

Can I Have a Voice in the Nation's Classroom?¹⁴

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I recently had breakfast with my father at the VIPs restaurant in the city of Oaxaca, where I live and work as an English teacher in the public state university. My father was visiting me from suburban Chicago. It was Saturday, his last day here. We were a little pressed for time. My father had a 9:50am flight; and I had to make it to my 11:00am Literature class with the students of the TEFL Saturday program, today "The Tyger" by William Blake (1794). "Give this boy anything but pork," my father told the waitress.

She put on a noble smile.

"No pork crap," my father said.

I asked for the American plate, as had my father, and to my surprise, I paused, pondering over a side of ham or bacon or nothing. Many years ago, as a first-year graduate student home for the summer, I had announced, probably at a Sunday family breakfast at Denny's, that after having read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, I would give up eating pork. This would be my personal gesture of moral support for the ideals of this Black Muslim leader who had been assassinated when I was in kindergarten. My father and mother had looked at me as I were the moon-man, but they congratulated me on my decisiveness. I had only mentioned my anti-pork pledge that one time. It had lasted for a couple of years. I was surprised my father remembered.

"Nothing. Pure eggs," I told the waitress.

"Side of steak for him," my father said.

She scribbled it down. She hurried off, practically running.

"It's all like yesterday," my father said.

The waitress thumped into the aluminum swinging doors to the kitchen area.

"She must have thought you were X-man," my father said.

She didn't come back. It was someone else, a young guy, and a short while later, as we sipped the last of our coffee, the tip on the table, Barney the

¹⁴ This is a refereed article.

purple dinosaur walked past. Barney waved both arms at us, his lime-green stomach jiggling, and then he went off jitterbugging between the tables, as we got up from ours and went to the cash register.

I tried to pay the bill but my father waved his cane. When we got to the door, Barney was there, alone, staring out the smoked glass. I stepped forward, held open one of the glass panels for my father. As he went past me, he quickly turned and passed Barney 10 U.S. "You may get the person in trouble," I told my father. We paused on the sidewalk. He caught his breath, as we waited for the light to stop the traffic, so we could get across Juárez Avenue to my car. "That's probably a waiter or busboy in that costume," I said. "Maybe even our waitress."

"I wouldn't worry." The light changed. We started across. "He's got his back to the inside. He'll tuck the money into a seam," my father said. He walked, slowly, at my side. He used his cane. He's 87 years-old. He grew up in an orphanage in inner-city Chicago during the Depression Era. He got through World War II, through a civil service career in the U.S. government, through two mortgages on a suburban home for a family of seven, through his first two years as a widower, through his first month living alone in a one-bedroom apartment in a retirement complex. "That gal or guy," he said, "is just trying to stay ahead of the game."

I beeped the alarm, opened the passenger door. I helped my father in. We were off, the windows down. "Everyone deserves a break."

I didn't respond. But that was O.K. My father and I really don't talk all that much when we're together. We just hang out. We say the minimal; we use a lot of one-liners that don't invite a reply. It's a style we share.

I thought about the X-man. Back then, his autobiography had beckoned me forth. But as a white suburban kid, I wasn't going to run to the Chicago south side and stand in front of crack houses, bullhorn in hand, verbally harassing those entering and leaving; nor, as an Irish-American Catholic, was I going to drop to one knee and offer a steaming pot of coffee to the front doors of the neighborhood mosque that had been converted from a Hardee's burger restaurant. And X's white shirt, black tie, and Dick Tracy suit -- yeah, right. But giving up pork was something feasible. For X, it was the "first pre-Islamic submission," the strengthening of one's determination to avoid "injurious things like narcotics, tobacco, or liquor" which only served to keep "black men oppressed and deprived and ignorant, and unable to get decent jobs, turning them into criminals" (Malcolm X 1964: 156, 161, 169). I liked the loose logic of this anti-pork thing. It was goofy. But it spoke to me. A couple years later, I had forgotten my resolve against pork; or maybe it had dropped down to my subconscious, where it petrified into a Jungian symbol, some kind of chalk graffiti or stick-painting on the caveman's wall that, according to Jung, likes deep within us all.

That Jungian crap is pretty good, I thought, as my father and I sauntered in through the terminal doors, me carrying his two bags. I had forgotten about Carl Jung, too. In 1955, Jung introduced the collective subconscious in which all of humankind's meaningful values and experiences throughout time are recorded (Caparrós 1990). We all have it. We age and grey and stoop, but in our Being we never get old. We're perpetually pre-Plato; we're the latest rage. I looked at my father. He was way out of breath. "I think I'll need that chair," he said.

I asked an airline official. The guy said of course, but you should have arrived much earlier because passengers with wheel chair assistance need to board first. It was a polite scolding. The airline official then took my father's ticket and luggage to the counter. He came back with the flight documents. He explained that someone had left the airline's only wheel chair abandoned in the boarding area behind the security checkpoint on the other side of terminal. They couldn't push the chair out past the electronic screening device, so my father would have to walk there and then go on foot through the screening area to the wheel chair on the other side, and please hurry the best you can, hurry. Yeah, right.

We walked most of the way, then stopped. My father looked at me. He leaned forward, both hands on the rubberized handle of his cane. He smiled -- ironically, or dreamily, or nostalgically, I couldn't tell. "He'll get his," he said.

I thought that remark was funny. A security guard waved his walkie-talkie at us, motioning us around the side of the crowd. We stopped at the chrome tube barrier off to the left of the X-Ray belt. "He's just a guy in his job," I said.

"No. That damn dinosaur."

The airline official came in behind us. He took from my hands the two bags.

"That dino. He'll get his break."

The airline official escorted my father, as the security guard swung open the chrome tube. My father turned back. "You," he said. There were a lot of people. It was hard to hear. "You, give yourself a break," he said, a half-shout, as he was led off, the airline guy at his side, the security guard at point, clearing the way. "Give yourself a break," my father repeated, a half-shout, as he disappeared into the crowd. I really didn't know what he meant. But I appreciated it. I walked out the terminal doors, feeling the blacksmith's hammer clang the anvil in a lightyear fore or aft.

We all have like moments. They're brief spaces, voids in the continent, in which we posture ourselves, through a gesture. Nick Carroway, the narrator of

The Great Gatsby (1925), visions human perfection as the sum total of one's best gestures, each retaining its uniqueness, all in a line of raw iron rectangles carefully arranged on an open field, we can imagine. Of his idol, Jay Gatsby, Nick says:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. (1925: 1).

Substitute the earthquake-watch center for the blacksmith's shop that forged the seams of the iron on the grass. We can then see the singularity of intent, and the nation beneath.

It was post-World War II America that defined my father and his gang from urban Chicago. They were wage earners by day, roughnecks and loiterers by night. The war had done more than awakening them to the abyss. They had come home to the same pile of crates in the warehouse, the same orange dusk on tar roofs, the same night brick chilled at their backs, as their hands spilled dice to the moon, the dice now small bits of white wonder floating to the boots of Greeks and Italians and Poles and naught merely and merrily and only the Irish as before. That was how they got over their horror in having had seen the beast in the mud at the bottom, and now up the sun, the dice rolling in the superintendent's broom, a gift to those who would yet stay behind, and they took one step over the curb, then stopped.

