THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

Homi K. Bhabha
The title of this chapter – Dissemination – owes something to the wit and wisdom of Jacques Derrida, but something more to my own experience of migration. I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in the ‘diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status – the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man. The gathering of clouds from which the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish asks ‘where should the birds fly after the last sky?’

In the midst of these lonely gatherings of the scattered people, their myths and fantasies and experiences, there emerges a historical fact of singular importance. More deliberately than any other general historian, Eric Hobsbawm writes the history of the modern Western nation from the perspective of the nation’s margin and the migrants’ exile. The emergence of the later phase of the modern nation, from the mid-nineteenth century, is also one of the most sustained periods of mass migration within the West, and colonial expansion in the East. The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the ‘middle passage’, or the central European steppes,
across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people.

The discourse of nationalism is not my main concern. In some ways it is the historical certainty and settled nature of that term against which I am attempting to write of the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the locality of culture. This locality is more around temporality than about historicity: a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more connotative than ‘country’; less patriotic than patrie; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than ‘the subject’; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism.

In proposing this cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation, I do not wish to deny these categories their specific histories and particular meanings within different political languages. What I am attempting to formulate in this chapter are the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives. My emphasis on the temporal dimension in the inscription of these political entities – that are also potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity – serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force. The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity. However, the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the ‘nation’ as a narrative strategy. As an apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or ‘cultural difference’ in the act of writing the nation. What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity.

Edward Said aspires to such secular interpretation in his concept of ‘wordliness’ where ‘sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency . . . exist at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself’ (my emphasis). Fredric Jameson invokes something similar in his notion of ‘situational consciousness’ or national allegory, ‘where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself.’ And Julia Kristeva speaks perhaps too hastily of the pleasure of exile – ‘How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by
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becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity?"6 without realizing how fully the shadow of the nation falls on the condition of exile - which may partly explain her own later, labile identifications with the images of other nations: 'China', 'America'. The entitlement of the nation is its metaphor: Amor Patria; Fatherland; Pig Earth; Mother tongue; Matigari; Middlemarch; Midnight's Children; One Hundred Years of Solitude; War and Peace; I Promessi Sposi; Kanthapura; Moby-Dick; The Magic Mountain; Things Fall Apart.

There must be a tribe of interpreters of such metaphors - the translators of the dissemination of texts and discourses across cultures - who can perform what Said describes as the act of secular interpretation.

To take account of this horizontal, secular space of the crowded spectacle of the modern nation ... implies that no single explanation sending one back immediately to a single origin is adequate.

And just as there are no simple dynastic answers, there are no simple discrete formations or social processes.

If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities - migrant or metropolitan - then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic. And such cultural movements disperse the homogenous, visual time of the horizontal society. The secular language of interpretation needs to go beyond the horizontal critical gaze if we are to give the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity its appropriate narrative authority. We need another time of writing that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic 'modern' experience of the Western nation.

How does one write the nation's modernity as the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal? The language of national belonging comes laden with atavistic apologues, which has led Benedict Anderson to ask: 'But why do nations celebrate their hoariness, not their astonishing youth?'8 The nation's claim to modernity, as an autonomous or sovereign form of political rationality, is particularly questionable if, with Partha Chatterjee, we adopt the postcolonial perspective:

Nationalism ... seeks to represent itself in the image of the Enlightenment and fails to do so. For Enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in the real world as the truly universal, it would in fact destroy itself.9
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Such ideological ambivalence nicely supports Gellner's paradoxical point that the historical necessity of the idea of the nation conflicts with the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture. The nation may exemplify modern social cohesion but Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself.... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism ... is itself in the least contingent and accidental. (My emphasis)

The problematic boundaries of modernity are enacted in these ambivalent temporalities of the nation-space. The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past. Historians transfixed on the event and origins of the nation never ask, and political theorists possessed of the 'modern' totalities of the nation — 'homogeneity, literacy and anonymity are the key traits' — never pose, the essential question of the representation of the nation as a temporal process.

It is indeed only in the disjunctive time of the nation's modernity — as a knowledge caught between political rationality and its impasse, between the shreds and patches of cultural signification and the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy — that questions of nation as narration come to be posed. How do we plot the narrative of the nation that must mediate between the teleology of progress tipping over into the 'timeless' discourse of irrationality? How do we understand that 'homogeneity' of modernity — the people — which, if pushed too far, may assume something resembling the archaic body of the despotic or totalitarian mass? In the midst of progress and modernity, the language of ambivalence reveals a politics 'without duration', as Althusser once provocatively wrote: 'Space without places, time without duration.' To write the story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs the time of modernity. We may begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion — the many as one — shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences.

Out of many one: nowhere has this founding dictum of the political society of the modern nation — its spatial expression of a unitary people — found a more intriguing image of itself than in those diverse languages of literary criticism that seek to portray the great power of the idea of the nation in the disclosures of its everyday life; in the telling details that emerge as metaphors for national life. I am reminded of Bakhtin's
wonderful description of a national vision of emergence in Goethe's Italian Journey, which represents the triumph of the Realistic component over the Romantic. Goethe's realist narrative produces a national-historical time that makes visible a specifically Italian day in the detail of its passing time: 'The bells ring, the rosary is said, the maid enters the room with a lighted lamp and says: Felicissima notte! ... If one were to force a German dockhand on them, they would be at a loss.' For Bakhtin, it is Goethe's vision of the microscopic, elementary, perhaps random, tolling of everyday life in Italy that reveals the profound history of its locality (Lokalität), the spatialization of historical time, 'a creative humanization of this locality, which transforms a part of terrestrial space into a place of historical life for people'.

