Michel Fabre is an outstanding European intellectual who has explored the American novel written by African Americans. This has led him into an implicit cross-culturality. It seems to me, therefore, that he would be interested in a theme in which cross-culturality may change some of the static norms of conventional fiction when it bears, in unsuspected ways, on the life of the earth.

This is a matter I have long cherished and I feel it is necessary to deepen and extend our intellectual vision of cross-culturality into the language of the imagination as this bears on the nature of sculpture, and of gnosis or knowledge, and indeed of measureless possibilities in the age in which we live which is dominated by power politics and polarisations.

Recently a commentator, in a scientific programme on genes, stated – I now paraphrase his remarks – that if we stripped away our pigmentations we should find an African presence lurking beneath the varying colour of our skins. But – he went on to say – this has only been recently perceived and is still little understood. Furthermore – he implied – in the ages of involuntary migration of the original African presence across land masses, oceans and rivers – the profoundest changes have occurred.

Our immersion in such changes has led to conceive of absolute ethnicities or racial apartments. Thus, in the arts, we have blocked the flow of measureless cross-culturalities. We tend to claim fixed boundaries and to gain support for such absoluteness from animal habitats.

Ironically the centuries have witnessed to green conquests. The most recent of these occurred in the Americas five hundred years ago. European cultures invaded the Aztecs, the Incas, and others and appeared to destroy invaluable differences. Such differences, in my view, are the challenging foundations of universal possibilities woven from diversities.

By the way I spoke, a moment ago, of our seeking support for fixed boundaries from animal habits.

What is animal habitat? Has it not been determined by the movement of land-masses, the changed shape of continents and oceans? Do we not see this in the incredible evolutionary detail that emerges in the animals of the Andes, of the Amazon, and elsewhere? It is important to realize that animal habitat though apparently grounded, at a particular moment, in absolute place, is itself partial in the life of the earth.

That is a message for art – for the way art bears on the human person – which we still have, it seems to me, to perceive very deeply – if art is to speak to us beyond material fixtures and ornamentations, if art is to take us slowly, constructively, across the most sensitive boundaries.
Boundaries are sensitive however partial they actually are. Their partiality may assist us to live and move in order to skirt or avoid earthquake regions by which we may be fatalistically trapped generation after generation. There is a measureless nature to the life of the earth in the midst of catastrophes, droughts and famine and flood that we blindly invite, a precarious freedom we need to understand if our cultures are to awaken from their ‘sleep’ or ‘obliviousness’ which seems so strong it is called realism.

Technical brilliance is at the core of realism. Realism – I would say – has undoubtedly been the fruit of the 18th and 19th century European novel form which has influenced the 20th century theatre of the arts. But such realism – however sophisticated or satiric or comic – led the rulers of civilisation unintentionally perhaps into an ‘obliviousness’ of the many diverse peoples under the umbrella of Empire. This may seem surprising. The British Empire was one, it was said, on which the sun never set in the 18th and 19th centuries. Perhaps it was a trend or habit that ran from the ‘sleep’ of conquest of the Americas making one people superior to others who pursued different faiths. The art of Empire in the novel form of the 18th and 19th centuries displayed all-white characters from all-white families and ignored all other peoples, diverse and peculiar, under the imperial umbrella.

Ruler and ruled never gained the mutual insight of creative and re-creative responsibility. The ruled were bracketed, as though they did not exist, upon the passivity of stages marked by the military crossings of the ruler.

There were a few American novelists of the 19th century such as, for instance, Herman Melville, where black and white and brown characters (all playing major roles in his fiction) offered pregnant silences and room for speculation as to what lay beneath these silences. In a sense the absolute domain of the ruling novel, which Melville inherited, was implicitly broken through such an array of speaking silences. *Benito Cereno* closes as follows: ‘Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end… has heard a hive of subtlety…’. It is possible also that we may find sketches of the fluid life of the earth in Melville’s narratives. Critics, as far as I am aware, have not looked into these issues.

And this brings me to the question: What does one mean by the life of the earth? I am not speaking of a description of hills or valleys or plains or rivers that are fixed or insentient features.