The light turned green. They braced themselves, while it all sped past, cars, they knew, but yet to them so many tin dogtags rattling in the jaws of black soot. They dusted their jackets with their hands, seeing, in the words of their homeboy, the urban novelist Nelson Algren, "the new word ... proudly traffic-borne on the sides of newspaper trucks racing from newsstand to newsstand assuring us of some vast difference between us and the rest" (1961: 89). They crossed the street to marriage and night school and the new suburbs, the noon-hour, and the yellow bulldozers left to rest halfway up the black dirt roads cut into brown corn fields, those fields having had been left to dry beyond harvest time, to make way for yet another nation, their nation, where they became the ever-softening wise guys.

They went out with their whole families on Sunday mornings to short-order restaurants, all chrome and formica and plate-glass, while back in the hood emerged Malcolm X. As the popular minister of the American-based *Nation* of Islam (careful), who would increase "the membership from 400 to 40,000" before his break from the Nation in 1964 and his assassination one year later (Haley 1965: 410), X screamed that the "white man's slave trade, and his subsequent devilish actions are *responsible* for not only the presence of this black man in America, but also for the *condition* in which we find this black man

here" and that "it *is a miracle* that the American black people have remained a peaceful people, while catching all the centuries of hell" (Malcolm X 1964: 247, 266; italics in original text).

This was in all the newspapers. But the X-man was a nation away from my father and his gang, those guys steadily aging over the years, but always a good time at the table with the kids, and soon *aficionados* of the sparkling Denny's as of the 80's, their credo being it's all a long haul but don't think about it, just spread around your dumb luck. We're all working stiffs.

Even a busboy or waitress in Barney costume. Outside the terminal I walked along the sidewalk and then cut across the grass parkway to the chain-link fence. I looked through the fence at the Airbus 320 on the tarmac. There were still loading luggage, not yet people. The turbines whined. I had enough time to make it to my 11:00 class -- just one more worker on the continent. I guess. Am I not a "panther ... an aristocrat in the animal kingdom?" (Handler 1965: ix). Am I not "potentially dangerous," with "the physical bearing and inner self-confidence" to climb up "from the lower depths?" (ibid: ix, xii). Hardly. That's X. And me? I'm just the super at the warehouse on Madison and Halsted, now on the sidewalk during the morning rush hour, sweeping you the dice. As Luke says, "Teaching remains about, within, and for the nation" (2004: 24).

This is the *nation* within. It's the grid of cement bars far below, some kind of giant tic-tac-toe game, silvery and gleaming, on the expanse of harvested fields, their furrows barren and black. It's Gatsby's mansion occupying the blue "corner of the peninsula" and "blazing with light" to the open sea ahead while darkened to the inland behind, but for the "thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires" that led to New York City with its "haunting loneliness" and "dark lanes" (Fitzgerald 1925: 38, 53). It's the café in Madrid, during the Spanish Civil War, at the time of Franco's seige on the city, in which the unnamed old man of Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" seeks refuge every night at a table on the terrace, sitting "in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light" (1933: 13). Our *nation* can shift its dimensions as well as expand and reduce itself. The old man likes "to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference" (ibid). His deafness could be his *nation* in the midst of the empty café, where the younger waiter tells him, "You should have killed yourself last week," purposely pours "into the glass so that the brandy slopped over," and tells the old man, "Finished... No more tonight. Close now" (ibid: 14-15). If we consider, however, that the old man sits in the shadow only to cocoon himself in his deafness, consciously effecting the sound of black silence, maybe his premonition of the impending violence at the hands of Franco's troops, we could conclude that the old man's true *nation* lies not in his deafness as he believes, but rather in the physical periphery around him, within the clean and pleasant café overseen by the older waiter who says, "I am of those who like to stay late at the cafe ... those who do not want

to go to bed.”(ibid: 16). However unconscious or conscious, physical or psychic, collective or coveted, our nation is a landscape, its wood-slat cyclone fence billowed and feeble to the larger Nation and otherwise Other.

The Other’s *nation* becomes our *Nation*; our *nation*, the Other’s *Nation*. This is a shifting premise in which the *N* is the bully and the *n* the victim. From his mansion “with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (the *n* for Gatsby), Gatsby, according to the first person-narrator Nick, visions New York City twenty miles away as a haven of post-World War I greed and corruption (the *N* for Gatsby) represented by “careless people” who “smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness” (Fitzgerald 1925: 4, 120). We hence can see that the *n* and *N* are doomed to collide in, to use the words of Pennycook (2001: 6), “questions of inequality, injustice, rights, and wrongs,” with the oppressed kicking from both sides of the cyclone fence.

Consequently, we could imagine that some New Yorkers beneath that “enchanted metropolitan twilight” (their *n*), especially those “poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner,” would consider Gatsby’s estate (the *N*), where “men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars,” as the lion’s den of the “solid and prosperous Americans” who make “the easy money” by exploiting the working class (Fitzgerald 1925: 25, 27, 38). The longer Gatsby’s parties pervade, the stronger the bonding of the beautiful and rich, and the more permanent the hardship of the urban time-clockers, not to mention the unemployed, who according to Algren remain “excluded from the privileges of our society,” doomed to become the “nobodies nobody knows” (1961: 67, 105).

Gatsby would counterpoint. He’d argue that, money and jobs aside, his *n* is the nobler. His flamboyant parties are a clever ploy to reunite with his old love Daisy, to him some kind of icon temporarily tossed to the burning heap of post-World War I greed and cynicism. He had met and fallen in love with Daisy the month before he was to be shipped off as a penniless soldier to Europe. At war’s end, he returned home only to learn that Daisy had married Tom Buchanan, a wealthy Chicagoan who had avoided the war and transplanted himself and Daisy to the east coast, specifically to the peninsula of East Egg, directly across the narrow bay from West Egg, where Gatsby, a few years later, as a self-made millionaire, would construct his opulent mansion and then begin the fun, “the lights ... brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra ... playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher” (Fitzgerald 1925: 26). If one of those voices were to be Daisy’s, Gatsby, who had “committed himself to the following of a grail,” would “recover something ... that had gone into loving Daisy” in those innocent and gauzy days before the great war (ibid: 73, 99). It would be “the last and greatest of all human dreams,” the retro-transformation of America from the ego-centricity and greed that in a

few years would culminate in the Great Depression to the distant past when America had been a "fresh, green breast of the new world" for the first European immigrants to come ashore (ibid: 121).

Some may think Gatsby a looney or a con man. Algren would. He'd tell Gatsby to climb down from his metaphysical bar stool and to own up to the times that have long since traded the American Dream with its infinite egalitarianism for the "American Disease" with its "nameless, useless nobodies who sleep behind the taverns" (1961: 67, 104). Algren's *N* is Gatsby's *n*; Gatsby's *N*, Algren's *n*. They each have one shoe stuck in the broken slats of the cyclone fence.

