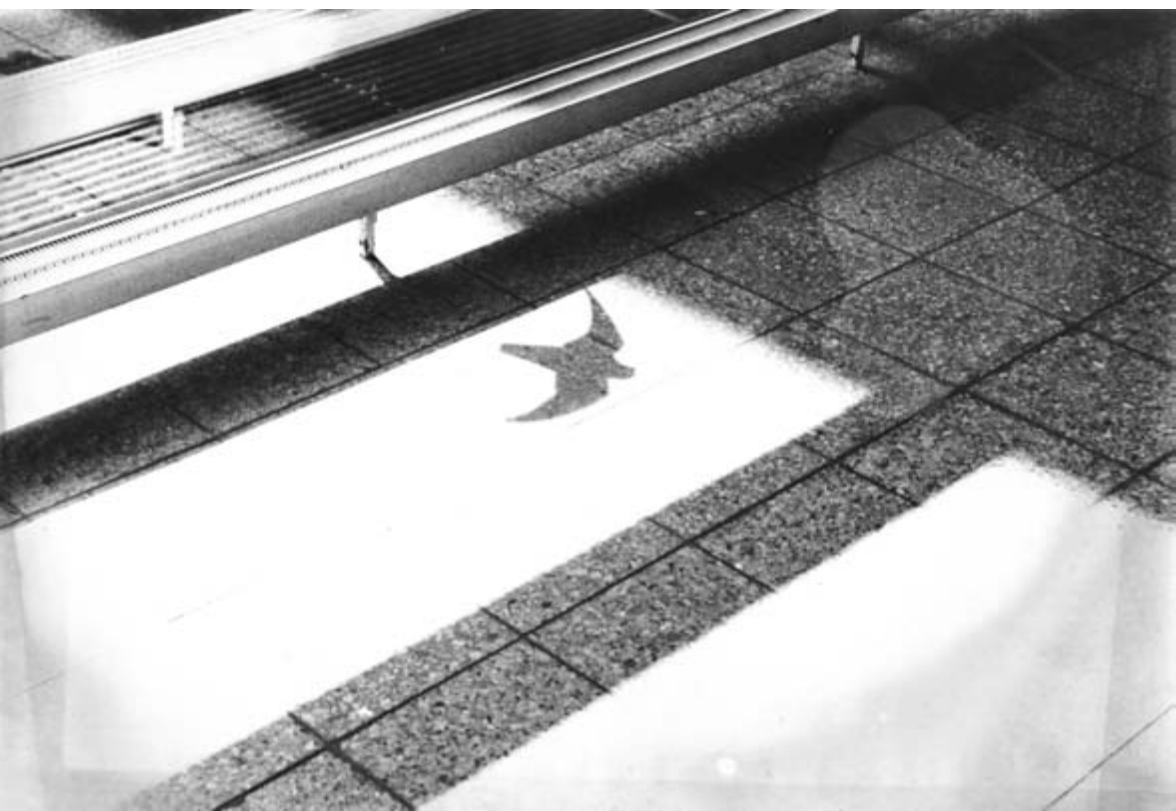
**REY CHOW**

**Entanglements, or  
Transmedial Thinking  
about Capture**



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*A John Hope Franklin Center Book*



# **Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture**

**REY CHOW**

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Frontispiece: Julian Rohrerhuber, *Vogelscheuche*  
(detail, one of four photographs, 1995).

*Courtesy of the artist.*

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### *Note on Translations*

With the exception of cases in which I believe it would help readers to see the original quotations, words and passages from languages other than English are provided in the official English translations or in the conventional Romanized formats.

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## Introduction

The task of philosophy today could well be, What are these relations of power in which we are caught and in which philosophy itself . . . has been entangled?

—MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Dits et écrits*

The essays collected in this volume were written for various occasions during the decade 1999 to 2010, and most of them within the second half of that period.<sup>1</sup> Rather than with a preemptive unitary focus, they are presented here in the fundamental sense of the word “essay,” as attempts at thinking through a series of recurrent, overlapping issues: the status of the mediatized image in relation to reflexivity; capture and captivation; mimetic violence, victimization, and forgiveness; and the place of East Asia in globalized Western academic study. This condition of overlapping recurrences is indicated by the term “entanglement,” which is invoked, first and foremost, to suggest a topological looping together that is at the same time an enmeshment of topics. Beyond this intimation of a tangle, of things held together or laid over one another in nearness and likeness, my aim is to ask if entanglement could not also be a figure for meetings that are not necessarily defined by proximity or affinity. What kinds of entanglements might be conceivable through partition and par-

1. The French-language original of the epigraph: “La tâche de la philosophie aujourd’hui pourrait bien être: qu’en est-il de ces relations de pouvoir dans lesquelles nous sommes pris et dans lesquelles la philosophie elle-même s’est . . . empêtrée?” Michel Foucault, “La Philosophie analytique de la politique” (1978), *Dits et écrits, 1954–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald with Jacques Lagrange, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 3:541; English translation quoted in Arnold I. Davidson, “Structures and Strategies of Discourse: Remarks towards a History of Foucault’s Philosophy of Language,” *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. and intro. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3.

## 2 Introduction

tiality rather than conjunction and intersection, and through disparity rather than equivalence?<sup>2</sup>

From these two series of convolutions—one could perhaps think of them as conceptual out-foldings superimposed on conceptual in-foldings—a certain contour of the entangled may be conjured, across a number of medial and cultural forms, with capture as artifice, force, and momentum.

### Loops

*Brecht's Scissors, Benjamin's Copy-images, Our Image-capturings* ♦ As a point of departure, the essay “When Reflexivity Becomes Porn” revisits some of modernism’s prominent legacies, pondering the direction in which reflexivity as a theoretical practice has been heading. Walter Benjamin’s work on Bertolt Brecht is exemplary of the conceptual innovations that continue to bear an impact on theoretical and artistic thinking in the twenty-first century. Brecht, contrasting the dramatic with the epic, was fond of citing Alexander Döblin’s idea of using a pair of scissors to cut up a narrative into pieces, with the pieces remaining fully capable of life.<sup>3</sup> To cut up, to subdivide, to render into parts: if art since

2. These questions are inspired to some extent by scientific inquiry such as quantum physics, in which the term “entanglement” designates mysterious connections between particles, which are said to be entangled due to simultaneous reactions they produce, reactions that are not the results of proximity (that is, of particles drawing close to one another). For an informative work in this area by a feminist theoretical physicist, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). In the area of biosemiotics, the behaviors of animals and organisms which coevolve by mysterious patterns of symmetry, down to the precise details of their bodily formations, could perhaps be considered another instance of this kind of ecological or cosmological entanglement. For a classic study, see Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans, with A Theory of Meaning* (originally published in German in 1934 and 1940), trans. Joseph D. O’Neil, introduction by Dorion Sagan, afterword by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). The physical and biological sciences are well beyond the scope and concerns of this book, but it is worth noting the cross-disciplinary dynamism of the queries involved.

3. See Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 70: “The bourgeois novel in the last century developed much that was ‘dramatic,’ by which was meant the strong centralization of the story, a momentum that drew the separate parts into a common relationship. A particular passion of utterance, a certain emphasis on the

modernism has been about a heightened sense of estrangement (or defamiliarization), estrangement itself is often a result of the intensification—one could say infinitization—of the part and the partial, and of partitioning. The actions of the scissors from which Brecht derived revolutionary thinking about narrative are also the actions of the camera. Montage, which in the Chinese language is often translated as 剪接 *jian-jie* (literally, cutting-reconnecting), may in this light be rethought not simply as an event in the history of cinema but also as a key operation in twentieth-century theoretical thinking. This is the operation of scattering a (purported) previous continuum into fragments, which are then soldered or sutured together and distributed anew. We perform montage whenever we move things around from one context into another in the realm of thought, producing unanticipated, unsuspected relations—oftentimes triggering a crisis and a new situation—through the very gesture of juxtaposition. (To this extent, the contemporary image-editing procedure known as Photoshop, sometimes derided as fakery, is simply a continuation and implementation of montage by digital means.)