In *Tumatumari*, a novel of mine published in 1968, we come upon a portrayal of moving landscape creating, I feel, a measureless dimension. The passage I have in mind runs as follows:

The clouds had vanished and the line of the mountains appeared now like a lofty crest of water breaking its own wave ceaselessly – undulating and refracting. It was a curious impression – the vast moving outline of the
mountains and the transparent ocean of the sky within and beneath which fell away other exposures, shorelines, crests and seas ... vegetation as well as sand – tier after tier, rank after rank of bush, descending balconies as in a submerged amphitheatre ... fluid / solid – water / fire – cauldron of space ...

In truth the ocean had never crawled here upon an ancient continental shelf and climbed still higher beyond Tumatumari to the farthest limit – the escarpment of Kaieteur...

In that passage is it not possible to visualize the ever-changing mobility of the earth, a mobility, a vulnerability, a curious infirmity, shall I say, that is born of land and water and fire and cloud through which we may create doors or windows, sensitive doors and windows, sensitive freedoms in the midst of fates?

When I speak of infirmity I am referring to the infirmity of strength, the strongest fortresses have a hidden infirmity through which it is possible to build new architectures in space. The very fixed stages – upon which we build our cities – are sentient and alive. Sentience – and its veined and tributary variations – may be coming home to us at last as we find ourselves potentially overwhelmed by the threat of flood and drought that we, in fact, visit on ourselves in our ‘obliviousness’ of the life of the earth. May I emphasize again that the life of the earth is not fixed, it is not a description of fixed mountains and valleys divorced from the characters that move upon it?

_Tumatumari_ is an Amerindian word, somewhat anglicized I would say, which means ‘sleeping rocks’.

In the novel I sought to bring the ‘sleep’ of a traumatized people, traumatized by conquest, into league with sculptures that have sprung from the earth – sculptured crests, sculptured outlines, sculptured exposures – in order to engage in an awakening, within many-sided nature, from the brutalization of everyday place and person by conquistadorial legacies.

Let us remember that across the ages – before Man appeared in his present shape – the eruptive earth would have sculpted figures, in its sentient thrust and momentum, resembling Man and Beast and Bird before Man and Best and Bird had actually appeared.

This, I feel, is the measureless origin of the arts, an apparently sleeping form imbued nevertheless with a subtle momentum, a subtle life within an apparent passivity.

We have seized on such passivity with what seems an all-powerful technology, we have brushed aside ancient legends of gods of the wind and the sea and the earth and the air without a thought of their intuitive depth, their intuitive bridle in the harness of the earth – horses of wind and sea – that needed a greater recreative understanding and development.

Such horses, in the sculptures of the earth, may seem asleep but they may teach us of our own ‘obliviousness’ or our tendency to turn into blocks of flesh-and-blood. We are ourselves sculptures awaiting a dream.
of life that may dawn upon us when we engage differently with a pace that is secreted everywhere.

I can imagine someone pointing to philosophical concepts of alchemy – such as the massa confusa and the prima materia – which implicitly tell of the life of the earth and warn against assuming the earth is ‘passive’ or ‘inanimate’ or ‘dead’.

This is true but on reflection one cannot fail to see that the human person, by and large, is divided in himself or herself between sentient earth-sculptures (which appear to him or to her as insentient) and the living work of art that he or she is in waking dream or play or action in fiction. This division of far selves, in the theatre of the arts, may mark, I feel, the summit of division within ourselves, a blind summit that seems to me to be at the heart of feud and conflict that ravage our ambivalent conquest and age. The earth we have wasted is our greatest ambivalent conquest and enemy. Perhaps we extend our will to conquer the earth into patterns of hate against human cultures for which we grieve in despair and terror that stir us out of our ‘sleep’.

Did C.G. Jung conceive of bridging this division between opposite selves in his coincidentia oppositorum? He may have but it would have been intuitive.

In an article entitled ‘Merlin and Parsifal’ I refer to Jung’s statement that a ‘new conceptual language’ is needed. But, as far as I was aware, he made no further statements and seemed afflicted by grave misgivings. As a consequence he never pursued the psycho-physical medium he had raised. The novels he read were conventional in which an ‘obliviousness’ rules the language and makes for an insentient and final stage on which character is built.