Each is in the right and the wrong. Algren's and Gatsby's issues regarding the "broader political and ethical visions that put inequality, oppression, and compassion to the fore" (Pennycook 2001: 10) ultimately are validated or negated within the confines of what Foucault calls "the ultimate destinations" of power (1981: 96). For instance, Foucault says that "rather than try to discover how the right of punishment is founded on sovereignty, how it is presented in the theory of monarchical right or in that of democratic right," he has "tried to see in what ways punishment and the power of punishment are effectively embodied in a certain number of local, regional, material institutions, which are concerned with torture or imprisonment" (ibid : 96-97).

It is at "those points" such as the prison and psychiatric ward, the end of the road, where power "installs itself and produces its real effects" (ibid: 97). Such effects may manifest themselves in *repressive forms* such as domination and exclusion; in *productive forms* such as "pleasure," "knowledge," and "discourse"; or simply in a *neutralized or face-value form* of a "network which runs through the whole social body" (ibid: 119), allowing itself to be ignored, glorified, exploited, duplicated or whatever by whomever dwelling "at the extreme points of its exercise" (ibid: 97). We can assume that the above three forms are separate yet overlapping and mutant, constituting power in the general sense. This power becomes perceived and felt only when, for the briefest of a moment, it would take a yawn and stretch itself across a certain landscape, and thereupon *it* would lie, on its back, the gin-and-tonic angel of Gatsby's American Dream, the monkey that in Algren's speak is the burden of urban junkies, the man "in a dark suit ... who wasn't black ...and ... wasn't white" to appear and vanish beside Malcolm X in his jail cell (1964: 186), the yellow mechanized crane to swoop up corn stalks for the future suburb, *it*, power, cracking an eye open, stretching its arms across that which is "regional and local" (Foucault 1981: 96-97).

This "localness," our own surroundings, is created in large part by that restless *it* above. As *it* shifts its form and creaks the atmosphere, we below become "not only its inert or consenting target" but also "the elements of its articulation" (ibid: 98). This means that *power* conquers us as much as we, in

turn, wield *power* back to the external. To go further, we can conclude that because we conceptualize our particular space and place within the continent (dare we say "world") according to our comfort and anguish, and because *power*, that *it* which gives us our sunrise or headache, ultimately manifests itself within our own person, then what really matters to us is our immediate domain, both material and psychic, as well as the other domains less immediate but nonetheless there, whether a Denny's restaurant transposed as a Mexican VIPs, a blue peninsula, or an inner-city hood before and after dreams of Mecca. Everyone has their messiah the *nation* and their boogeyman the *Nation* -- places, hangouts, mindsets, even bodies. This last we see in Frankie Machine, morphine addict, protagonist of Algren's novel *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949), who visions himself as two distinct corporal entities, one the healthy warrior (his *n*) who peacefully sleeps "once more on his old army cot," the other the ravaged junkie (his *N*) by the name of Private McGantic standing "in a far and sunlit entrance" to the tent, "stoop-shouldered by his terrible burden," the "thirty-five-pound monkey on his back," and complaining, "I can't get him off." (15). We'll leave the monkey there, for now, but what about the yellow iron crane, the ghost in the suit, and the drunken angel? They have just rolled over, over and off, into the bounce and rattle of white dice ahead of the super's wide broom. "It is in this context," according to Luke (2004: 24), "that we teach second and third languages and dialects ... as custodians of nations." Wow.

Sweep up. Sweep off the curb, sweep out of the *barrio* to another, always everywhere a *barrio*, and now I'm walking through an opening in the chain-link fence and then across a vacant cement lot, carrying my broom. I'm in a playground that was begun very long ago but then abandoned, in its middle a lone swing set made of black wrought iron, chains of large iron loops, and wooden seats, and for some reason, I stay clear of the swing set, heading in through the door in the brick wall, and I lean the broom to the blackboard. I'm the building superintendent from Madison and Halsted, now standing at the board, beside the window. I see Nelson Algren in the first row, his cocky-ass grin, his hair that he never combs, his nerd glasses. On one side of him is Nick Carraway, 24 years old, in a pink tennis sweater, his whiteness whiter than ever, kind of a sickly pale, he probably still in shock from having found Gatsby shot dead and floating in the swimming pool; and on the other side, F. Scott Fitzgerald, his highness higher than his Princeton days, he decked out in a fedora hat and Hollywood suit, grey with white pin-stripes and a red kerchief in the breast pocket to match the red feather in his hat.

I tell them they're gonna do some English.

"We already speak English." It's Fitzgerald.

"Not my English," Algren says.

"They mean," Nick says, "that English is their own language."

"Give it a break." It's Malcolm X. He's standing against the side wall. He's tall and thin and lanky. He's wearing a black suit, the lapels of the jacket very narrow, and a white shirt and black tie. He's holding a little white cup of coffee. The cup is filled to the brim, but he holds it very casually. "You white devils," he says.

This is gonna be interesting, I think.

I pass out the photocopies of Blake's poem, "The Tyger."

"Where's your Frankie?" Malcolm X asks Algren.

"He's being squeezed by the cops and the local junk man, Piggy-O."

Malcolm X, the photocopied "Tyger" in one hand, the little coffee cup in the other, stares at Algren. Malcolm X has this super deadpan expression, the lenses of his horn-rimmed glasses silvery in the fluorescent light. He says, "Your boy just needs discipline. He's gotta help himself."

"It's in the hands of 'the bubble-gum snappers and the key-club cats alike'" (1961: 104).

"Don't pull a 'Martin Luther King' on me," Malcolm X said.

"Will they or not throw compassion from the suburb to the hood?"

"Sure, I get it. Frankie first has to cry for his civil rights from Uncle before he looks out the tenement window at the sun." X shook his head, took a sip of coffee.

"It should have been me who pulled him from the water." That's Nick. "The police, the firemen were all there, but I myself should have gotten in the pool."

"The dream was unattainable," Fitzgerald says, and then he looks at the "Tyger" poem. He adjusts his fedora hat. He leans to Algren. He says, "This English here is from another world."

"White devils," Malcolm X murmurs, and then grins.

I ask who would like to read out loud.

"Aren't you the janitor, or watchman?" asks Fitzgerald.

I pause. "Sure."

"Life guard," Nick says quickly. Everyone laughs.

"No, custodian," Algren says. "It's the current b.s. buzz word."

*Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

It's Malcolm X.

Everyone shuts up. They must have caught the irony of the moment. Malcolm looks around. He pops back his coffee, draining the cup in one swallow.

It's quiet. Outside the chains rattle. Nick finally says, "Should it not be "-try" instead of "-tree," at the end of the last word, to keep the rhyme?" His voice is low.

"In the eighteenth-century, how would it've been? " That's me. I'm just b.s.-ing. I look out the window. I see the swing set, black and iron and crudely made. One of its seats sways, barely. "What'da think?"

"-try," Nick says.

"The demon's cry,." Algren says.

Malcolm smiles, kind of. He flips the empty cup in his hand. Nick continues:

*In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?*

"Oh, Daisy, baby." Fitzgerald leans back in his chair, his fedora hat dropping, half covering his eyes. "Can't ya feel the heat?"