This new order of things—technical, artistic, and political—as triggered by cinematographic maneuvers of space and time is the focus of Benjamin's widely read essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."<sup>4</sup> For centuries, Benjamin reminds us, artists tried to perfect techniques of representation in order to reproduce reality in as accurate a manner as possible. That centuries-old effort was rendered obsolete by the advent of daguerreotypy, as a mere click on a machine, the camera, can replicate reality with a kind of resemblance no human hand, however skilled, ever could have. Although it was written in the mid-1930s, Benjamin's argument remains a landmark for reasons that go far beyond the empirical invention of photography and film. His thesis is really about a paradigm shift in the way replication is, or can be, conceptualized. No matter how well made, the artistic image was, before the arrival of photography, simply an imperfect copy, a reproduction that was deemed secondary in status to the source, which was reality itself. Mechanical automatism, Benjamin suggests, has fundamentally overturned

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clash of forces are hallmarks of the 'dramatic.' The epic writer Döblin provided an excellent criterion when he said that with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life."

4. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. and introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217–51.

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this hierarchy by ushering in an era in which an image's replicability is to be grasped in its infinite extendability or generatability both from within and from without (the frame). This is how the copy-image supersedes the original as the main action or event. While the original may remain confined to the particular place and time of its making, the copy-image, by virtue of becoming (re)producible in forms that were previously unimaginable, lives a life of versatility and mobility, enabling even the most distant and exotic sights to be held in one's hand, visually pried open, and examined up close, at the same time that they are disseminated far and wide.

If we consider the copy-image as a part that has been cut out from the original, Benjamin's thesis can also be rethought as a thesis about the afterlife of the part and the partial: technically reproducible copy-images are so many sections from an original "whole" that can henceforth no longer be reassembled into one piece. As the parts take on lives of their own, multiplying tens of thousands of times in unexpected locales and dimensions, before unexpected audiences, the original is by contrast trapped in its own aura, imprisoned in the specificity of its "natural" time and place. By calling attention to the copy-image as an endlessly multipliable and endlessly movable part, *Benjamin has in effect inaugurated a reconfiguration of the conventional logic of capture*: rather than reality being caught in the sense of being contained, detained, or retained in the copy-image (understood as a repository), it is now the machinic act or event of capture, with its capacity for further partitioning (that is, for generating additional copies and images *ad infinitum*), that sets reality in motion, that invents or makes reality, as it were.<sup>5</sup>

This modernist ambience of cutting, capturing by copy-images, and partition-as-ever-renewable-productivity—an ambience that resonates both with the Marxian commodity fetish and with the psychoanalytic partial object—is one framework in which the chronologically later work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze on visibilities may also be understood. An important moment in this theoretical loop is Foucault's

5. For related interest, see the discussion of the paradigm shift in memory brought about by digitization in Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Mayer-Schönberger makes the important point that there has been an irreversible change in the economics driving the storage (memory) of information—namely, that unlike in ages past, it is now much cheaper to save (that is, remember) than to discard (that is, forget). This is an interesting parallel to, and update of, Benjamin's point about the fundamental change in the economics of image-distribution made possible by technological reproducibility.