In Tumatumari I sought – through trials of the imagination – to create a theatre of the arts in which obliviousness is denuded and the two selves – sentient earth-sculpture and Man, as a living work of art, actually come together in an astonishing way in a theatre of arts.

Curiously enough I see this clearly now as I look backwards and forwards across my fiction from the 1960s into the 70s, 80s, 90s and into The Dark Jester which has just been published. I can see now how they all have a measurelessness which I called the unfinished genesis of the imagination.

Let me return to Tumatumari. Roi Solman dies in the Tumatumari waterfall. His wife Prudence sees him in a dream descending into the waterfall and hunting the ‘wild boar of the rapids’. The hunt which is normally pursued on land changes subtly and completely in her Dream of the waterfall.

Everything changes subtly and completely. Who or what is the ‘wild boar of the rapids’? It is sentient earth-sculpture. It existed long before Roi pursued his present human shape. As a consequence the stage of theatre in which Roi hunts moves and is alive in his consciousness. The rigid barriers of time are partially abolished within a space that lives in its
own right. Prudence awakens, in some degree, to the life of her husband as he appears to awaken in her Dream, to his life as a work of art. Such is, I feel, the miracle of fiction.

However one traces it – I have done so in different ways, different fictions across the years – the fact emerges obscurely at times, clearly at other times, depending on the intuitive scope of the writing, that each player in a work (if I may describe him or her as a player) needs to come into league with the earth on which he moves, in which he swims, into which he descends, as a sentient living entity. I feel that this requires a wholly different theatre of the arts to the one we now have which may have sophisticated characterisation but this is established as an insentient stage. This leads respectedly to a will to conquer which divides people everywhere like a remorseless fate.

In Tumatumari Prudence is a fictional player who sees her husband Roi, in her Dream of his hunt of the ‘wild boar of the rapids’, in a fluid combination of the earth and the constitution of heaven (in the) raging spittle of the chase on the boar’s lips which mingled now with hers like the waters of life’.

What, may I ask, are ‘the waters of life’?

It is vitally important, it seems to me, to engage with this in the trials of the imagination that the novel discloses, however testing, however difficult, and not to divide one’s attention by fastening on pure philosophical concepts: philosophy is very important but it needs to blend with the images in a work of art so genuinely, perhaps complexly, that we free ourselves from absolute restrictions in pursuing in its correspondences with other partial images.

Reason, as advanced by apparently sophisticated thinkers, leads to exercises that ignore the language of art in fiction. Just ignoring, such ignorance, reduces or measures flesh-and-blood as a block and this inevitably, if unwittingly, leads to agencies of conquest. There are reasons beyond reasons, depths beyond surfaces. Such depths, such humilities, beyond a fixed or sovereign restriction, are the mystery of art, the true mystery of fiction.

Let me return now to the question I asked earlier on ‘the waters of life’.

What are ‘the waters of life’ which are gained from a wholly new approach to fiction and art as these may encompass inexplicable truth on multifarious life?

Is this not a question of gnosis, of gnostic understanding, of knowledge gained from extremities of living encounter with earth-sculptures that revise our approach to the nature of human-made sculptures, the nature of human art? How does sculpture live, how does art live, in subtle, curiously moving ways though it seems ornamental and inanimate?
Does such an approach to sculpture, to art, to the body and bodilessness of the Word in poem and fiction, point a way to the veiled meaning of original spirit, original soul?

Except that such knowledge – as I come, by intuitive degrees, to it – has no fortress location, no invulnerable location. In such apparently invulnerable fortresses lies a hidden vulnerability or infirmity we may see in mind and imagination. Such a vulnerability or infirmity may prove a complex window through our habits, beyond habitual discourse, beyond the cosmos, beyond the stars that we try to see, to place, within our galaxy.

The multifarious life of the earth, therefore, teaches us to pay the closest care and attention to variations and movements on the stage on which we live: and not to invest absolutely or fixedly in such a stage.

