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Transnational Subjectivities: Roy Miki's *Surrender* and Global Displacements

KIT DOBSON

ROY MIKI'S 2001 BOOK OF POETRY, *Surrender*, offers its readers an opportunity to interrogate the function of subjectivity in the face of contemporary global displacements of the self under transnational capitalism. When the contemporary subject is asked to view itself as an actor within a global system and no longer simply as a being imbued with agency within a local or national setting, a series of questions arises; Miki's text sets out to explore these. They include questions about not only the subject, but also about how the global system constructs such subjects and whose ends, specifically, the contemporary forms of subjectivity might serve. In raising these issues, *Surrender* meshes with Miki's broader literary and political project of questioning the legacies of national and state structures. Here the transnational dialogue comes to focus upon the differentiation between dominant, American conceptions of transnational subjectivity and a more mobile form of the subject. This latter, mobile form of the subject comes to be aligned in part with Canada and with other spaces that are depicted as somehow escaping the hegemonic power of the United States. "The purpose," the poem "knocks at the door" states, "has always been / to restore the purchases beyond" (41). This "beyond" is one that looks towards liberatory discourses that escape the controls of the world system. It is a system evoked in the word "purchases," which connotes not only the world of banal consumerism, but also aspires towards something that is spatially past the easy reach of those within this world, which requires gaining the leverage that the word "purchase" also connotes. This reading, however, takes some deciphering. The poems in the book do not form a clear sequence or follow a narrative progression. Rather, proceeding through strategies of enjambment and rupture, the poems of *Surrender* suggest ways of politicizing subjectivity as a strategy for dealing with the contemporary moment, one in which the

dialectic between the nation and the world is renegotiated. *Surrender* thus rethinks the subject within globalizing political spaces, asking its readers to query subjectivity in the context of the nation-state, all the while handling “the social,” as the poem “speed bumps” states, “with kid gloves” (21). This constitutes an image of care and delicacy, but it is one that is complicated, in turn, by its associations with the luxury goods of the wealthy classes against which the book agitates. Such problems recur again and again, undermining any simplistic reading of today’s subject, pushing readers instead to engage with contemporary forms of control and domination in a complex manner.

This paper seeks to uncover how this one voice within Canadian poetry thinks about cultural dissidence against global capitalism in the context of theorizations of globalization, examining the consequences of national citizenship and the problematic of agency under the contemporary systems of subjectivity. *Surrender* provides a direct line into the problematics of conceptualizing poetic disruption in a transnational setting. Thinking about politics and subjectivity through its poetic form suggests, moreover, that one important terrain for the counter-globalization debate is cultural, and that questions of liberation continue to be situated at the level of language itself. While seeking liberation from oppressive sign systems that would limit the subject to a static position, the multiple voices of *Surrender* find themselves running up against disciplinary forces that seek to impose limits and external order upon them. Agency remains, however provisional it might be, in shuttling between positions of unhinged openness in thinking about the self and an acknowledgement of the system in control of citizens and subjects. I link this system of dominance to the Foucauldian concept of biopower, a term that describes how regimes of control seek to extend their sovereignty beyond the political realm and come instead to wrest control over such things as life, death, and even the body itself. Identity becomes “an island” in *Surrender* (12), one that is to be disrupted, but the transnational world that is depicted will not fully enable an open-ended liberation or disrupted selfhood either. Finding spaces for agency remains instead an ongoing and complex negotiation.

This shuttling strategy is key at the present moment, as concepts of subjectivity shift under the contemporary mindset of the transnational. A great deal is at stake in rethinking the subject today. The formerly stable concepts of identity and selfhood began to appear coercive in the

early analyses of deconstruction. As poststructural theorists of identity began to examine these concepts in more depth, they came to be seen as ways of restricting how the body might move through space and form allegiances with others. The transnational era seems to magnify these issues. Concepts of singularity and identity seem to limit the possibilities for social change today, as the expectation that the body will inhabit a single identity renders it individuated and isolated, left to fend for itself within the capitalist system. In the place of identity — and the old retrenchments of identity politics — Stuart Hall offers the concept of “identifications” as one way of thinking about how subjectivities might be reconceptualized (292). Judith Butler, on a different tack, now queries the notion of “undoing gender” as a means of working towards liberation and as a way of making the “gender trouble” that she has advocated into a way of opening up the subject to difference and change. Such acts of undoing, dissenting against the status quo and stable identities, have particular consequences when thought through the framework of the global, with the attendant problems of policing and surveillance that the contemporary scene has introduced. Regulatory institutions such as state-based citizenship actively work in opposition to these liberating discourses, seeking to reinscribe difference and limit the play of bodies, while, on the flip side, international economic agreements dismantle the borders that prevent the free play of capital. Opening up the concept of the self offers one means of countering the deregulation of capitalism with human liberation. But this opening has a number of consequences, as *Surrender* makes clear.