powerful work on incarceration by light, in which he famously asserts, “Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.”<sup>6</sup> Beyond the popularized reading of *Discipline and Punish* as a treatise on surveillance (with surveillance being a manmade form of transcendent violence), however, Foucault’s work on visibility can in fact lead in a quite different direction. To see this, we need to read that work in conjunction with Deleuze’s and follow the possible lines of flight into the contemporary discursive terrain of image-capturing and redemption. As explored in the essay “Post-colonial Visibilities,” in reference to the work of Helen Grace as well as Foucault and Deleuze, what is at stake is no longer the coupling of visibility and incarceration or surveillance, on the one hand, or even simply the deterritorialization and becoming-mobile of technologized images, on the other. Rather, it is the collapse of the time lag between the world and its capture. What happens to memory when images, in which past events are supposedly recorded and preserved, become instantaneous with the actual happenings? When conventional time shifts vanish as a result of the perfecting of the techniques of image-capturing? When time loses its potential to become fugitive or fossilized—in brief, to become anachronistic?

*Captivation, Identification* ♦ The second theoretical loop that runs through this collection involves another, sentient dimension of capture, in which the affective rather than purely mechanistic ramifications of capture come to the fore. These workings are implicitly present in all the essays and explicitly addressed in “On Captivation.” Juxtaposing the work of Jacques Rancière with that of the cultural anthropologist Alfred Gell as well as with readings of theory, literature, and film, that essay approaches capture and captivation through the debate on the indistinction of art and nonart. In advancing his admirably democratic thesis about the indistinction between art and everyday artifacts, Gell, for instance, puts an intriguing spotlight on the trap, a device for catching and killing animals, as a major example of such indistinction. And yet the trap is, to all appearances, the opposite of indistinction and, by implication, the opposite of a liberalization of boundaries: its art or cunning lies in an aggressive potential to take another being captive and bring it into submission. What makes a trap a trap is a state of arrest and enclo-

6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 200.

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sure, coinciding with the prey's loss of mobility, autonomy, and perhaps life. How, then, to explain the centrality of the trap in a nonelitist consideration of art and artifacts? Is the trap in the end simply an account of history as told by the victors, the captors? Can the trap be thought of as a special part, both in the foregoing medial terms and in terms of Rancière's specific sense of *partage*, which pertains both to sharing and to distribution? It is by following the lead of these questions that this essay arrives at the suggestion of capture and captivation as a type of discourse, one that derives from the imposition of power on bodies and the attachment of bodies to power, and that contains the makings of what may be called a heteronomy or heteropoeisis.

At the same time, capture and captivation constitute a critical response, however untimely, to the disconnect(ing) of identification as a perceptual mode, a disconnect(ing) that underlies many examples of modernist art and theory, including feminist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s. As is well-known, this too is an important legacy of Brecht's teaching: at the heart of Brecht's attack on traditional Western dramaturgy is the aesthetic effect, crucial to Aristotle's theory, of what may be called audience identification with the dramatic spectacle. Making-strange, for Brechtian critics, essentially means rejecting wholesale the emotion of tragic inevitability that makes dramatic action cohere and enables the identificatory entanglement with fiction. Instead, in an anti-Aristotelian mode, the audience is invited—not the least through the cutting-up of a narrative (continuum) into different characters' perspectives—to adopt critical positions in relation to the dramatic spectacle, so as to interrupt and puncture its illusionism as based on aesthetic unity, which in psychological terms would correspond to the illusionism of a secure founding of the self, of a fully integrated selfhood. In retrospect, it is possible to say that such programmatic dismantling of identification, and with it the conscious disengagement from binding emotions such as empathy and compassion, has become instrumental not only to subsequent innovations in the modern theater and cinema but also to the ongoing, contemporary politicization of identities by way of class, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, and other social partitions and divisions.