The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression. There is, however, always the distracting presence of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present, as we saw in the national discourses with which I began. Despite Bakhtin's emphasis on the realist vision in the emergence of the nation in Goethe's work, he acknowledges that the origin of the nation's visual presence is the effect of a narrative struggle. From the beginning, Bakhtin writes, the Realist and Romantic conceptions of time coexist in Goethe's work, but the ghostly (Gespensternüßiges), the terrifying (Unerfreuliches), and the unaccountable (Unzuberechnendes) are consistently surmounted by the structuring process of the visualization of time: 'the necessity of the past and the necessity of its place in a line of continuous development ... finally the aspect of the past being linked to the necessary future'. National time becomes concrete and visible in the chronotype of the local, particular, graphic, from beginning to end. The narrative structure of this historical surmounting of the 'ghostly' or the 'double' is seen in the intensification of narrative synchrony as a graphically visible position in space: 'to grasp the most elusive course of pure historical time and fix it through unmediated contemplation'. But what kind of 'present' is this if it is a consistent process of surmounting the ghostly time of repetition? Can this national timespace be as fixed or as immediately visible as Bakhtin claims?

If in Bakhtin's 'surmounting' we hear the echo of another use of that word by Freud in his essay on 'The “uncanny”', then we begin to get a sense of the complex time of the national narrative. Freud associates surmounting with the repressions of a 'cultural' unconscious; a liminal, uncertain state of cultural belief when the archaic emerges in the midst of margins of modernity as a result of some psychic ambivalence or intellectual uncertainty. The 'double' is the figure most frequently associated with this uncanny process of 'the doubling, dividing and
interchanging of the self'. Such 'double-time' cannot be so simply represented as visible or flexible in 'unmediated contemplation'; nor can we accept Bakhtin's repeated attempt to read the national space as achieved only in the fullness of time. Such an apprehension of the 'double and split' time of national representation, as I am proposing, leads us to question the homogeneous and horizontal view associated with the nation's imagined community. We are led to ask whether the emergence of a national perspective – of an elite or subaltern nature – within a culture of social contestation, can ever articulate its 'representative' authority in that fullness of narrative time and visual synchrony of the sign that Bakhtin proposes.

Two accounts of the emergence of national narratives seem to support my suggestion. They represent the diametrically opposed world views of master and slave which, between them, account for the major historical and philosophical dialectic of modern times. I am thinking of John Barrell's splendid analysis of the rhetorical and perspectival status of the 'English gentleman' within the social diversity of the eighteenth-century novel; and of Houston Baker's innovative reading of the 'new national modes of sounding, interpreting and speaking the Negro in the Harlem Renaissance'.

In his concluding essay Barrell demonstrates how the demand for a holistic, representative vision of society could only be represented in a discourse that was at the same time obsessively fixed upon, and uncertain of, the boundaries of society, and the margins of the text. For instance, the hypostatized 'common language' which was the language of the gentleman whether he be Observer, Spectator, Rambler, 'Common to all by virtue of the fact that it manifested the peculiarities of none' – was primarily defined through a process of negation – of regionalism, occupation, faculty – so that this centred vision of 'the gentleman' is so to speak 'a condition of empty potential, one who is imagined as being able to comprehend everything, and yet who may give no evidence of having comprehended anything.'

A different note of liminality is struck in Baker's description of the 'radical maroonage' that structured the emergence of an insurgent Afro-American expressive culture in its expansive, 'national' phase. Baker's sense that the 'discursive project' of the Harlem Renaissance is modernist is based less on a strictly literary understanding of the term, and more on the agonistic enunciative conditions within which the Harlem Renaissance shaped its cultural practice. The transgressive, invasive structure of the black 'national' text, which thrives on rhetorical strategies of hybridity, deformation, masking, and inversion, is developed through an extended analogy with the guerilla warfare that became a way of life for the maroon communities of runaway slaves and fugitives who lived dangerously, and insubordinately, 'on the frontiers or
margins of all American promise, profit and modes of production'. From this liminal, minority position where, as Foucault would say, the relations of discourse are of the nature of warfare, the force of the people of an Afro-American nation emerge in the extended metaphor of maroonage. For ‘warriors’ read writers or even ‘signs’:

these highly adaptable and mobile warriors took maximum advantage of local environments, striking and withdrawing with great rapidity, making extensive use of bushes to catch their adversaries in cross-fire, fighting only when and where they chose, depending on reliable intelligence networks among non-maroons (both slave and white settlers) and often communicating by horns.

Both gentleman and slave, with different cultural means and to very different historical ends, demonstrate that forces of social authority and subversion or subalternity may emerge in displaced, even decentred strategies of signification. This does not prevent these positions from being effective in a political sense, although it does suggest that positions of authority may themselves be part of a process of ambivalent identification. Indeed, the exercise of power may be both politically effective and psychically affective because the discursive liminality through which it is signified may provide greater scope for strategic manoeuvre and negotiation.