Everyone laughs -- Malcolm, too. Nick yelps *wa-wa-woop*. Malcolm flings his coffee cup to the bucket in the front of the room. The cup thuds like rock to iron, and everyone laughs louder.

Damn kids. What's a custodian to do? First, look out the window again. Beyond the swing set, at the rear of the lot, there are two forms huddled at the fence. I squint. I can make out Piggy-O, his face pale and round as a sewer cap, wearing "an army overcoat and the mariner's rolled cap," his fingers in "a crawling descent down the grimy vest into a tobacco pouch suspended from his

neck" (Algren 1949: 46-47), and beside Piggy-O, sitting as well, the guy in the impeccable black suit who had "an Asiatic cast of countenance ... and ... oily black hair" and who couldn't be identified "racially," besides simply being "a non-European" (Malcolm X 1964: 186-187). It would be fun to think I've suddenly been thrown into a parody of Hitchcock's movie *The Byrds* (no – *Birds*), in which rag men and business men are going to infinitely multiply on the fence and telephone wires, waiting for the school bell and Fitzgerald and kids to come running out. But that's a stretch. What is clear, however, is that Piggie-O, along with Malcolm's spirit of Muhammed in his Sunday best, are manifestations of Foucaultian "tactics and strategies of power ... through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organizations of domains" (1981: 77). When these guys are on our side, they "make up a sort of geopolitics" (ibid), which we would call our *n*. To the contrary, when they're the bullies of our junior-high from hell, when they are the reason for us to believe, as Algren does, that "the levers of power are held by those who have lost the will to act honestly" (1961: 105), they become the messengers of our *N*. If so, we would have to "forge new levers by which to return honesty to us" (ibid).

One of these *levers* would be *critical applied linguistics*, which according to Pennycook keeps us conscious of "how the classroom, text, or conversation is related to broader social, cultural and political relations" (2001: 5). *Translate*: Keep alive Nick's dream for a lifeguard, even though his *n* bled to death beside its own warped reflection on the water; and at the same time, keep watch with Algren on the West Egg peninsula, while the yellow crane, on loan from yet another suburb, swings its shovel of a nose crashing to the side of Gatsby's mansion, lest another fat cat reactivate those footloose parties that make all the more remote "any simple remedies for the unrelenting pain and humiliation of those trapped" in Algren's *n*, the mean streets of urban America (Giles 1990: xvii). Contradictions notwithstanding, any *n* that is truly felt within the classroom should merit attention, especially if under siege by the larger *N*.

Which is the *n* and which the *N*? Some are obvious, such as that affected by Piggy-O, the *N* to the *Nth* degree, the morphine distributor in the Polish-American ghetto of 1940's Chicago, one of those materially responsible for Frankie's addiction, that is, the monkey on his back. Other *N*'s are born of Foucault's *neutralized* type of power, ultimately a liberator or an oppressor, depending "on its direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its ... target" (1981: 97). If this "target" (i.e. person; or more specifically, student) is threatened in such a way that he or she seeks a new landscape of "geopolitics," then we have unmasked yet another *N*. *Translate*: Mr. Suit.

He's still sitting there, beside Piggy-O. His back is to the fence, his hands dangling above his burgundy wingtips, one hand scraped and red across the knuckles from having had punched the wooden seat of the swing a few minutes ago as he entered the playground, and that hand now reaching down "as the

pouch slipped out of his {Piggy-O's} fingers" (Algren 1949: 47). The Suit has been on the heels of Malcolm. He shadows him; he foreshadows his fate.

Every morning when I wake up, now, I regard it has having another borrowed day. In any city, wherever I go, making speeches, holding meetings of my organization, or attending to other business, black men are watching every move I make, awaiting their chance to kill me. I have said publicly many times that I know that they have their orders. Anyone who chooses not to believe what I am saying doesn't know the Muslims in the Nation of Islam (Malcolm X: 1964: 380-381).

Mr. Suit holds Piggy's pouch in his open hand, as if contemplating its weight. It could be a fragment of gold, or better, it could be a myth, a prehistoric answer -- the betrayer's recompense from the annals of time. He then looks into the pouch, nothin' but monkey food. He tosses the pouch up to Piggy's face.

Malcolm X was first visited by Mr. Suit, as an apparition, in the Norfolk Prison Colony, where Malcolm X had been serving out a several-year sentence for burglary. At that time, he interpreted this image as the spirit of the prophet Mohammed, bearing him the message to embrace the religion of Islam in order to arise above the ghetto, the *real* prison of the black man, that had been constructed by the collective white society. Malcolm X understood that by purging "himself of all the ills that afflict the depressed Negro mass ... drugs, alcohol, tobacco, not to mention criminal pursuits" (Handler 1965: xii), he would be able, through sheer will and discipline, to conquer the deeply infested social problems of the ghetto by means of eradicating their disastrous consequences on the individual person. Although social problems clearly have external manifestations such as poor housing, drug abuse, and crime, such manifestations nevertheless are superficial and entirely subordinate to the individual's internal submission to the social problems. In other words, if you clean up your act, you and everyone else, even going to the extreme of not eating pork (*the gesture, kids!*) and always wearing a clean white shirt and tie (*Daisy would like that*), then the social problems will lose their own structure and hierarchy; consequently, they will implode on themselves.

Malcolm X became the embodiment of this "puritanical" attitude (ibid). Its strength was based on the religion of Islam, albeit a new twist, the urban Black version, a.k.a. Black Muslims of the *Nation* of Islam (*careful*). As the leading minister of the Nation of Islam, soon to surpass the popularity of its leader Elijah Muhammed (*watch out*), Malcolm X, "in his television appearances and at public meetings ... articulated the woes and the aspirations of the depressed Negro mass in a way it was unable to do for itself" (ibid : xii-xiii). He denounced "the white man ... with a violence and anger that spoke for the ages of misery" (ibid xii-xiii); and he yelled upon "the black man in the ghettos ... to start self-correcting his own material, moral, and spiritual defects and evils," to establish

"his own program to get rid of drunkenness, drug addiction, [and] prostitution ... [in order] to lift up his own sense of values," and in general "to build up the black race's ability to do for itself" through initiatives such as the fomenting of black-owned banks, constructors, and other local businesses (Malcolm X: 1964: 275-276). If white society would attempt to deter or sabotage the black man's quest for self-realization and subsequent transformation of the ghettos, then "the Negroes should use arms ... to defend" their urban landscape (ibid 366), going so far as to form a militia cordon around the boundaries of each neighborhood, while they continue with their purification of themselves and their city blocks. Malcolm X, who as a last resort was "for violence if non-violence means we continue postponing a solution" (ibid: 367), believed that such a calling to arms would be unavoidable; when all else fails, it would be preferable to the only other alternative, which would be allowing the "sociological dynamite that stems from ... unemployment, bad housing, and inferior education" to spontaneously combust of its own volition, exploding on all street corners (ibid 366). (*I hear ya, daddy -- and so too Frankie.*) This would do no *n* or *N* any good -- better the sawed-off shotgun than the ruins of Armageddon at Madison and Halsted. (*Hey, teach-, let the tyger speak for himself.*)