But ghosts of identification refuse to die, and typically return to haunt scenarios involving loyalty and betrayal and the pain and pleasure that accompany the pursuits of objects, be these objects human or non-human. In a number of essays (“On Captivation,” “Fateful Attachments,” and “Framing the Original”), we encounter fictional characters who can easily be labeled mad but whose madness, or state of being captivated,

lends the stories their perverse psychological textures. A bored housewife in the nineteenth-century French countryside who squanders her life in addictions to cheap romances and consumerist spending; a Stasi functionary in East Germany who, at the risk of his own career, opts to guard the people he is supposed to catch and incriminate; a minor collector in mid-twentieth-century Republican China who, the pressure of public opinion notwithstanding, surrenders to Japanese invaders in order to save his own collection of bric-a-brac; a woman spy in the same period in China who participates in a patriotic plot to seduce and catch a national traitor live, only to end up letting him off at a critical moment, at the expense of her own and her allies' lives . . . By what exactly are these characters so captivated—knotted together, tangled up—that physical survival seems negligible, indeed beside the point? Is it sheer coincidence that these memorable tales of captivity, with their protagonists' characteristic propinquity toward bondage, masochism, and self-annihilation, have emerged amid modern contexts of conflicting allegiances, East and West, and alongside a modernist (anti-) aesthetics of anti-identification? Should such bondage, masochism, and self-annihilation be taken for a final enclosure or an anarchical opening, a recoiling of the self into . . . the infinite?

*Victimhood* ♦ With the essay “Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood,” a third theoretical loop can be traced, one that intersects with copying and capturing through the dynamics of mimesis. The work of René Girard, with its critique of the presumed originariness of desire and its emphasis on the mimetic nature of cultural violence, provides the main argumentative intervention here. In Girard's focus on mimesis as a sociological phenomenon, we hear resonances with feminist and postcolonial criticisms. At the same time, insofar as feminist and postcolonial criticisms tend to posit masculinity and whiteness as the definitive sources for women's and colonized people's acts of imitation, they tend to leave intact a presupposition of origins that carries with it the implication of mimesis as a derivative form of action. By contrast, in an argumentative move that recalls Benjamin's thesis about the potency of the copy-image, Girard asserts mimetic violence as the very mechanism—or the first term—of collective cultural existence. His unapologetic observation of mindless iteration or repetition in human behavior can be discomfiting, for the simple reason that it refuses to idealize or prettify humanity, individual or collective. Apart from the sacred rituals and the artworks that, in the course of human civilization, have helped



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exorcize mimetic violence through the sacrifice of surrogate victims, the only viable exit suggested by Girard's work seems to be religion. Hence, we surmise, his investment in such radical Judeo-Christian figures as Job and Jesus.

Another kind of Judeo-Christian response to cultural violence is forgiveness. From Hannah Arendt to Jacques Derrida, theorists have embraced forgiveness as the essential form of transcendence that can liberate or salvage us from being held captive to the spell of past injuries and sufferings. In Derrida's rendering of forgiveness as translation, and of translation ultimately as a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the question of suffering and victimhood takes on a thought-provoking lingual significance: suffering and victimhood are at once intractably untranslatable and what strives for, what demands translation. (To quote Derrida's words from another context: "Only that which is untranslatable calls for translation.")<sup>7</sup> These issues are discussed in the essay "I insist on the Christian dimension," in which Derrida's advocacy of Christian forgiveness (in the context of a reading of *The Merchant of Venice*) is juxtaposed with two fictional characters' self-destructively intransigent behavior in the form of a refusal or inability to forgive without the reward of power. Insofar as they cast these characters outside the borders of what is acceptably human, the experiences of abjection undergone by Shylock in Shakespeare's play and by Shin-ae Lee in the Korean film *Secret Sunshine* leave the piety of Christian forgiveness, rather than as a satisfactory answer, as an unresolved aporia, an epistemic snarl. Against such piety, these stories ask, how should we come to terms with victimhood, which for many victims and their descendants is a singular, impassable, and nontranscendable occurrence?