It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the concept of the ‘people’ emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement. The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this
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process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation.

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The tension between the pedagogical and the performative that I have identified in the narrative address of the nation, turns the reference to a 'people' – from whatever political or cultural position it is made – into a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of modern social authority. The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population. The ambivalent signifying system of the nation-space participates in a more general genesis of ideology in modern societies that Claude Lefort has described. For him too it is 'enigma of language', at once internal and external to the speaking subject, that provides the most apt analogue for imagining the structure of ambivalence that constitutes modern social authority. I shall quote him at length, because his rich ability to represent the movement of political power beyond the binary division of the blindness of Ideology or the insight of the Idea, brings him to that liminal site of modern society from which I have attempted to derive the narrative of the nation and its people.

In Ideology the representation of the rule is split from the effective operation of it. . . . The rule is thus extracted from experience of language; it is circumscribed, made fully visible and assumed to govern the conditions of possibility of this experience. . . . The enigma of language – namely that it is both internal and external to the speaking subject, that there is an articulation of the self with others which marks the emergence of the self and which the self does not control – is concealed by the representation of a place 'outside' – language from which it could be generated. . . . We encounter the ambiguity of the representation as soon as the rule is stated; for its very exhibition undermines the power that the rule claims to introduce into practice. This exorbitant power must, in fact, be shown, and at the same time it must owe nothing to the movement which makes it appear. . . . To be true to its image, the rule must be abstracted from any question concerning its origin; thus it goes beyond the operations that it controls. . . . Only the authority of the master allows the contradiction to be concealed, but he is himself an object of representation; presented as
possessor of the knowledge of the rule, he allows the contradiction to appear through himself.

The ideological discourse that we are examining has no safety catch; it is rendered vulnerable by its attempt to make visible the place from which the social relation would be conceivable (both thinkable and creatable) by its inability to define this place without letting its contingency appear, without condemning itself to slide from one position to another, without hereby making apparent the instability of an order that it is intended to raise to the status of essence. . . . [The ideological] task of the implicit generalization of knowledge and the implicit homogenization of experience could fall apart in the face of the unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty, of the vacillation of representations of discourse and as a result of the splitting of the subject.24

How do we conceive of the 'splitting' of the national subject? How do we articulate cultural differences within this vacillation of ideology in which the national discourse also participates, sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another? What are the forms of life struggling to be represented in that unruly 'time' of national culture, which Bakhtin surmounts in his reading of Goethe, Gellner associates with the rags and patches of 'everyday life, Said describes as 'the non-sequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity' and Lefort re-presents as the inexorable movement of signification that both constitutes the exorbitant image of power and deprives it of the certainty and stability of centre or closure? What might be the cultural and political effects of the liminality of the nation, the margins of modernity, which come to be signified in the narrative temporalities of splitting, ambivalence and vacillation?

Deprived of that unmediated visibility of historicism — 'looking to the legitimacy of past generations as supplying cultural autonomy'25 — the nation turns from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the 'contemporary' within modern culture. Such a shift in perspective emerges from an acknowledgement of the nation's interrupted address articulated in the tension between signifying the people as an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object; and the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign. The pedagogical founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people, described by Poulantzas26 as a moment of becoming designated by itself, encapsulated in a succession of historical moments that represents an eternity produced by self-generation. The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's self-generation by
casting a shadow *between* the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside.

In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation 'in-itself' and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between'. The boundary that marks the nation's selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the 'selfhood' of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.

This double-writing or dissemi-*nation*, is not simply a theoretical exercise in the internal contradictions of the modern liberal nation. The structure of cultural liminality *within the nation* would be an essential precondition for deploying a concept such as Raymond Williams's crucial distinction between residual and emergent practices in oppositional cultures which require, he insists, a 'non-metaphysical, non-subjectivist' mode of explanation. The space of cultural signification that I have attempted to open up through the intervention of the performative, would meet this important precondition. The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse – the agency of a people – is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative. This disjunctive temporality of the nation would provide the appropriate time-frame for representing those residual and emergent meanings and practices that Williams locates in the margins of the contemporary experience of society. Their emergence depends upon a kind of social ellipsis; their transformational power depends upon their being historically displaced:

But in certain areas, there will be in certain periods, practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize.27

When Edward Said suggests that the question of the nation should be put on the contemporary critical agenda as a hermeneutic of 'worldliness', he is fully aware that such a demand can only now be made from the liminal and ambivalent boundaries that articulate the signs of national culture, as 'zones of control or of abandonment, or recollection.
and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing' (my emphasis).28

Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space – representing the nation’s modern territoriality is turned into the archaic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. The difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One. The liminal point of this ideological displacement is the turning of the differentiated spatial boundary, the ‘outside’, into the authenticating ‘inward’ time of Tradition. Freud’s concept of the ‘narcissism of minor differences’29 – reinterpreted for our purposes – provides a way of understanding how easily the boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the Western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal liminality providing a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent.

