The central problematic of *Minor Transnationalism* is that of multiple determination in the context of subject formation or identity formation. The editors make the point clearly in their fine introduction and the contributors largely agree, in analyses evoking an exceedingly diverse range of socio-economic contexts and material conditions, that postcolonial theory tends to lapse into binary habits of thought, which in turn tend to reify and reinscribe the hierarchy of centre over periphery (margin), major over minor, or West over non-West. At stake in an exploration of minor transnationalism then is not the mere use of dualisms, binary oppositions, or dichotomies. Rather, as the references to relational thought that crop up in the introduction and in some of contributions suggest, the goal of looking at minor transnationalism is to move analysis beyond reciprocal determination toward multiple determination. Put another way, the goal is to think identity as a complex set of relations.

In this regard, *Minor Transnationalism* at once challenges and renews poststructuralist modes of thought. First, if only for strategic reasons, difference is seen as ontologically prior to identity and the goal is to think difference differently. Second, as in poststructuralism, dialectical modes of thought are subject to critique, mostly in the form of self-other dialectics that were one point of departure for psychoanalytic and deconstructive analyses of subject formation. Contributors tend to agree that, despite the critical sophistication that various poststructuralist thinkers brought to bear on self-other dialectics, dialectics nonetheless persists awkwardly in postcolonial theory, in the form of a reciprocal determination of identity through which the self (West or centre) inevitably accrues power and identity at the expense
of the other. Consequently, the politics of minority identity, whenever articulated as a binary relation to the West or some other centre, lapses into a politics of recognition that shores up the power of the West to determine subjectivity. Even though postcolonial theory has successfully shown how the other is necessary to this reciprocal determination, the other always remains at a disadvantage. In brief, binary thought enables vertical or hierarchized systems of identity.

In response, *Minor Transnationalism* proposes to look for horizontal connections among minor identities or formations, which is to say, at moments or sites of multiple national determination. It is one of the strengths of the volume as a whole that contributors all speak to this challenge, striving to deal with multiple determinations rather than binary oppositions. Moreover, while there is a general critique of and even disenchantment with the dichotomizing force of postcolonial theory, the movement beyond postcolonial theory never takes the form of a simple historical overcoming and the responses to it are rich and diverse. A complex dialogue thus unfolds across the essays, despite radical differences in their materials and concerns. Particularly important to the dialogue is the status of the West and, by extension, the status of the world and world history.

In its continual reference to the West, postcolonial theory sustained, however reductively, a world historical perspective and Gayatri Spivak, for one, argued that such a vantage remained essential for strategic, historical reasons. But is recourse to a world historical or global perspective truly necessary? Or will a series of shifting lateral points of encounter provide sufficient sense of the whole to allow for responsible political action or ethical engagement? In theory, minor transnationalism moves in this latter direction. Yet contributors have rather different ideas about how (and how much) this is possible.

Ali Bedad, for instance, provides a thorough and thoughtful critique of postcolonial theory, explaining how he has come to see postcolonial theory as “too general and too celebratory to be useful in reading the ‘minor’ text” (230), such as *Les boucs*, a francophone novel whose context is Maghreb immigration in France. His response to the rampant generalization of postcolonial theory takes the form of greater emphasis on historicization, contextualization and socio-historical mediation in understanding the specific conditions of exile. He does not, however, explore the debates attending historicization and contextualization. Context is, after all, infinite; historians must draw lines somewhere. This is because postcolonial theory, for all its flaws, provides Bedad with a general historical perspective, which he supplements with a socio-historical analysis of French immigration policies toward North Africans. In effect, Bedad holds postcolonial theory “under erasure” in order to introduce historical specificity into the general postcolonial framework.

If the term “under erasure” comes to mind here, it is because so many of the contributions to *Minor Transnationalism* are clearly indebted to broadly deconstructive modes of analysis (deconstruction of the West and the nation) that are at
the same time deemed inadequate to understanding contemporary configurations of power. At some junctures, as in Kathleen McHugh’s insightful reading of transnational cinematic autobiography in Rea Tajiri’s *History and Memory* and Guillermo Verdecchia’s *Crucero*, the work of the transnationally situated subject appears almost synonymous with a deconstruction of national identity. Similarly, Seiji Lippit’s attention to “passages” (*roji*) as way to challenge distinctions between inside and outside, between internal others (minorities) and external others (colonies), in the articulation of Japanese nationalism appears fairly confident of the critical force of deconstruction, especially as manifested in the fiction of Nakagami Kenji. Yet, even in such essays, broadly deconstructive strategies demand such historical specificity that deconstruction opens beyond a sense of the indetermination underlying identity in general, that is, its general conditions of (im)possibility. A tension implicit in the deconstruction of identity emerges, which Michael Bourdaghş’s account of the American and Japanese reception of rockabilly singer Sakamoto Kyû helps to elucidate.