The essay "American Studies in Japan, Japan in American Studies" serves as a rejoinder to these issues from a historically different perspective. Occasioned by a meeting on American studies in Japan, this essay examines two films, *No Regrets for Our Youth* and *Rhapsody in August*, both by Akira Kurosawa and both having to do with the fraught history of the Second World War in the Pacific. In *Rhapsody in August*, in particular, we encounter the compelling figure of a grandmother who lost her husband to the atomic bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki in August 1945, who in her old age seems courageously willing to move on

7. See Mustapha Chérif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan, with a foreword by Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 81.

in peace, in spite of a lifetime's suffering caused by an irreparable personal loss. As is evident in the politics of translation, there is an intimate relation suggested here among victimhood, redemption, and language (as in the notion of heterolingualism, borrowed from Naoki Sakai). If the frail old woman's ability to move on is the result of a letting-go, of what exactly has she let go? How might such letting-go be understood when compared with the transcendent, redemptive impulse of Christian forgiving?

*The Far East of the West* ♦ The essay "Fateful Attachments" focuses on a little read text by Lao She, an eminent writer who, in the summer of 1966, was hounded into suicide during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Exploring a minor collector's obsession with objects against a background of competing forces of commodity fetishism, patriotism, and nihilism, this story offers a small preview of China's full-scale embrace of capitalist consumerism in the age of globalization, in the wake of its dogmatist communist era. The essay "Framing the Original" features the story "Lust, Caution" by Eileen Chang, on which the contemporary director Ang Lee's controversial film of the same title is based. Be the experience of captivation through collected objects or illicit sexual partners, Lao She's and Eileen Chang's works demonstrate how the presence of the national enemy, Japan, cuts into such experience with a prohibitive divide—the divide between "us" and "them" that, in accordance with Girard's logic of collective mimetic violence, cannot be crossed. In both stories, the main characters' failure to adhere to this prohibitive divide is fatal, yet it is such failure, caused by the insistence of other forms of fidelity—eccentric, masochistic, unpatriotic, metaphysical—that constitutes the inexhaustible narrative interest in each case.

The presence of Japan in these stories about China during the 1930s and 1940s, together with the films by Kurosawa mentioned earlier, evokes the difficult question of the changing status of the modern Far East in the Western, in particular the U.S. academy after the Second World War. If, as China ascends to the position of an economic superpower, it is no longer possible to approach China as a subaltern nation, by way of a line from a primer such as "I am hungry" (see the opening discussion in "Framing the Original"), how should the clichés, the stereotypes, and the myths as well as the proper scholarly knowledge about the modern Far East be reassembled? How to come to terms with the history of Japan's imperialist aggression against China and other Asian countries, even as we come to terms with the history of U.S. militarism in Japan, the rest

of Asia, and elsewhere in the postwar world? And how might this discursive loop of “the Far East of the West,” now complicated by various technologies of framing, including but not limited to film, be extendable in an encounter with the cosmopolitan Christian aspirations toward an ethically tolerant world literature, aspirations shared by theorists such as Erich Auerbach, Edward Said, and others in the discipline known as comparative literature (as discussed in the essay “‘I insist on the Christian dimension’”)?

### Scenes of Entanglement, Dreams of Enlightenment

By bringing to the fore uncharted and potential connections among discourses and disciplines, these essays, when read as an assemblage, demonstrate what is perhaps the most obvious sense of entanglement: the sense of a contemporary horizon in which relationships among things, among things and humans, and among different media have become increasingly an issue, in part because of the steady relativization, in modernity, of once-presumed stable categories of origination and causation such as author, owner, actor, mind, intention, and motive. Such relativization of agency is compounded, in the age of digitization, by the rapid disappearance of time-honored intervals, be those intervals temporal, geographical, or personal. (In this respect, the transmediality of the web or the net, so felicitously named, is a nonnegligible operator in our thoroughly entangled daily environment.) As Bruno Latour suggests, many ideas tend to make sense only when they are kept segregated from one another as distinct, specialized domains of knowledge; once they are put side by side, the very sense that they have been making in isolation begins to evaporate.<sup>8</sup> One outcome of entangled relationships, then, would be the fuzzing-up of conventional classificatory categories due to the collapse of neatly maintained epistemic borders. The state of an intermixing, of a diminution of distances among phenomena that used to belong in separate orders of things, necessitates nothing short of a recalculation and redistribution of the normativized intelligibility of the world, includ-