The terrain of the transnational can be considered through the frameworks offered by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their academic bestsellers *Empire* and *Multitude*, published in 2000 and 2004, respectively. The debates that these volumes have sparked provide, for me, grounds for beginning an analysis of what subjectivity might mean in the context of contemporary global capitalism. The success of these books suggests that theorization of the subject and counter-capitalist techniques remain vital in the contemporary moment. In these hotly debated volumes, Hardt and Negri provide an interdisciplinary focus upon contemporary tropes of hegemony and resistance, reading the political and cultural problems that they see in dominant models of global capitalism, and attempting to formulate ways of escaping the disparities that this system creates. What appears to have attracted critics to these

texts is Hardt and Negri's sheer optimism and their discussion of a vast array of the knowledges produced around globalization. At a time when many leftist theorists have been sounding increasingly bleak, Hardt and Negri inject a great deal of enthusiasm into debates by claiming that the world is getting better and that a future of what they term "radical democracy" is just around the corner, coming to us precisely through the global displacements and flows that anti-capitalist critics have been decrying. I am skeptical about their conclusions and optimism. However, the ways that Hardt and Negri think about the subject allow me to stage a dialogue between their writing and Miki's. This dialogue allows me to step beyond Hardt and Negri's narrow Euro-American perspective on the nation and state, as they fail to recognize the vital ways in which geopolitical entities like Canada differ from Europe or the United States. It also provides me with a broad theoretical palette to work through Miki's poetic formulations, allowing for a strong analysis of Miki's contribution and a recognition of the importance of the concept of subjectivity itself within these debates.

Modeling their thinking on Marx, Hardt and Negri portray globalization as a new form of domination to be transcended or worked through, just as Marx read capitalism. For Hardt and Negri, this form of domination can be conceptualized under the term of Empire. For them, Empire is not tied to any particular nation-state, and is indeed best thought of not with reference to national frameworks, given what they see as the growing obsolescence of the nation-state form. Empire, consisting of the mobile, decentred, and deterritorialized forms of dominance projected by a new form of global sovereignty, whose political bodies have not yet been formalized, simply absorbs national projects into the capitalist whole. For Hardt and Negri, Empire "establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (*Empire* xii). While American power remains in many respects dominant, for Hardt and Negri the power of the nation-state now serves the broader functions of Empire, as capitalism within the state model is transposed onto a transnational stage. As a result, Hardt and Negri state that "the United States does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project" (*Empire* xiii-xiv). Empire is, rather, a broader series of conditions that determines the political and economic

situations of an ever-larger proportion of the globe. As such, it is a structure that displaces concerns from specific settings onto the global whole. As a form of biopolitical domination, moreover, it entails a shift in how the subject is conceptualized within this world, controlling it at material, physical, and psychological levels.

The political task of the left, Hardt and Negri claim, is to dismantle sovereignty itself, which they see as a structure of implicit injustices and hierarchies — a reading that they develop in part from Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* — and to realize a form of politics founded upon an open-ended mobility similar to that of Empire, which they term the “multitude.” They see in the contradictions of Empire the beginnings of its inevitable demise and the beginnings of “a democracy of the multitude” (*Multitude* xviii). The deterritorialized spaces that Empire opens up by displacing the subject into a transnational framework can be used critically, they state, in order to dismantle Empire itself. This dismantling is said to lead to a future politics of openness and plurality. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is created when Empire dismantles the barriers between the mass of disenfranchised labourers, citizens, and refugees. It is “an alternative” to imperial rule: it is “the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire,” who no longer have any “mediation between them” as a result of Empire's systematic, yet still incomplete, removal of borders (*Empire* 393). This multitude is thus “the living alternative that grows within Empire” (*Multitude* xiii). These sorts of movements have been thought of as rhizomatic, in the sense that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus* — that is, as connecting “any point to any other point ... not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature” (21). The multitude that Hardt and Negri theorize exemplifies one strain of poststructural thinking via Deleuze and Guattari, challenging leftist models based upon older notions of class solidarity and unity, claiming instead political primacy for movements that maintain loose connections and that shift continually, such as the counter-globalization and anti-war movements that have characterized the turn of the millennium in the West. As such, Hardt and Negri propose actively utilizing the displaced sense of the subject that Empire creates in order to forge bonds across borders in previously unimaginable ways. The global displacements of Empire thus become a means of creating a new, liberated subject in opposition to capitalist dominance.