Freud uses the analogy of feuds that prevail between communities with adjoining territories – the Spanish and the Portuguese, for instance – to illustrate the ambivalent identification of love and hate that binds a community together: ‘it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness.’30 The problem is, of course, that the ambivalent identifications of love and hate occupy the same psychic space; and paranoid projections ‘outwards’ return to haunt and split the place from which they are made. So long as a firm boundary is maintained between the territories, and the narcissistic wound is contained, the aggressivity will be projected on to the Other or the Outside. But what if, as I have argued, the people are the articulation of a doubling of the national address, an ambivalent movement between the discourses of pedagogy and the performative? What if, as Lefort argues, the subject of modern ideology is split between the iconic image of authority and the movement of the signifier that produces the image, so that the ‘sign’ of the social is condemned to slide ceaselessly from one position to another? It is in this space of liminality, in the ‘unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty’ that we encounter once again the narcissistic neuroses of the national discourse with which I began. The nation is no longer the sign of modernity under which cultural differences are homogenized in the ‘horizontal’ view of society. The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, an ethnography of its own claim to being the norm of social contemporaneity.
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The people turn *pagan* in that disseminatory act of social narrative that Lyotard defines, against the Platonic tradition, as the privileged pole of the narrated:

where the one doing the speaking speaks from the place of the referent. As narrator she is narrated as well. And in a way she is already told, and what she herself is *telling* will not undo that somewhere else she is *told*.31 (My emphasis)

This narrative inversion or circulation – which is in the spirit of my splitting of the people – makes untenable any supremacist, or nationalist claims to cultural mastery, for the position of narrative control is neither monocural nor monologic. The subject is graspable only in the passage between *telling*/*told*, between ‘here’ and ‘somewhere else’, and in this double scene the very condition of cultural knowledge is the alienation of the subject.

The significance of this narrative splitting of the subject of identification is borne out in Lévi-Strauss’s description of the ethnographic act.32 The ethnographic demands that the observer himself is a part of his observation and this requires that the field of knowledge – the total social fact – must be appropriated from the outside like a thing, but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding of the indigenous. The transposition of this process into the language of the outsider’s grasp – this entry into the area of the symbolic of representation/signification – then makes the social fact ‘three-dimensional’. For ethnography demands that the subject has to split itself into object and subject in the process of identifying its field of knowledge. The ethnographic object is constituted ‘by dint of the subject’s capacity for indefinite self-objectification (without ever quite abolishing itself as subject) for projecting outside itself ever-diminishing fragments of itself’.

Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its signifying difference is turned from the boundary ‘outside’ to its finitude ‘within’, the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of ‘other’ people. It becomes a question of otherness of the people-as-one. The national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture’s contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse. They no longer need to address their strategies of opposition to a horizon of ‘hegemony’ that is envisaged as horizontal and homogeneous. The great contribution of Foucault’s last published work is to suggest that people emerge in the modern state as a perpetual movement of ‘the marginal integration of individuals’. ‘What are we to-day?’33 Foucault poses this most pertinent ethnographic question to the West itself to reveal the alterity of its political rationality. He suggests that the ‘reason of state’ in the modern
nation must be derived from the heterogeneous and differentiated limits of its territory. The nation cannot be conceived in a state of equilibrium between several elements co-ordinated and maintained by a ‘good’ law.

Each state is in permanent competition with other countries, other nations . . . so that each state has nothing before it other than an indefinite future of struggles. Politics has now to deal with an irreducible multiplicity of states, struggling and competing in a limited history . . . the State is its own finality.34

What is politically significant is the effect of this finitude of the State on the liminal representation of the people. The people will no longer be contained in that national discourse of the teleology of progress; the anonymity of individuals; the spatial horizontality of community; the homogeneous time of social narratives; the historicist visibility of modernity, where ‘the present of each level [of the social] coincides with the present of all the others, so that the present is an essential section which makes the essence visible’.35 The finitude of the nation emphasizes the impossibility of such an expressive totality with its alliance between a plenitudinous present and the eternal visibility of a past. The liminality of the people – their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects – demands a ‘time’ of narrative that is disavowed in the discourse of historicism where narrative is only the agency of the event, or the medium of a naturalistic continuity of Community or Tradition. In describing the marginalistic integration of the individual in the social totality, Foucault provides a useful description of the rationality of the modern nation. Its main characteristic, he writes,

is neither the constitution of the state, the coldest of cold monsters, nor the rise of bourgeois individualism. I won’t even say it is the constant effort to integrate individuals into the political totality. I think that the main characteristic of our political rationality is the fact that this integration of the individuals in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualisation and the reinforcement of this totality. From this point of view we can understand why modern political rationality is permitted by the antinomy between law and order.36

From Foucault’s Discipline and Punish we have learned that the most individuated are those subjects who are placed on the margins of the social, so that the tension between law and order may produce the disciplinary or pastoral society. Having placed the people on the limits of the nation’s narrative, I now want to explore forms of cultural identity and political solidarity that emerge from the disjunctive temporalities of the national culture. This is a lesson of history to be learnt from those peoples whose histories of marginality have been most profoundly
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enmeshed in the antinomies of law and order – the colonized and women.

OF MARGINS AND MINORITIES

The difficulty of writing the history of the people as the insurmountable agonism of the living, the incommensurable experiences of struggle and survival in the construction of a national culture, is nowhere better seen than in Frantz Fanon’s essay ‘On national culture’. I start with it because it is a warning against the intellectual appropriation of the ‘culture of the people’ (whatever that may be) within a representationalist discourse that may become fixed and reified in the annals of History. Fanon writes against that form of nationalist historicism that assumes that there is a moment when the differential temporalities of cultural histories coalesce in an immediately readable present. For my purposes, he focuses on the time of cultural representation, instead of immediately historicizing the event. He explores the space of the nation without immediately identifying it with the historical institution of the State. As my concern here is not with the history of nationalist movements, but only with certain traditions of writing that have attempted to construct narratives of the social imaginary of the nation-people, I am indebted to Fanon for liberating a certain, uncertain time of the people.