That was the X-Man, before mecca. It all started with the guy in the suit. In 1953, two years out of prison, a few months before being appointed Black Muslim minister in the *Nation* of Islam (*watch out!*), Malcolm discovered the identity of that corporal image who had beckoned to him behind bars. In a conversation with Elijah Muhammed, he learned of a Master W.D. Fard, "a brother of the east" who in 1931 "knocked from door to door at the apartments of the poverty-stricken Negroes" in Detroit, selling "silks and other yard goods," and announcing that he "was The One the world has been looking for to come for the past two thousand years," the Muslim Mahdi (ibid: 206-208). (*Nothing personal, dude, but take a wire, wrap it tight with white gauze, insert wire in left ear, push it through, with your other hand pull wire out of right ear, now with both hands pull wire back and forth, clean out your mushrooms and fungus.*) W. D. Fard's mission was to return the "Negroes in America" to "where heaven for them was -- back home, among their own kind" in Africa (ibid: 207). (*Check the logistics; waddya do?; cross continents and an ocean "to the fake padlock on the door" and "the curtained parlors and the right way to ring ... one long and two short and ask for Marie?" {Algren 1947: 230}*) ; here, in Africa, they would forever be far away from "the white race which was bred from black Original Man six thousand years before, purposely to create a hell on earth for the next six thousand years" (*no comment from the blue lawn*) (ibid: 207).

In this same year, W.D. Fard established the University of Islam in Detroit, and over the next three years, the temples of the Nation of Islam emerged in Detroit, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., with none other than Elijah Muhammed designated by Fard as the "Supreme Minister, over all other ministers" among whom "sprang up a bitter jealousy," the consequence being repeated attempts to assassinate E. M. (Malcolm X: 1964: 209). (*And when thy heart began to*

beat , / what dread hand? & what dread feet?": yes, sir, that's my irony now.) E.M. received a a three-and-a half year prison sentence on apparently trumped up charges of draft dodging, and upon his release from prison, E.M. became the self-proclaimed messenger of Allah, thanks to that traveling businessman W.D. Fard who in 1934 "had disappeared, without a trace" (ibid), maybe to float in and out of prisons, a phantom recruitment officer perhaps self-willed into existence.

Fard became the legend on which to justify the Black Muslim movement on Islamic religious grounds, as well as the myth behind the man of Elijah Muhammed, the head honcho of the show, who modified Fard's quest of returning urban Blacks to the African continent to an even more unrealistic goal of creating separate statehood for urban blacks within America. This struck X not only as absurd but fraudulent. If X were the panther -- a black panther, the wiseguy of the *tyger* family -- then E.M. was the coyote trickster. His doctrine of non-negotiable segregation and statehood certainly raked in the money from the fans, enough to finance his Chicago mansion (*no offence, Fitz- and Nick*) and support his illegitimate children; but because of the absolute impossibility of convincing the American people and the congress to legislatively form a 53rd state for Blacks (*you have to wonder, gentlemen, **where** this state would be, not to mention whether out-of-state 'white' tourists would be welcome*) E.M. was under no heat to deliver (*just leave your money at the door, while I ease my myself down the ladder of my indoor pool -- sorry, Nick*)

With this uneasy foreboding ("*what dread grasp / dare its deadly terrors clasp?*"), in 1964, Malcolm X made his pilgrimage to Mecca. There, as the famous Black Muslim from America declared a guest of the state by Prince Faisal of Saudia Arabia, X communed "with tens of thousands of pilgrims ... of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans" who demonstrated "a spirit of unity and brotherhood" that his "experiences in America had led" him "to believe never could exist between the white and non-white"(ibid: 340). He now saw 'whiteness' not as a race or people but rather a misguided attitude: "[I]t isn't the American white *man* who is a racist, but it's the American political, economic, and social *atmosphere* that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man" (ibid: 371; italics in original text).

Once back in Harlem, he held press conferences, affirming his Muslim beliefs, but announcing his departure from the *Nation* of Islam (*I said, watch out!*) and his formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (*we get the idea, teach-*), which would retain the self-empowerment plea for Black America but with the objective that Blacks form "an integral part of the American community" (Handler 1965: xiii-xiv). This was "a far cry from Elijah Muhammed's doctrine of separation" (ibid: xiv). X's house was set afire. He continued the Sunday afternoon meetings of his new organization at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. He called upon "the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and the universities," to "see the handwriting on the wall" and to join the cause by advocating anti-racism within their own white community (Malcolm X 1964: 341), while the Blacks continue "working by

themselves ... in their own community" (ibid: 376), both Blacks and whites "working separately" yet together for "the salvation of America's very soul" (ibid: 377). X spoke out against E.M.'s "religious fakery" and gave public support to two former secretaries of the *Nation* who had filed paternity suits against E.M. (Haley 1965: 425). He in taxis or his own car was followed by automobiles which, at red lights, would pull up alongside him, the Black passengers brandishing rifles behind the closed windows. X sought "to convert the Negro population from non-violence to active self-defense against white supremists across America," while embracing the progressive and well-intentioned white society (ibid: 416). W.D. Fard put on a new suit. He hung from electrical cables; he warmed his hands in burning oil drums by night. (*Yeah, "when the stars threw down their spears," they were the bars from my cell, I mean my cell in the ghetto; and yeah when they "watered the heaven with their tears," it was Frankie's army canteen water, even your man Gatsby's fountain water.*)

"*Did he who made the lamb make thee?*" It's Nick. He has stood up from his chair, photocopy in hand.

Malcolm X, still standing at the side wall, looks back at Nick.

A lone arm rises, its hand and wrist covered by a grey fedora hat.

"*I'm just one more jerk in the world who thinks he has something useful to contribute,*" Malcolm X says. "*Aren't we all?*"

The hat falls off, exposing the hand beneath, which is formed into the tiger's jaw.

Very soon the room will erupt in laughter, hollers, and cat calls, with X himself joining in the racket, X taking off his horn-rimmed glasses and putting on Fitz's hat. But, for now, for these several very long seconds, that *tyger salute* is a call to all language classrooms for a "sociopolitical movement" devoted to "social transformation by seeking social justice and equality among all people" (Kuboto 2004: 37); for pedagogic material with a "focus on racism and other kinds of injustice" resulting from collective ... oppression (ibid); for class activities that generate an awareness of "our locations within social, cultural, [and] economic ... frameworks" and the capacity to freely affect "change" in that awareness (Pennycook 2001: 120). *Translate:* Keep Mr. Suit and Piggy-O off the swing set.

How? I raise my own arm in the *tyger salute*, for that last second before the class goes bonkers and the paper wads fly, one into my face, and I tell myself, please shut your trap. If you say *watch out!* one more time, you may become the bad guy. Don't you know that direct discourse and action may eventually corrupt the bearer? The Marxist proletariat, after all, has yet to

arrive. If he were, however, to miraculously step onto a playground, he wouldn't waste his breath with Piggy-O. He'd seek out Piggy's boss, morphine wholesaler Nifty Louie, Marxie and buddie Louie drinking a cognac together, jokingly conferring that "the monkey never dies" but "just hops onto somebody else's back" (Algren 1949: 60).