8. See the opening pages of Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). These pages notably recall the beginning of Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1970), with the deranged list of classifications from Borges's fantastical Chinese encyclopaedia.

ing a realignment of the grids, sets, and slots that allow for such intelligibility in the first place.

Against this epistemic sense of entanglement (that is, of entanglement as a derangement in the organization of knowledge caused by unprecedented adjacency and comparability or parity), scholars of the literary humanities will note that the word “entanglement” also carries the more familiar connotation of being emotionally tied to a person or an object, from whom or from which one cannot extricate oneself. As Gaston Bachelard, writing about the “cogito” of the dreamer, declares, “The night dream (*rêve*) does not belong to us. It is not our possession. With regard to us, it is an abductor, the most disconcerting of abductors: it abducts our being from us.”<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, describing how a poet writes about the angles of moldings on a ceiling, Bachelard suggests, “If we ‘listen’ to the design of things, we encounter an angle, a trap detains the dreamer.” He concludes, “Even when the criticisms of reason, the scorn of philosophy and poetic traditions unite to turn us from the poet’s labyrinthine dreams, it remains nonetheless true that the poet has made a trap for dreamers out of his poem. / As for me, I let myself be caught. I followed the molding.”<sup>10</sup> As is evident in some of these essays, this precarious situation of losing oneself in an other, a situation that at times culminates in self-destruction, is often the stuff of art and fiction. Paradoxically, it is in the realm of such sticky, sentimental entanglements, which can be both blockages and throughways, that the old-fashioned but ever relevant question of art’s and fiction’s relation to (metanarratives of) social progress tends to linger.

In a nutshell: the democratization of society typically calls for and witnesses a gradual elimination of elitist distinctions (the leveling of categories of knowledge in modernity, as observed by Latour, is a good instance of such democratization); entanglements in the affective or aesthetic form of capture and captivation, on the other hand, tend to be experiences of becoming sensorially *overtaken* and *overpowered* that bear the persistent constitutive markings of hierarchical distinctions (such as domination and submission). When politically progressive intellectuals think the democratization, indistinction, and liberalization of social boundaries, in a kind of conceptual fluidity between art and the every-

9. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 145.

10. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, foreword by Etienne Gilson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 144–45.

day, between the modern and the primitive, between the West and the non-West, and so forth, they typically run up against some populations' embodied states of captivity, including the intangible but phenomenologically registered effects of enchantment, subordination, unevenness, vulnerability, desperation, servitude, and deprivation of existential autonomy—in short, all the basic issues of terror and freedom, and (often sadomasochistic) pleasure and pain that, in refracted manners, surface in art and fiction. The latter demand engagement, therefore, in their antagonistic materiality as much as in their open-ended ideality.

Entanglements: the linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together. The essays in this collection can be read as so many scenes of entanglements, in multiple valences of the term “scene”—as situation, dramatization, staging, picture, frame, window, and above all as the assemblage or installation of a critical aperture, a supplemental time-space in which perhaps even the roughest crossings can be approached with a sense of innovation and creativity, and the most painful entanglements understood, if somewhat counterintuitively, as evolving states of freedom.

In Mandarin, the character for “entanglement,” 纏 (*chan*), happens to be a homonym with the character for “Buddhist meditation,” 禪 (*chan*), a practice, it is believed, that has the potential to lead toward spiritual enlightenment. In the gap between these conceptually disparate yet aurally indistinguishable phenomena, is there some whimsical relation to be dreamt? Some other loop, as yet unthought, that awaits being made intelligible?