The knowledge of the people depends on the discovery, Fanon says, ‘of a much more fundamental substance which itself is continually being renewed’, a structure of repetition that is not visible in the translucidity of the people’s customs, or the obvious objectivities which seem to characterize the people. ‘Culture abhors simplification,’ Fanon writes, as he tries to locate the people in a performative time: ‘the fluctuating movement that the people are just giving shape to’. The present of the people’s history, then, is a practice that destroys the constant principles of the national culture that attempt to hark back to a ‘true’ national past, which is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype. Such pedagogical knowledges and continuist national narratives miss the ‘zone of occult instability where the people dwell’ (Fanon’s phrase). It is from ‘this instability of cultural signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as a dialectic of various temporalities – modern, colonial, postcolonial, ‘native’ – that cannot be a knowledge that is stabilized in its enunciation: ‘it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation. It is the present act that on each of its occurrences marshalls in the ephemeral temporality inhabiting the space between the “I have heard” and “you will hear”’. Fanon’s critique of the fixed and stable forms of the nationalist narrative makes it imperative to question theories of the horizontal, homogeneous empty time of the nation’s narrative. Does the language of
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culture's 'occult instability' have a relevance outside the situation of anti-colonial struggle? Does the incommensurable act of living – so often dismissed as ethical or empirical – have its own ambivalent narrative, its own history of theory? Can it change the way we identify the symbolic structure of the Western nation?

A similar exploration of political time has a salutary feminist history in 'Women's time'. It has rarely been acknowledged that Kristeva's celebrated essay of that title has its conjunctural, cultural history, not simply in psychoanalysis and semiotics, but in a powerful critique and redefinition of the nation as a space for the emergence of feminist political and psychic identifications. The nation as a symbolic denominator is, according to Kristeva, a powerful repository of cultural knowledge that erases the rationalist and progressivist logics of the 'canonical' nation. This symbolic history of the national culture is inscribed in the strange temporality of the future perfect, the effects of which are not dissimilar to Fanon's occult instability.

The borders of the nation Kristeva claims, are constantly faced with a double temporality: the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative). The time and space of Kirsteva's construction of the nation's finitude is analogous to my argument that the figure of the people emerges in the narrative ambivalence of disjunctive times and meanings. The concurrent circulation of linear, cursive and monumental time, in the same cultural space, constitutes a new historical temporality that Kristeva identifies with psychoanalytically informed, feminist strategies of political identification. What is remarkable is her insistence that the gendered sign can hold together such exorbitant historical times.

The political effects of Kristeva's multiple women's time leads to what she calls the 'demassification of difference'. The cultural moment of Fanon's 'occult instability' signifies the people in a fluctuating movement which they are just giving shape to, so that postcolonial time questions the teleological traditions of past and present, and the polarized historicist sensibility of the archaic and the modern. These are not simply attempts to invert the balance of power within an unchanged order of discourse. Fanon and Kristeva seek to redefine the symbolic process through which the social imaginary – nation, culture or community – becomes the subject of discourse, and the object of psychic identification. These feminist and postcolonial temporalities force us to rethink the sign of history within those languages, political or literary, which designate the people 'as one'. They challenge us to think the question of community and communication without the moment of transcendence: how do we understand such forms of social contradiction?

Cultural identification is then poised on the brink of what Kristeva

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calls the 'loss of identity' or Fanon describes as a profound cultural 'undecidability'. The people as a form of address emerge from the abyss of enunciation where the subject splits, the signifier 'fades', the pedagogical and the performative are agonistically articulated. The language of national collectivity and cohesiveness is now at stake. Neither can cultural homogeneity, or the nation's horizontal space be authoritatively represented within the familiar territory of the public sphere: social causality cannot be adequately understood as a deterministic or overdetermined effect of a 'statist' centre; nor can the rationality of political choice be divided between the polar realms of the private and the public. The narrative of national cohesion can no longer be signified, in Anderson's words, as a 'sociological solidity' fixed in a 'succession of plurals' – hospitals, prisons, remote villages – where the social space is clearly bounded by such repeated objects that represent a naturalistic, national horizon.

Such a pluralism of the national sign, where difference returns as the same, is contested by the signifier's 'loss of identity' that inscribes the narrative of the people in the ambivalent, 'double' writing of the performative and the pedagogical. The movement of meaning between the masterful image of the people and the movement of its sign interrupts the succession of plurals that produce the sociological solidity of the national narrative. The nation's totality is confronted with, and crossed by, a supplementary movement of writing. The heterogeneous structure of Derridean supplementarity in writing closely follows the agonistic, ambivalent movement between the pedagogical and performative that informs the nation's narrative address. A supplement, according to one meaning, 'cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, technē, image, representation, convention, etc. come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function' (pedagogical). The double entendre of the supplement suggests, however, that

[It] intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of.... If it represents and makes an image it is by the anterior default of a presence .... the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance.... As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief.... Somewhere, something can be filled up of itself ... only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. (performative)

It is in this supplementary space of doubling – not plurality – where the image is presence and proxy, where the sign supplements and empties nature, that the disjunctive times of Fanon and Kristeva can be turned into the discourses of emergent cultural identities, within a non-pluralistic politics of difference.