While the bold claims that Hardt and Negri make have led critics to discuss *Empire* as a twenty-first century *Communist Manifesto* (Zizek), the slide towards gestures of totality while advocating an open-ended politics has led to harsh critiques from many quarters (see especially Brennan, Passavant and Dean, and Balakrishnan). Many writers have been concerned with the deficiencies and limitations of Hardt and Negri's total theory of the contemporary global order. Critics variously suggest that Hardt and Negri underestimate "the problems which capitalism poses to the possibility of the inclusive and generous society they wish to see" (Rustin 15), that they "overstate their case" relative to material conditions (Aronowitz 24), and that they systematically avoid "empirical evidence" (Arrighi 32). Hardt and Negri's writing is seemingly designed to provoke debate on what global capitalism might mean, especially regarding the functioning of Empire and the multitude as agents of change in contemporary society. This provocation leads to a second function, that of questioning what political responses might be fitting to this perceived global condition for the new subject. Whether their own series of proposals is adequate, however, remains an unresolved question. Neil Smith reminds readers that, in Deleuzian formulations, every deterritorialization is accompanied by a subsequent reterritorialization, but this second half of the equation is one to which Hardt and Negri are, he claims "entirely blind" (51). Whether the subject is being liberated through their thinking or simply opened up for recoding into a new system of control, in other words, remains a very serious concern. This is precisely the issue upon which Miki's response to the displacements of global capitalism focuses. His response, as we will see, is not incongruous with Hardt and Negri's thinking, but seriously challenges their optimistic outlook.

The deterritorialized status of the global scene is one that we might accept at present, but this deterritorialization is one that is contested, as openness is shut down through legislative and disciplinary mechanisms. For theorists of citizenship such as Saskia Sassen, this means that subjectivity is shifting in new ways, being rescaled to the global, while remaining impacted by state formations. For writers who are thinking intensely about subjectivity, as is Roy Miki in *Surrender*, the deconstruction of fixed positions that accompanies the deterritorializing gestures of Empire, while promising, is nevertheless bounded by limits that illustrate whose interests these shifts serve. At present, the liberatory

potential of deterritorialized bodies is fixed by the discursive regimes that control them through an ever-increasing variety of surveillance techniques. While the body has been extensively theorized through feminist, gender, and deconstructive analyses that have pointed towards the potential for social change through challenging categories of identity as finite constructs, our bodies are at the same time subjected to enormous repressive mechanisms, recognized in part by Foucault in his discussion of the incitement to discourse in the Christian West (17). These mechanisms are of direct concern to Miki in *Surrender*, as the speaker of “knocks at the door” asks “what compelled the overture of disclosure?” in an almost-direct allusion to Foucault (34). Inasmuch as theorizing the body’s potential unfixity proves conceptually powerful and viable within limited practice — for example in Hardt and Negri’s analyses of the unmoored, technologized alliances between anti-war activists and those seeking equity through the New Social Movements — the disciplinary social body into which the citizen is constructed makes global capitalism a difficult situation in which to transgress norms.

Cultural practice becomes a key site for examining the manner in which subjects may become able to realize something akin to the open-ended politics of the multitude that Hardt and Negri advocate. I read contemporary cultural practice as a site in which identity markers shift and become fluid as a response to the disciplinary power of capitalist society. This shifting, which I see as a means of contesting the foreclosure of the subject’s agency in consumer society, does not simply consist of a deconstruction of the subject, but is also a means of arriving at a future politics that is less coercive than that of the present. The “project of the multitude” that Hardt and Negri discuss importantly employs new “weapons” for undermining global capitalism and creating a “democracy of the multitude” (*Multitude* xviii), using “weapons that are not merely destructive but are themselves forms of constituent power” (347). These are, importantly, capable of “creating the social relations and institutions of a new society” (348). Such weaponry, constructive of social relations rather than destructive, has long been heralded as the dangerous but particular property of poets, as either Shelley’s “unacknowledged legislators of the world” or as those able to inaugurate a Heideggerian *poesis*, a bringing forth or revealing of the grounds upon which human society has been constructed. Today, such poetic capabilities need to be thought in the context of globalization or

Empire. In particular, the destabilization of the unified lyrical subject and the development of previously marginalized poetries demonstrates the creation of alternative voices to those of the culturally dominant within Empire, and play a key role in connecting the global citizens of the multitude across geographical space.