On one hand, by situating his analysis in relation to the dynamics of air travel and “air power,” Bourdaghş offers a vision of a historically specific biopolitics of Pax Americana, insofar as jets bring extraterritoriality (military bases) as much as nationality to the fore in U.S.-Japan relations. On the other hand, when he turns to Naoki Sakai’s deconstruction of the dynamics of the universal/particular that underlies the formation of national language, he finds that the transnational and hybrid inflections of rock music serve largely to reinforce the same old nationalisms and the perennial metaphysics of the West, by which Japanese particularity is in the service of the American universal. It would seem that, as Bedad argues, the critique of metaphysics implicit in deconstruction does not merely point to the persistence of the West, but can also function as a dehistoricizing force in analysis, de-emphasizing historical transformations. But the crucial question is that of what is nationalism today. How does the dynamics of universal/particular (national identity) transform under conditions of extraterritoriality, globalization or transnationalism? Is it still in force?

Moradewun Adejunmobi’s illuminating historicization of discourses of the vernacular in the context of British and French colonialization in Africa is also exceedingly important in this respect, because he calls attention to the ways in which the vernacular has been dehistoricized in postcolonial theory, contributing to a celebratory confusion of the vernacular with nativist self-determination.

Still, it is surely not enough to critique the dehistoricizing force implicit in deconstructive strategies prevalent in postcolonial theory. After all, theory by nature tends to deterrioralize and abstract, whence its critical force in making connections. As the contributors to *Minor Transnationalism* are aware, it is not a matter of getting out of theory, but of finding theoretical abstractions better suited to the contemporary situation and the contributors to this volume largely
agree that something must be added to deconstructive strategies that will move postcolonial theory beyond the reinscription of reciprocal determination in the direction of multiple determination.

Françoise Lionnet’s essay is a good example, for she considers Mauritian writer Dev Virahsawmy’s play *Toufann*, a loose adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, in terms of “lateral comparisons among ‘minor’ texts and genres or marginalized artistic productions and languages that will eventually allow us to bypass altogether the mediation by a center” (203). So, in addition to exploring how *Toufann* draws out the subversive aspects of the original play, Lionnet shows how Virahsawmy is “in a productive, if only implicit, dialogue with several African writers” (214). The play then “goes ‘beyond dichotomies’ to enunciate a new logic of relational understanding” (217). In other words, the addition of lateral comparisons promises to flatten the vertical hierarchies that remain implicit in deconstructing the Western canon. But, insofar as Lionnet places Virahsawmy in dialogue with other African writers and not, say, Indonesian or Columbian writers, there seems to be some material constraints on lateral comparison and maybe other historical frameworks that will also demand attention, such as regional logics. In this sense, even as Lionnet’s analysis works toward relational understanding, it hinges on and invites expanded deconstruction.

Shu-mei Shih’s essay also takes issue with deconstructive critiques of the West, arguing that the result is increased sophistication in discussions of the West. The problem, she suggests, is not one of how the West knows the non-West but of Western scholars’ indifference to and ignorance of the non-West. In this respect, her view of the power of the Western academy recalls Giorgio Agamben’s ideas about sovereignty as a kind of pure decisionism, which appears in Shih in the form of the West’s absolute ignorance and refusal. As with Agamben’s shift from the logic of friend/enemy or self/other to that of the “inclusive exception” (104-05), for Shih it is the diasporic intellectual, whom the West treats as an assimilated minority, who provides the key to understanding the operations of sovereignty in the failure of Western feminism to conduct a true dialogue with Chinese feminism. As in Agamben, the inclusive exception is the rule, for it is how the sovereignty operates and Shih encourages intellectuals to begin to listen in the diasporic mode. At the same time, her recommendation to listen responsively to the other, which she does very effectively in her discussion of Chinese feminists, suggests that Shih also sees the diasporic intellectual in deconstructive terms, in terms of a radical openness to the other.