This, however, is not to discredit Marxie. He fortunately is doomed to never exist, but only to assert an image of himself that will never fully materialize. For better or worse, Marxie is humankind's most flamboyant model of struggle against repression simply because (unlike, for example, Camus' philosophy of the absurd) Marxism has prescribed itself an entire cellophane package of procedures that has been unleashed on peoples. Beginning with Lenin, the cellophane wrapper has been frantically torn off, as "democratic centralism" spills out from the Styrofoam plate to "insure the strictest obedience to orders" (Sprintzen 1988: 181). The rationale for this, as Camus satirically explains, is that "all freedom must be crushed in order to conquer the empire, and one day the empire will be the equivalent of freedom" (1955; in Sprintzen 1988: 181). Yeah, right, take a number and wait 100 years, and that cellophane wrapper now more like a body bag for yet another village mayor to be executed publicly in his town square by Marxie's great-grandchild the FMLN of EL Salvador in the 1980s, you know, collateral damage, not our fault you were born two generations too early. Forget the image of the wild electric hair and sunken face -- anyway, that's not Karl, but Groucho's brother, Harpo, the funny guy. Think more of a Rorschach ink pattern. It's there. It won't go away. We need to see it within us; but, really, it's spooky as all hell.

Accordingly, Pennycook (2001: 6) states that "critical applied linguistics needs at some level to engage with the long legacy of Marxism," as we can assume must any movement dealing with retaliation against dominance. In fact, Pennycook categorizes such an approach to language teaching as *emancipatory modernism* which, among other things, "provides us with both critical literary and critical discourse analysis ... relating textual meanings to broader social, economic, and political concerns" (ibid: 167), with the goal of an "inclusionary approach to difference" (166). But Pennycook is not completely sold on the idea. He'd rather see Marxie's *emancipatory modernism* complemented by another of his approaches, that of *problematizing practice*, which rather than obsessing over the domination being hurled down from the macro heavens would seek to transform the student's place at the table in the recognizable micro world. What is telling, however, is Pennycook's criticism of an all exclusive *emancipatory modernism* (or, *E.M.*; no pun intended, X). Along with its righteousness and overly simplistic classification of power according to socio-economic class (2001), *E. M.*'s "individual empowerment" is an illusion. It arises from our awareness of a prejudicial or unfair difference between us and the other classes (ibid); so we break our heads in order to eradicate this difference and gain entry -- or, rather, re-entry. Based on Mey (1985), Pennycook explains that the immigrant worker who in an ESL class learns to speak in the same manner as his employers is living proof that "empowering individuals within inequitable social

structures not only fails to deal with those inequalities but also reproduces them" (2001: 39). This immigrant worker with the talk of the dominant class is simply a walking photocopy of the existing system of oppression. "This leaves us helpless as (critical) applied linguistics" (ibid); **E. M.'s** classroom is perpetually cyclical with no happy ending in sight.

The same goes for Marxism itself. According to Sprintzen (1988), Marx, visioning the classless society, "merges his outrage at the suffering of the people, their exploitation by a relatively small class of proprietors of the means of production, with an unbounded faith in the liberating possibilities of industry" (174) because in general "economics determines the superstructure of habits, beliefs, values, political and legal forms" (173). In order that "the working people ... be set free," then, they must oust the dominant class who controls industry, affect "the fullest possible development of industry's productive forces," and assume total control of the production (ibid:174-175). It is at this point that Camus sees a slippage in the Rorschach ink blot.

Camus, according to Sprintzen, criticizes Marx for allowing his "faith in the liberatory possibilities of production ... to blind him to its oppressive potential" (1988: 175). Marx "blames the division of labour for exploitation without seeing to what extent this division is furthered, and even made necessary, by the development of those forces of production" (ibid). If the factory divides society and keeps the poor in their place, what is to guarantee that the same factory would be any different when owned and operated by the Marxist proletariat in the big leather chair behind the oak desk? Doesn't the organization of labour itself force self-sacrifice on the part of the worker?

Imagine that the young waiter of Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," having left the café to work in a factory, would complain that he was "sleepy now," that he never got "into bed before three o'clock" in the morning, and that you, *Proletie*, have "no regard for those who must work" and live their lives, and that the least you can do is pay us a decent wage (Hemingway 1933: 14-15). In response, Maxie would sit back in his chair, thump his boots onto the desk top, and then pause. He'd see, outside the glass door, his new drinkin' buddy, Nifty Louie with "his Paradise Ballroom haircut" and "Division street sun tan," his arms held out like a song 'n dance man (Algren 1949: 145-146). Marxie would wave in Louie, then turn back to the young waiter. He'd tell the waiter that everyone needed a "light for the night" (Hemingway 1933: 16); and so they'd keep up with the over-time hours, every single soul on the production line, 'cause no mass volume of production, then no profits, and no profits, then no material goods with which to climb up the social ladder before the ladder self-collapses, and also the same low wages, 'cause an increase in payroll, you guessed it, then no profits and no ladder, trust me, you and your mother-in-law will thank me 100 years from now. Nifty Louie would then sidle up to the desk. He'd slap five to Marxie, then look at the waiter. He'd say, "I think you're one of the weaker sheep yourself" (Algren 1949: 61). The waiter would slump off, out

the glass door, down the wooden staircase to the assembly line below. After all, as Lenin himself states, "discipline and organization are assimilated more easily by the proletariat, thanks to the hard school of the factory." (Camus 1954: 217; in Sprintzen 1988: 175). "Well, now," Marxie would then say to Louie, "Let's get outta here and go stand before a bar with dignity" (Hemingway 1933: 16). He'd get up from his chair, whacking his hands on the desk, and Piggy Rorschach, the ink-man of kids' nightmares, falls off the page, the handplate of a Ouija board game shadowing across the tiny red-stone park in El Salvador where two guys in Red Cross vests carry yet another body of an executed mayor in a clear plastic bag, a distant scene far below, the plastic wrap gleaming like ice, the gulag revisited.

Not that the Salvadoran Right Wing's death squads were any better, of course not. But they made no pretensions about the killer behind their door. What Camus objects to is Marxism's promotion of a "mystical faith in a mythologized proletariat" who, according to basic logic, would never be able to construct "the classless society" (Sprintzen 1988: 176), but rather, just as Mey's and Pennycook's immigrant worker in an ESL class, simply would reproduce the same exploitation and repression that had created and perpetuated class divisions in the first place. So why the fairy tale? Would it not be a big step forward to just admit there's a killer behind every door?

The body is swung and tossed, an ice man in his slab of ice thumping to the truck bed; and the continent sways, so many *n*'s and *N*'s obscured by that wavering, warped, fun house mirror shadow, and we've got to remind ourselves to keep moving. In motion, Marxism has something to offer. Hell breaks loose only when the revolution stops and, for example, is "rationally organized ... into small cells ... under the direction of a central committee whose rule was law, whose interpretation was reality" (ibid: 180). Such an infrastructure, according to Foucault (1981), would subsist on the consumption and transmission of power networks, which in this case would be nothing more than a 'reproduction' of those same networks that existed in the old regime before the revolution. Lenin and Stalin did take Marxism to this finality in constructing the now defunct Soviet empire, one of humankind's most notable bone-head mistakes.