Such alternative voices can be witnessed in some of the poetic practices that have taken place within Canada, here especially those called for by Roy Miki, who states in the essay "Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing" that "formal disruptions ... become strategies for resistance to norms" in minority writing (117). Poetic practice also becomes a way of creating political alliances in the writing of M. Nourbese Philip, who recognizes "the resistance of the people" in the poetic usage of spoken and racialized "badenglish" in the essay "A Genealogy of Resistance" (23). Again this is the case with Fred Wah, whose essay "Speak my Language: Racing the Lyric Poetic" is concerned in part with "racing the subjectified voice," the lyric "I," which has the effect of roughing up the certainties of the monological lyrical speaking subject employed by Western poets in the past (109). These writers are all focusing on issues of race, and these are crucial to a cultural project of dismantling the imperializing consciousness of late capitalism. Empire is a deeply raced space, a situation that Hardt and Negri do not account for adequately according to critics such as Kevin Dunn, who argues that *Empire* "continues to exhibit core elements of Eurocentric thought" (143). Against such a failure to recognize racialization, Robert Budde argues that Miki, Philip, and Wah,

even when their poetics do not address race issues directly, ... produce a critique of unitary identity construction, cultural naming, policing, identification strategies, hegemonic language practice, consumer referentiality, and monumental versions of the overly buttressed ego of the colonizer. (285)

I am interested here in destabilizing the nation-state through such a focus on race in poetic practice, reading for places in which the individual subject might become part of an interconnected force. This is a search not for an undifferentiated and universalized humanity, but rather for a politics of alliance that remains open to difference, all the while formulating a politics of transgression. This seems to be precisely what is enabled by the "unplaceable, irreducible, and subversive" writings of Miki and others (Budde 285).

Roy Miki's *Surrender* offers a strong rethinking of such a subject within national and globalizing political spaces. Whereas Frank Davey was able to contend in 1993 in *Post-National Arguments* that that nation provides the only means of "defending ... against multinational capitalism" (24), Miki provides a more nuanced look at ways in which the structures of the nation-state restrict how the subject might conceptualize itself today. *Surrender* is a tightly composed book of poems that illustrates the ambivalence that I have voiced about the project of the multitude, just as it is a strong challenge to the history of Canadian racism and nationalism. Positioning itself transnationally, as a book written in and about many places, it contemplates how the subject might be conceptualized in the context of Empire. This is a space in which the subject is displaced from a locality and is conceptually interpolated into a world system in which she or he may feel little agency, given the global scale. Regaining agency thus becomes a key problem in this emerging space. If the text has a dominant thematics, I would identify it specifically as a debate about subjectivity in this context, as its series of speakers projects a number of possible positions from which to approach the contemporary world. Throughout the text, pronouns vary radically in their presentation, most often appearing in the lower case, sometimes set off by quotation marks, sometimes without, constantly pushing the reader to consider the manner in which subjectivity is being deployed. This questioning emerges at the very opening of the book, in a poem entitled "make it new," where the speaker suggests that s/he has "altered" her or his "tactics to reflect the new era." This is an era in which "the earth is not heavy / with the weight of centuries" and in which "bodies / of multitudes" do not "tread muted on fleet denizens" (9). Instead, the poem suggests that this newly-invoked multitude is not silent, and that it responds specifically to the Empire that is being created, seeing it as a new construct. This multitude emerges at the end of the volume after the free play between individual subjects has been dismantled in the face of regimes of governance that seek to reduce subjectivity to a single, stable meaning, and this process of arriving at something akin to a multitudinarian alliance between subjects is central to my reading of the text.