In this respect, Shih’s essay works nicely alongside Suzanne Gearhart’s reconsideration of Étienne Balibar’s notion of “interior exclusion.” Gearhart shows that Balibar is dealing with problems of subject formation in terms that are not incompatible with psychoanalytic treatments of it. If immigrants for Balibar “typify a new form of sociability and of citizenship” (34), Gearhart argues that it
is because they suggest an active transnationalism, an ambivalent or ambiguous, dehysterized (inter)nationalism that avoids the polarities of assimilation and separation. So the interior exclusion not only provides a way to highlight the increasingly predatory operations of national sovereignty à la Agamben, it promises an ethical and political alternative, a new sociability. To some extent, Shih’s recommendation for intellectuals to open their diasporic ears to the other recalls Balibar–Gearhart’s dehysterized sociability and, yet, her discussion steers more toward the ethical than the political. This is surely in part because it is so difficult to situate China in these terms. On one hand, China appears as the other of Western sovereignty, with Chineseness or Chinese “nativism” as a response to the West, as the particularistic flipside of Western universality. On the other hand, as Shih’s evocation of “(post)socialism” implies, consideration of China may entail other universalisms or even encompassible worlds, which cannot be understood only in terms of the sovereignty of the West, duelling superpowers, reciprocal determination, or even a straightforward historical dialectic.

Other essays propose to sidestep the apparently endless critique of the West, albeit in very different ways. Susan Koshy, for instance, takes issue with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s exclusive focus on Western intellectual traditions to account for power relations under conditions of globalization. Ultimately, Hardt and Negri’s attribution of everything to the West leads them to dismiss precisely what Koshy feels is important today: human rights and international law, which, she indicates, have been shaped historically by both the West and non-West. Without denying the importance of the West, Koshy opts to bracket a critique of the West in order to deal with the problem of bonded labour in contemporary America, discussing how identity-based groups helped to free two young Indian women sex workers from bondage through a transnationally situated understanding of ethnicity. In other words, identity-based groups do not simply embrace or celebrate ethnicity. Rather, their understanding of ethnicity can allow for political action against ethnically inflected oppression in the global order.

Elizabeth Marchant also responds to Western ethnocentrism not with a sustained critique of the West, but with a highly localized analysis of racial inequality. She challenges Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant’s claim that American intellectual debates are imposed in dehistoricized form on the entire planet. Particularly questionable is their use of the example of Brazil to show that American debates about race miss the mark, because Brazil enjoys racial democracy. While Marchant aptly sees in Bourdieu and Wacquant an attempt to erase their own “ethnocentric intrusion,” she does not dwell on a critique of Western ethnocentrism, but turns to racial inequality in the context of Pelourino, which the Brazilian state promotes as an instance of its racial harmony. Exploring the intersection of race and class, she indicates that “Not only is Brazil not an exception in its ideas about ‘race,’ but lately scholars of contemporary race studies … argue convincingly that the United States is becoming ever more like Brazil” (313).
In her brilliant discussion of Jean “Binta” Breeze, a female Jamaican dub poet, which is calculated to contest the ways in which Paul Gilroy’s mapping of the Black Atlantic replicates the cartography of corporate globalization, Jenny Sharpe also turns to localized analysis in response to the persistence of globalizing tendencies. While one might argue, as the editors do in their introduction that such “global/local frameworks tend to romanticize the local” (6), it is significant that, in these three essays which seemingly bypass in different ways the postcolonial critique of the West, the emphasis on the transnational of the local effectively shows how world historical concerns are not simply produced in the West and imposed across the globe. Worlds emerge elsewhere and, while they cannot remain indifferent to the West or the Americanized global order for historical reasons, they are in some sense incompossible worlds.

In fact, the dialogue between essays sidestepping the critique of the West and essays displacing and supplementing that critique provides one way to understand the project of Minor Transnationalism as a whole: as a challenge to poststructuralist and postcolonial theories axed on deconstructive critiques of the West, with a search for new paradigms within poststructuralist thought. What emerges is an interest in the philosophy of relations implicit in French critical theory but thus far little remarked, as well as a turn to and a renewed openness within theory to localized analyses in which attention to the transnational promises to “world” sites and moments that were formerly evoked mostly as points of inner otherness. While there are established philosophical ways of working between relational theory and the problems of worlding that might here be summoned, the challenge of Minor Transnationalism lies not in the formulation of rigorous new theory but, rather, in a critical displacement of postcolonial theory that calls for new ways of thinking relations between our worlds, as much on the basis of what is emerging as on the basis of what has been.

References