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This supplementary space of cultural signification that opens up—and holds together—the performative and the pedagogical, provides a narrative structure characteristic of modern political rationality: the marginal integration of individuals in a repetitious movement between the antinomies of law and order. From the liminal movement of the culture of the nation—at once opened up and held together—minority discourse emerges. Its strategy of intervention is similar to what British parliamentary procedure recognizes as a supplementary question. It is a question that is supplementary to what is stated on the ‘order paper’ for the minister’s response. Coming ‘after’ the original, or in ‘addition to’ it, gives the supplementary question the advantage of introducing a sense of ‘secondariness’ or belatedness into the structure of the original demand. The supplementary strategy suggests that adding ‘to’ need not ‘add up’ but may disturb the calculation. As Gasché has succinctly suggested, ‘supplements … are pluses that compensate for a minus in the origin.’ The supplementary strategy interrupts the successive seriality of the narrative of plurals and pluralism by radically changing their mode of articulation. In the metaphor of the national community as the ‘many as one’, the one is now both the tendency to totalize the social in a homogenous empty time, and the repetition of that minus in the origin, the less-than-one that intervenes with a metonymic, iterative temporality.

One cultural effect of such a metonymic interruption in the representation of the people, is apparent in Julia Kristeva’s political writings. If we elide her concepts of women’s time and female exile, then she seems to argue that the ‘singularity’ of woman—her representation as fragmentation and drive—produces a dissidence, and a distanciation, within the symbolic bond itself which demystifies the community of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalises and equalises. The minority does not simply confront the pedagogical, or powerful master-discourse with a contradictory or negating referent. It interrogates its object by initially withholding its objective. Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity. The questioning of the supplement is not a repetitive rhetoric of the ‘end’ of society but a meditation on the disposition of space and time from which the narrative of the nation must begin.

The power of supplementarity is not the negation of the preconstituted social contradictions of the past or present; its force lies—as we shall see in the discussion of Handsworth Songs—that follows—in the renegotiation of those times, terms and traditions through which we turn our uncertain, passing contemporaneity into the signs of history.

*Handsworth Songs* is a film made by the Black Audio and Film Collective during the uprisings of 1985, in the Handsworth district of
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Birmingham, England. Shot in the midst of the uprising, it is haunted by two moments: the arrival of the migrant population in the 1950s, and the emergence of a black British peoples in the diaspora. And the film itself is part of the emergence of a black British cultural politics. Between the moments of the migrants’ arrival and the minorities’ emergence spans the filmic time of a continual displacement of narrative. It is the time of oppression and resistance; the time of the performance of the riots, cut across by the pedagogical knowledges of State institutions. The racism of statistics and documents and newspapers is interrupted by the perplexed living of Handsworth songs.

Two memories repeat incessantly to translate the living perplexity of history into the time of migration: first, the arrival of the ship laden with immigrants from the ex-colonies, just stepping off the boat, always just emerging – as in the fantasmatic scenario of Freud’s family romance – into the land where the streets are paved with gold. This is followed by another image of the perplexity and power of an emergent peoples, caught in the shot of a dreadlocked rastafarian cutting a swathe through a posse of policemen during the uprising. It is a memory that flashes incessantly through the film: a dangerous repetition in the present of the cinematic frame; the edge of human life that translates what will come next and what has gone before in the writing of History. Listen to the repetition of the time and space of the peoples that I have been trying to create:

In time we will demand the impossible in order to wrestle from it that which is possible, In time the streets will claim me without apology, In time I will be right to say that there are no stories ... in the riots only the ghosts of other stories.

The symbolic demand of cultural difference constitutes a history in the midst of the uprising. From the desire of the possible in the impossible, in the historic present of the riots, emerge the ghostly repetitions of other stories, the record of other uprisings of people of colour: Broadway Farm; Southall; St Paul’s, Bristol. In the ghostly repetition of the black woman of Lozells Rd, Handsworth, who sees the future in the past. There are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories, she told a local journalist: ‘You can see Enoch Powell in 1969, Michael X in 1965.’ And from the gathering repetition she builds a history.

From across the film listen to another woman who speaks another historical language. From the archaic world of metaphor, caught in the movement of the people she translates the time of change into the ebb and flow of language’s unmastering rhythm: the successive time of instantaneity, battening against the straight horizons, and then the flow of water and words:
I walk with my back to the sea, horizons straight ahead
Wave the sea way and back it comes,
Step and I slip on it.
Crawling in my journey's footsteps
When I stand it fills my bones.

The perplexity of the living must not be understood as some existential, ethical anguish of the empiricism of everyday life in 'the eternal living present', that gives liberal discourse a rich social reference in moral and cultural relativism. Nor must it be too hastily associated with the spontaneous and primordial presence of the people in the liberatory discourses of populist ressentiment. In the construction of this discourse of 'living perplexity' that I am attempting to produce we must remember that the space of human life is pushed to its incommensurable extreme; the judgement of living is perplexed; the topos of the narrative is neither the transcendental, pedagogical idea of History nor the institution of the State, but a strange temporality of the repetition of the one in the other – an oscillating movement in the governing present of cultural authority.

Minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic in-between of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy. It contests genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture - and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life. Now there is no reason to believe that such marks of difference cannot inscribe a 'history' of the people or become the gathering points of political solidarity. They will not, however, celebrate the monumentality of historicist memory, the sociological totality of society, or the homogeneity of cultural experience. The discourse of the minority reveals the insurmountable ambivalence that structures the equivocal movement of historical time. How does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present? How does one then narrate the present as a form of contemporaneity that is neither punctual nor synchronous? In what historical time do such configurations of cultural difference assume forms of cultural and political authority?

SOcial ANONYMITY AND CULTURAL ANOMIE

The narrative of the modern nation can only begin, Benedict Anderson suggests in Imagined Communities, once the notion of the 'arbitrariness of the sign' fissures the sacral ontology of the medieval world and its overwhelming visual and aural imaginary. By 'separating language from
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reality', Anderson suggests, the arbitrary signifier enables a national temporality of the 'meanwhile', a form of homogeneous empty time. This is the time of cultural modernity that supersedes the prophetic notion of simultaneity-along-time. The narrative of the 'meanwhile' permits 'transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.'46

Such a form of temporality produces a symbolic structure of the nation as 'imagined community' which, in keeping with the scale and diversity of the modern nation, works like the plot of a realist novel. The steady onward clocking of calendrical time, in Anderson’s words, gives the imagined world of the nation a sociological solidity; it links together diverse acts and actors on the national stage who are entirely unaware of each other, except as a function of this synchronicity of time which is not prefigurative but a form of civil contemporaneity realized in the fullness of time.

Anderson historicizes the emergence of the arbitrary sign of language — and here he is talking of the process of signification rather than the progress of narrative — as that which had to come before the narrative of the modern nation could begin. In decentraling the prophetic visibility and simultaneity of medieval systems of dynastic representation, the homogeneous and horizontal community of modern society can emerge. The people-nation, however divided and split, can still assume, in the function of the social imaginary, a form of democratic 'anonymity'. There is, however, a profound ascesis in the anonymity of the modern community and its temporality, the meanwhile that structures its narrative consciousness, as Anderson explains it. It must be stressed that the narrative of the imagined community is constructed from two incommensurable temporaliies of meaning that threaten its coherence.

The space of the arbitrary sign, its separation of language and reality, enables Anderson to emphasize the imaginary or mythical nature of the society of the nation. However, the differential time of the arbitrary sign is neither synchronous nor serial. In the separation of language and reality — in the process of signification — there is no epistemological equivalence of subject and object, no possibility of the mimesis of meaning. The sign temporalizes the iterative difference that circulates within language, of which meaning is made, but cannot be represented thematically within narrative as a homogeneous empty time. Such a temporality is antithetical to the alterity of the sign which, in keeping with my account of the 'supplementary question' of cultural signification, alienates the synchronicity of the imagined community. From the place of the 'meanwhile', where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places.

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Having initially located the imagined community of the nation in the homogeneous time of realist narrative, towards the end of his work Anderson abandons the 'meanwhile' – his pedagogical temporality of the people. In order to represent the people as a performative discourse of public identification, a process he calls 'unisonance', Anderson resorts to another time of-narrative. Unisonance is 'that special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests', and this patriotic speech-act is not written in the synchronic, novelistic 'meanwhile', but inscribed in a sudden primordiality of meaning that 'looms up imperceptibly out of a horizonless past' (my emphasis). This movement of the sign cannot simply be historicized in the emergence of the realist narrative of the novel.

It is at this point in the narrative of national time that the unisonant discourse produces its collective identification of the people, not as some transcendent national identity, but in a language of doubleness that arises from the ambivalent splitting of the pedagogical and the performative. The people emerge in an uncanny moment of their 'present' history as 'a ghostly intimation of simultaneity across homogeneous empty time'. The weight of the words of the national discourse comes from an 'as it were – Ancestral Englishness'. It is precisely this repetitive time of the alienating anterior – rather than origin – that Lévi-Strauss writes of, when, in explaining the 'unconscious unity' of signification, he suggests that 'language can only have arisen all at once. Things cannot have begun to signify gradually' (my emphasis). In that sudden timeless of 'all at once', there is no synchrony but a temporal break, no simultaneity but a spatial disjunction.

The 'meanwhile' is the sign of the processual and performative, not a simple present continuous, but the present as succession without synchrony – the iteration of the sign of the modern nation-space. In embedding the meanwhile of the national narrative, where the people live their plural and autonomous lives within homogeneous empty time, Anderson misses the alienating and iterative time of the sign. He naturalizes the momentary 'suddenness' of the arbitrary sign, its pulsation, by making it part of the historical emergence of the novel, a narrative of synchrony. But the suddenness of the signifier is incessant; instantaneous rather than simultaneous. It introduces a signifying space of iteration rather than a progressive or linear seriality. The 'meanwhile' turns into quite another time, or ambivalent sign, of the national people. If it is the time of the people's anonymity it is also the space of the nation's anomie.