The speakers of this volume are therefore key, given their disrupted state. The early poem "attractive" makes the debate between the political ramifications of subject positions clearer, as it stages a dialogue between

two speakers, one of them set off from the other by being italicized. In response to the primary speaker's unmoored and ungrammatical statement "raucous vibes in the sunder / down of lyric i am ambushed," a second, more forceful voice asserts "*let's get serious a poetic / text has to resonate*" (12), calling for a more grounded, direct appeal to its readership. The text maintains this ambivalence between a deliberately disrupted lyrical "I" and a more fixed, dogmatic structure of subjectivity. While it seems to strive for the first, continual doubts emerge and seem to push the text towards more stable concepts of selfhood, particularly when the speaker of "speed bumps" notes that "identity is rife in the upper echelons" (21), suggesting that the uncomplicated positioning of the dominant is, in part, what enables its dominance. A deconstructive approach to identity is sought, only to be challenged continually by social situations in which, the text states, "the colour of skin / obscures choices" (25). Simultaneously, however, the question of race contains productive potential for disruption. An italicized speaker in the poem "knocks at the door" thus states that "*each immigrant / moment is ape to undot the fault lines. falling between the seams / unbends the communication canal. eruptions enter unannounced*" (33). The uncoded status of the immigrant, falling between the seams, presents an opportunity for a seismic cultural shift, but this statement is subsequently closed down by an official discourse in the poem that simply states "*sign on / the dotted line,*" bringing the undotting immigrant moment back within the discursive terrain of the dominant (33).

While *Surrender* begins with a practice that highlights the poststructural disunity and hence the constructed nature of the lyrical "I" speaker, this position shifts over the course of the volume. The initially unfixed dialogue between multiple voices is challenged by the surrounding social space, which pushes the speakers into more and more stable identity formations. These shifts are envisioned as a part of the movement from classical metaphysics to poststructuralism and beyond, as "knocks on the door" goes on to suggest in a short series of statements: "*the subject stood still. then pirouetted. / then collapsed in a midden heap*" (43). In my reading, the initial, static subject evokes the fixity of structuralism or classical metaphysics, with its confidence in master narratives, the underlying "deep structure" of the social, and the belief in a limited or knowable self. The pirouette evokes the radical free play of early poststructuralism and its celebration of the disrupted subject, while

the subject's final collapse into the midden heap suggests the disparity of global capitalism's so-called race to the bottom, but also leaves open the question of what the subject does once collapsed into this position. No longer engaged in anxiously maintaining its stable ground nor in absolute free play, the contemporary subject's present and future become questions as to what alternatives to the binary of stasis and play might be available. The answers may well be found in the detritus of these momentarily polarized positions in Western thought — structuralism and poststructuralism — and rooting around in the trash becomes a means towards uncovering what those futures might entail.

The thematics of this shifting contemporary subject are highlighted in the poem "fool's scold, 1.4.97." The poem contains the most overt narrative thread in the volume, and is said to commemorate "*the last day of the restrictions / on freedom of movement*" imposed upon Japanese Canadians (70). The poem thus reflects Miki's ongoing concern with the forced dispersal and imprisonment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and the redress movement in which he has been one of the major figures, which he details in the book *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. In addressing this issue, the poem connects to others in *Surrender* that quote RCMP and government sources directly, sources that seek to limit the movement of subjects who are marked as Japanese Canadian. The poem itself, however, focuses upon speaking about the experience of Japanese internment at Irvine, California. Specifically, the poem details the speaker's difficulty in getting adequate paperwork from the American authorities to do so when coming from Canada. It is explicitly a poem about "the passage into empire" (71) — here the American empire and not Hardt and Negri's deterritorialized Empire — and the disparity between the speaker's being allowed to cross the border as a result of possessing Canadian citizenship papers and then encountering a series of immigration-related difficulties as a result of racism. As such, this poem is a relatively clear indictment of the United States in its shifting conception of the nation. Central is the insistence with which the first-person subject emerges as a result of being pushed into the certainties of immigration forms by US officials. The following stanza exemplifies the fixity into which the speaker is pushed:

new regulations, she continues, needed to deal with illegal
aliens here. are there legal aliens here? i don't ask but at this

interstice i imagine the border zone of “enemy alien,”
 thinking of the ja’s [Japanese Americans] expelled from the coast in 42. (76)

Here the speaker is conversing with a border guard who demonstrates the continuation of racist policies within empire and the disparities caused by the possession of different levels of privilege based upon citizenship. This privilege, in turn, is connected to the racial exclusions of nationalism. The speaker is able to escape from these exclusions as a result of academic privilege and by holding the “right” passport, and this fact of course becomes ironic when visiting the United States in order to lecture on Japanese internment during the war.