Camus perhaps would pose his philosophy of the absurd as a type of Marxism without finality. In his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1955), we observe Sisyphus endlessly rolling his boulder up the hill. He knows there is no room to stop and stand, not at the top nor the bottom; the only alternative is to keep moving up the incline with his boulder. It is his own act of revolution, which actually frees him from the utter injustice of his situation, second by second, step by step. This is awful. But at least *Sis* doesn't have blood on his hands which would prevent him from getting a firm grasp on the boulder; at least he doesn't have to carry Nifty Louie, like a monkey, on his back as he grapples up the hill. It could be worse. Oh, sure. Thanks for small favours.

Like a *Sis-ified Marxie*, we as teachers should never arrive -- metaphorically, that is. We shouldn't talk about *Madison and Halsted*, and please give it up with the *careful!* and *watch out!*. Deep-six any mention of **D.A.I.S.Y.** (**D**.iversity, **A**.gency, **I**.dentity, **S**.ociety, and **Y**.ou). Also, avoid pedagogic activities and materials that make obvious their intention to treat **C.O.R.R.U.P.T.S.** (**C**.lass **O**.ppression, **R**.evolt, **R**.esistance, **U**.s, and so **P**.aint **T**.he **S**.tatue in Times Square or Gorky Park). Such social action and consciousness would be "constructed by ... the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future" (Norton & Toohey 2004: 1). You certainly can hope for this in your students. But get it out of your head that you are there to transform or promote this social change; such self-grandiosity often leads to distorted ideology. Do you really aspire to be a W.D. Fard or E. M. (both X's and Pennycook's)?

Any awareness to arise in the classroom, solidifying an existing *n* or birthing a new one, should be orchestrated entirely by the student. *Translate*: Nick reaching a liberating level in his mourning of the death of his friend and idol, Gatsby, by finally realizing that **DAISY CORRUPTS**. Nick knows that Daisy commits the fatal hit-and-run accident, drunk, behind the wheel of Gatsby's automobile; that at her pretense of leaving Tom Buchanan for him, Gatsby tries to cover for her, hiding the automobile, waiting for Daisy to arrive at his mansion; and that Daisy has no intention of leaving Tom. It's a ruse. Gatsby waits and waits; and finally his own assassin, the husband of the victim, knocks on his door. Gatsby is shot, falls into his pool, and drowns. Nick now sees that Daisy is not a temporal victim of post-World War I nihilism but rather its active promoter. Hence Gatsby's dream was doomed from the beginning:

I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. (Fitzgerald 1925: 121).

This awareness is all Nick's. During the class, the most I did was to suggest that the kids talk about Blake's "chain" and "immortal hand or eye" in relation to **themselves**; and X took over the show, probably because he did not "expect to live long enough" for other opportunities to tell his story (Malcolm X: 381). This was enough on my part.

For once you stop yourself in the classroom and take a critical stand, through your own person or an overtly critical material or activity, the gig is up. The general attitude that the "**(p)luralization of target language** and cultural codes needs to be achieved through critical scrutiny of how the norm regulates

and limits possibilities for **marginalized people** and how **oppositional voices** can create new possibilities" (Kubota 2001: 21; bold print mine) veers dangerously close to authoritarianism. It presupposes a judgment that current language teaching is **polarized** not only because of its attempt to remain egalitarian and a-political, which Pennycook (2001) calls *liberal ostrichism*, but also because it follows certain ideologies such as *classical humanism* whose intentions are to preserve the status quo. This is a noble criticism; but don't be fooled. It comes from a counter-ideology or something-ology, most likely related to Marxism, the ice man cometh. In fact, any ideology can become corrupted.

The first step in this corruption is a distancing or subordination between the actors. In the statement above, the brashness in identifying who is **marginalized** would require the teacher to dwell high up in Foucault's central tower of the Panopticon penal system (1981), from where the teacher would have a clear view of his or her students in their social realm, which the teacher even more brashly would characterize as a prison yard. To jump the wall of this prison, which Foucault had found as a suggested prototype in the eighteenth century writings of Jeremy Bentham (ibid), the students would need to take on **oppositional voices**. Although the discourse implies the students' self-discovery of these voices, we nonetheless sense the heavy hand of the teacher, up in the central tower, dropping a restaurant menu of voices from the open windows. Come on, haven't we had enough saviors?

If our goal as the *teach-, super-, or custodian* is that "in diverse sites of language education, practices might be modified, changed, developed, or abandoned in our effort to support learners, learning, and social change" (Norton & Toohey 2004: 2), we need to constantly deny our own social and political beliefs. We need to forego even the briefest of destinations, as does Foucault when he imagines a revolution in the Panopticon prison (1981). Pondering over whether the prisoners should take "over the central tower, " Foucault decides: "Oh, yes, provided that isn't the final purpose of the operation. Do you think it would be much better to have the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?" (ibid: 164-165). In this light, Pennycook (2001) sees critical language teaching not as an established perspective but rather "as a way of thinking and doing that is always questioning, always seeking new schemas of politicization" (173), even to the extreme "of dissolution, of pulling apart" as it is "cast ... adrift" (177). Similarly, a few weeks before his death, Malcolm X said: "I can't put my finger on exactly what my philosophy is now, but I'm flexible" (Haley: 428).

X's and our revolution is one that perpetually continues and changes so as to avoid reproduction of oppression in the awareness as well as the personification of the oppressor in the Audubon Ballroom and the classroom beside the playground with the lone swing set. We don't trust finalities, not in ideologies nor in people. Even Nifty Louie's distributor, Piggy-O, who sighs "with relief to feel the pouch between his fingers again" (Algren 1949: 48) as he

stands beside Fard in the playground, was probably once a nice guy, just like you or I.

Now Piggy-O and Mr. Suit take one and then two steps towards the swing set. I watch them from the window, a paper wad for the umpteenth time hitting the side of my face. I wonder what will come out of this class. I know realize that it has been punctuated with pockets of space, allowing for a type of 'pedagogical safe house' (Canagarajah 2004), but with me keeping a wide distance, except for those few times that I got nerved during X's autobio, which I'm sorry for, but glad I pulled myself back. Maybe the kids have adopted "imagined communities and identities" with which they can "develop roles, discourses, and values that counter the dominant institutions" (ibid 134). I can't know for sure. But, anyway, am I entitled to know? Algren, his nerd glasses askew on his face, holds both arms out, signaling a stop to the paper fight.

Nick comes up to my side. He has much more colour in his face now. He glances out the window. "It's that 'foul dust' outside, teach-," Nick tells me. It 'floated in the wake of his dreams.' I see that now" (1925: 2).

Piggy-O and Fard stop at a swing. Fard kicks the wooden seat, then opens and closes his hand, looking at his knuckles. "Call the principal, or security." Nick says.

"It's just us."

"Ouch."