We are told of parallel universes by scientific speculations, parallel universes of which we know nothing except perhaps that there is a Wound – akin to the Wound of being and non-being we carry in ourselves – that may take us into the spirit of timelessness. A supreme paradox. We move through a Wound into timelessness.

Quantum ‘particle’ and ‘word’ – in their apparent illogicality – may help us to sense a living spark reaching darkly and brightly perhaps from a true Creator. It reaches through the demiurgic and conquistadorial fields with which we have to wrestle for precarious freedoms in the midst of implacable fates.

It is but a spark, a spark capable of multiple illuminations that take us into diverse potentials, diverse dangers, diverse hopes in cross-cultural ages.

It is but a speech but it offers us an intensity of creative and re-creative imaginative and intuitive scope.

Without that ‘spark’ what do we have but biassed games and functions of uniform art and a clinging to science for marks to conceal our failures and our mortality?

Genesis therefore – within the intuitions I have inserted in this talk that there is no fortress locality to knowledge, that there is a complex window or infirmity within the strangest minds, the strongest imaginations – brings us to ‘the waters of life’ as imbued by the spark of a true creation, a spark which assists us in contending with the demiurgic politics of our age. The demiurge is equipped to ride all who are oblivious of the sentience of the earth and the threshold such sentence provides into parallel universes of the imagination through a tree of life existing long before we arrived in our present shape and form.

I do not say this absolutely but as a jest, a serious jest, however, which permits us a glimpse of charms between knowledge and ignorance we dream to cross.

I could quote many passages from my fictions across the decades but shall content myself with a quote from The Dark Jester, my most recent novel, to sustain a grasp, as it were, of the measureless spark but makes
us, in fiction, living sparks of art in the ground on which we move, which moves with us.

This is the City of Cities, El Dorado. I bring to it the ruins of the past, the memories of places I know as mine but which are taken by Europe and Spain. El Dorado is the Troy of the Americas.

I walk in shoes of mist, I wear rock and water. Rock melts, water becomes a solidity or a desert. My bone and my garments fuse in world theatre.

‘El Dorado is gold. I am a man of gold in a place of gold. This is the distinctive legend of flesh and gold’. I cry the words boldly but my misgivings rise into space. There is a rumble. The Earth shakes. Shakes to Cassandra who comes across time to tell us in multiple ways of the fate of cultures. It is the heavy tread of my pursuers. Or is it my own bodiless step?

A pulse beats fast as a drum…

Troy collapses with the entry of a Wooden Horse which gives birth to a jealous many-headed enemy when everyone, dances and celebrates in lust. El Dorado hides on a saddle of ground on a Misty Animal in the Amazon. I swear I see it wrapped in elements of jealous enemy and lusty friend. I give a cry of joy, such joy, but how sprinkled with the desperation of unease. It is swept from me, so swiftly I am astonished. All that remains are the tears of the Animal like a shroud upon me. They materialize into my pursuers in jungled space, and leap and seize me. El Dorado vanishes. It is swallowed in the belly of a gigantic Horse or Animal of space…

Such is my wrestling with enemy and friend in the suspended heart of fate that edges into uneasy freedom.

They seize me.

I have a golden chain around my neck on a jungled body of land. My hair is like the hair of trees. They take me back to Cuzco, an outcast in my own land.

As I stand on the Scaffold, in world theatre, the Sea turns into the dramatization of slender hope spinning a path into desolate cities, desolate places. The land that is mine has become desolate. And yet I see a thread of water on which I cross. How can one come Home except upon threads of desolation one still carries?

The Sword of God coils into a Rope as it flashes to the wisdom of the Serpent.

I faintly hear the Bishop intoning a prayer.

Will the Bishop’s God the Bishop’s Sword, respond to a shape in me that turns as red as a feather in Air and Earth? It is a Wound in the body of art as delicate as a sail, a flimsy sail. Flimsy as it is it sings of a Ship, a hidden Ship in a Hidden City no one has yet found though it still endures with the promise of creation on Land and on the Sea.

Wilson HARRIS
Chelmsford

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