The first-person speaker, while seeking to undermine itself and to realize a liberating fragmentation, thus remains unfree to do so within the spaces of the nation-state that the poem imagines. The crossing of borders — the process of transgression, of ingressing into a space marked by its difference from Canada — marks a site in which the body is interpolated into a sign system that forces the concretization of the first-person voice. While busily dismantling its privilege, then, the subject is called back in as a unitary being at the point of control. The ruling powers, specifically, seek to reduce it to a single, mappable point that can subsequently be controlled, regulated, and processed. While the speaker is self-conceptualized in terms of a disrupted presence, or rather lack of presence, the regime in control of what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe term “the means of representation” (xiii) at the border dictates a fall into limited modes of being. The border thus performs a violence upon the speaker, suturing an identity of harshly individuated selfhood to a body whose otherwise deterritorialized self might work towards broader politics and examine connections that disrupt the capitalist system into which it is thrust.

The remainder of the volume consists of a voyage back out: after the sequence in which the speaker uneasily crosses the border and is pushed into a fixed subject position, the voice again becomes less concrete. Indeed, while I identify a single speaker on the border, the remainder of *Surrender* is less certain in its singularity. Poems on mobility and displacement go on to dismantle the speaking subject and uncover political questions in ways that are connected to specifically located subjects, but that are not limited to only these positions. The short poem immediately following “fool’s scold,” entitled “on the sublime,” deliberately hesitates “to use the first person” (78), while the poem “surrender is a

verbal sign,” a few pages later, thematizes how “the i lower in case / balks at its own groan” (81). Identity and stability become the tired signs of dogmatic structures that create individuated subjects in the context of the transnational capitalism in which the book’s speakers unavoidably participate, making the struggle to recover a flexible subjectivity key to their resistant politics. After the process of being violently thrust into metaphysical stasis by the oppressive regimes of imperial governance, the book becomes a process of recovering a more mobile subjectivity because, as the speaker of “surrender is a verbal sign” says, “my identity has worn out” and “all labels need to be licked” (90). By the text’s end, the speaker of “over heard” can state that “at the interval the sieve effect kicks in / all around ‘us’ the flow of capital” (131), but such an unfixed, non-monological concept of the “we” in quotation marks takes until the very last line to re-emerge.

This shuttling between static and flexible structures of being points towards the ambivalence of theorizing a transnational politics of the subject. The constant motion in the form of subjectivity in *Surrender* provides the speakers with a sense of agency, a movement in and out of the controlling interests of biopolitics, but at the same time illustrates the difficulties of operating under simply deterritorialized signs of subjectivity. The deterritorializing process of the early poems in *Surrender*, from stasis to pirouette to midden heap, is followed by the reterritorialization of American immigration forms and customs officers. Simply adopting an unfixed structure of subjectivity, in other words, leaves one open to a reterritorializing process that strips one of agency. This reterritorialization occurs especially when dealing with the material conditions of the nation-state: those of the United States in “fool’s scold,” but also of other countries from Canada to Australia in other poems. *Surrender* thus cautions against any simplistic theory of the multitude through illustrations of the praxis of biopower. While Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concepts may have found followers, criticism has sought to demonstrate the practical restrictions of conceptualizing a politics of resistance in terms of the multitude that they envision. *Surrender* evokes this ambivalence: its disruptive poetic practices highlight ways in which social change might derive from thinking about the subject differently, understanding its locatedness not as a limitation but as a mobile node in a series of politically dissenting bodies. However, the process of being-subjected that *Surrender* narrates shows

how the specificity of identity formations pushes the subject back into a rigid language of limited being. These limitations push the subject in turn towards a political practice founded upon its citizenship status, as the speaker of “fool’s scold” relies on a Canadian passport in order to secure passage. *Surrender*’s closing attempts to recover the destabilized subject position of the book’s opening highlight the political struggles and dilemmas that one faces as a citizen of Empire: while radically unfixed subjectivities provide a new means of doing politics — one of doing politics as a multitude without order or agenda, but with a determinable direction nevertheless — these open subjectivities are at the same time limited by the imperial social order. This is an order that subjects us — and some of us more than others, especially, *Surrender* continually reminds us, those who face racial discrimination — to disciplinary regimes that return us, again and again, to the limited politics enabled by our own, individualized subject positions. While these individualist politics might in themselves be sites of power, they may not allow communities to form in resistance to the disciplinary modes of biopolitics, thereby undermining attempts to rethink the subject as a means of breaking free.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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