"Don't worry." It's Algren. He has walked up to Nick's side. He looks out the window. Behind us, X and Fitz are picking up the paper wads. "The isolated man is a loveless man," Algren says (1961: 104).

Nick cocks his eyebrows.

"I mean, we're all together here on the inside, we five cats."

"Thanks, mom."

"And kittens."

I know Algren is right. It is this strange brew of solidarity with a marked sense of difference that can empower our students by helping them to position themselves in the world (Pennycook 2001, Kubota 2004). It was the same as in the new suburb of my father back in the late-1940's. There was an egalitarian nation, yet refreshingly ethnic, a lone corn stalk snapping at the iron blade, as the engines idled and the men walked off for lunch, road workers, cooks, bookkeepers, teachers, night schoolers, some looking for the Swede in their

Mick, others the Sicilian in their Fin, and one guy the Ukraine in his Maine. That's a state, hollow head. Yeah, he knows that; he's from there. All hung together, yet each felt his alienation.

It was a stance of belonging by means of holding oneself apart. It was already there, in red-hot tongs, turned over on stone. They played it out. A few years later, it would be repeated by Malcolm X who, in the very first stage of his dialectic, made "the troubled white audiences ... confused, disturbed ... threatened" (Handler: 1965: xii) and even "scared hell out of " many in the Black community (Davis: 1965: 458), not to mention waitresses at VIPs. X's voice filled all the urban street corners, including Madison and Halsted that my father and company had just deserted, but he shared their same process of self-creation, an insistence on converging *unity with self identity through isolation*. Malcolm X -- up to his fateful moment at the podium in the Audubon ballroom when he would be fired on simultaneously by four gunmen whom he had foreseen would be sent by the *Nation*, perhaps with some tangential encouragement from outside forces -- remained "committed to the cause of liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into that society" (Handler 1965: ix).

Their differences aside, the X-men and my father's generation had a common passion: their own *nation* as the antithesis of the neighboring *Nation*. We can include Fitz, Nick, Algren, Hemingway's old man and waiters, and even Frankie Machine. On one level, however ill-advised or temporal, however material or metaphorical, they all want the same as Gatsby who, after returning home from World War I, bulldozed his blue lawn and beachline out of the coastal island "that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes" (1925: 121). *Translate*: Malcolm X, in Fitz's hat, now marching out the door and across the playground and slashing his arms through the chains, as Piggy-O and Fard backstep wide-eyed and stupified; *and then*, behind X, Fitz, carrying a bucket, stepping to the corner of the swing set, swaying his body with the bucket; *and then*, Algren, Nick, and I the Super having had stepped out to the playground and now cheering, our gesture of cursing and honoring the unjust temporality of this moment, 'cause we know on Sunday afternoon of this very week X will be at the podium in the Audubon Ballroom, but nonetheless now, right now, as Algren says, X and all of us have "the city's rusted heart, that holds both the hustler and the square / takes them both and holds them there / for keeps and a single day" (1961: 77); *and then*, Fitz staggering with the bucket, holding it low between his knees, mimicking the stride of the monkey that had been forced off of Frankie's and how many others' backs; *and then*, X, with his arms held out, continuing to force Piggy and Fard back towards the fence; *and then*, Fitz feigning heavy weight and caution, as if the bucket were filled with hot mop water or acidic cleaning fluid, the old Harlem Globetrotter's trick; *and then*, Nick, Algren, and I cheering louder and holding up our arms in the *tyger salute*, our gesture of gestures to tear down the central tower of Foucault's Panoptican prison; *and finally*, Fitz wheeling the bucket, flinging at least two hundred paper wads into

Pig Man and Suit who by now are crouched on the ground with their arms across their faces, as a tiny coffee cup then rolls past them and into the fence.

Damn kids. The custodian will have to sweep up that mess.

I walk out the door with my broom. Everyone has left, and so I thought. I find a kid sitting on the swing, and something inside me drops. It's X as a boy, about 7 years-old. He wears black glasses, his reddish afro cut close. He's crying, slightly. I imagined he is utterly isolated at school, and probably teased. It's not only because of his mulatto-like features, his grandfather on his mother's side being a white man from Grenada; it's also his strange seriousness, his ever tense face.

Barney the purple dinosaur approaches; the boy, still crying, jumps down from the swing. Barney -- a girl's voice -- says, "Mal, I'm not afraid of you." The boy falls into Barney's stomach, as if collapsing. "I'll take you home to your mom, Mal." I know that the year before, X's father, a Black activist, was murdered; and a few years from now, his mother will be institutionalized for a severe emotional breakdown and he will be sent to a foster home. "Come along, Mal." They walk off, slowly, the boy fallen to Barney.

I prop my broom on the side of the swingset. I follow them, pulling out of my pocket enough peso paper and coins to match 10 U.S., and when Barney turns around, I extend the money in an opened hand. "You need it more than I," she says, her huge green smile frozen for centuries in her purple sponge face. "You're a teacher."

Yeah, thanks a lot, I murmur, as they turn, walk away. I feel myself half-smile. I squeeze the money in my hand, and I look at the black iron swing set. It's one of those Jungian symbols that is painted on our collective subconscious. It began as a super old archetype, probably pre-historic, some well-meaning and humane emotion or inspiration that someone had projected out to the external world, where it took some recognizable form in art, mythology, or science. There it was perceived by others, reinternalized, and reprojected back to the outside; this process continued until the masses finally shaped it into the swing set image. Those are Jung's archetypes, humankind's select phenomena that throughout time have been commonly considered positive, constructive and wondrous. They are shared universally; they are continually projected and reassimilated through venues such as music, art, architecture, literature, and education. Tap into an archetype and you'll see the beauty of history, the illumination of the future.

I start to walk, following Barney and little X. I lag behind. I see little X step to the side, regain his footing, and then fall in beside Barney. It's heartbreaking. I fling the money in the air, hearing a few coins click off the top bar of the swing set behind me, and I think to myself, Can I have a voice in the

nation's classroom? Is there a place for me? You can count on me to deny my own presence so that you can transform yours. All I can really offer is the gesture, my own and those of others close to me, all of our nations in the making, the corn fields tumbling, the ghetto streets shining, the swing set waiting. I laugh at myself about the swing set, how it sounded in that context, and then I see Barney and the boy go through the fence and then I'm at the fence.

I looked through it. I saw my father, 87 years-old, being escorted up the steps to the Airbus 320, the turbines whining, getting louder. There hadn't been any wheel chair, after all. His black cane gleaming, my father moved slowly, at his back the airline official, the security guard, and a guy in a janitor's uniform with an orange vest. It all looked so steep. They were the only ones going up.

Give yourself a break.

I didn't get it. But it didn't matter. I had the impression that one of my father's reasons for coming down here was to tell me that message, to save it for the airport, his farewell. I felt the weight of his intention, an ancient leaden coin dropping within me. I wanted somehow to share it with today's "Tyger" students, whom I'd see in about twenty minutes. "What the hammer? ... / What the anvil?" They went inside the airplane with my father. Only the janitor in the orange vest remained on the platform, just for a second. He had both hands on the railings, the turbines screeching.

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