How are we to understand this anteriority of signification as a position of social and cultural knowledge, this time of the 'before' of signification, which will not issue harmoniously into the present like the continuity of tradition – invented or otherwise? It has its own national history in
Renan's 'Qu'est ce qu'une nation?' which has been the starting point for a number of the most influential accounts of the modern emergence of the nation – Kamenka, Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Tzvetan Todorov. In Renan's argument the pedagogical function of modernity – the will to be a nation – introduces into the enunciative present of the nation a differential and iterative time of reinscription that interests me. Renan argues that the non-naturalist principle of the modern nation is represented in the will to nationhood – not in the prior identities of race, language or territory. It is the will that unifies historical memory and secures present-day consent. The will is, indeed, the articulation of the nation-people:

A nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life... The wish of nations is, all in all, the sole legitimate criteria, the one to which one must always return. Does the will to nationhood circulate in the same temporality as the desire of the daily plebiscite? Could it be that the iterative plebiscite decentres the totalizing pedagogy of the will? Renan's will is itself the site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past: the violence involved in establishing the nation's writ. It is this forgetting – the signification of a minus in the origin – that constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative. It is the syntactical and rhetorical arrangement of this argument that is more illuminating than any frankly historical or ideological reading. Listen to the complexity of this form of forgetting which is the moment in which the national will is articulated: 'yet every French citizen has to have forgotten [is obliged to have forgotten] Saint Bartholomew's Night's Massacre, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century.'

It is through this syntax of forgetting – or being obliged to forget – that the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible. The national subject is produced in that place where the daily plebiscite – the unitary number – circulates in the grand narrative of the will. However, the equivalence of will and plebiscite, the identity of part and whole, past and present, is cut across by the 'obligation to forget', or forgetting to remember. The anteriority of the nation, signified in the will to forget, entirely changes our understanding of the pastness of the past, and the synchronous present of the will to nationhood. We are in a discursive space similar to that moment of unisonance in Anderson's argument when the homogeneous empty time of the nation's 'meanwhile' is cut across by the ghostly simultaneity of a temporality of doubling. To be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problem of totalizing the
people and unifying the national will. That 'strange time – forgetting to remember – is a place of 'partial identification' inscribed in the daily plebiscite which represents the performative discourse of the people. Renan's pedagogical return to the will to nationhood is both constituted and confronted by the circulation of numbers in the plebiscite. This breakdown in the identity of the will is another instance of the supplementary narrative of nationness that 'adds to' without 'adding up'. May I remind you of Lefort's suggestive description of the ideological impact of suffrage in the nineteenth century, where the danger of numbers was considered almost more threatening than the mob: 'the idea of number as such is opposed to the idea of the substance of society. Number breaks down unity, destroys identity.'53 It is the repetition of the national sign as numerical succession rather than synchrony that reveals that strange temporality of disavowal implicit in the national memory. Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification.

Anderson fails to locate the alienating time of the arbitrary sign in his naturalized, nationalized space of the imagined community. Although he borrows his notion of the homogeneous empty time of the nation's modern narrative from Walter Benjamin, he misses that profound ambivalence that Benjamin places deep within the utterance of the narrative of modernity. Here, as the pedagogies of life and will contest the perplexed histories of the living people, their cultures of survival and resistance, Benjamin introduces a non-synchronous, incommensurable gap in the midst of storytelling. From this split in the utterance, from the unbeseeled, belated novelist there emerges an ambivalence in the narration of modern society that repeats, uncounselled and unconsolable, in the midst of plenitude:

The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounselled and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.54

It is from this incommensurability in the midst of the everyday that the nation speaks its disjunctive narrative. From the margins of modernity, at the insurmountable extremes of storytelling, we encounter the question of cultural difference as the perplexity of living and writing the nation.

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Cultural difference must not be understood as the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogeneous empty time of the national community. The jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces of national society that I have tried to trace. Cultural difference, as a form of intervention, participates in a logic of supplementary subversion similar to the strategies of minority discourse. The question of cultural difference faces us with a disposition of knowledges or a distribution of practices that exist beside each other, abseits designating a form of social contradiction or antagonism that has to be negotiated rather than sublated. The difference between disjunctive sites and representations of social life have to be articulated without surmounting the incommensurable meanings and judgements that are produced within the process of transcultural negotiation.

The analytic of cultural difference intervenes to transform the scenario of articulation – not simply to disclose the rationale of political discrimination. It changes the position of enunciation and the relations of address within it; not only what is said but where it is said; not simply the logic of articulation but the topos of enunciation. The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding to does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern significlation. The subject of the discourse of cultural difference is dialogical or transferential in the style of psychoanalysis. It is constituted through the locus of the Other which suggests both that the object of identification is ambivalent, and, more significantly, that the agency of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection.

Cultural difference does not simply represent the contention between oppositional contents or antagonistic traditions of cultural value. Cultural difference introduces into the process of cultural judgement and interpretation that sudden shock of the successive, non-synchronic time of signification, or the interruption of the supplementary question that I elaborated above. The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in the ‘war of position’, marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification. Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always ‘incomplete’ or open to cultural
translating. The *uncanny* structure of cultural difference is close to Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of ‘the unconscious as providing the common and specific character of social facts ... not because it harbours our most secret selves but because ... it enables us to coincide with forms of activity which are both *at once ours and other*’ (my emphasis).55

It is not adequate simply to become aware of the semiotic systems that produce the signs of culture and their dissemination. Much more significantly, we are faced with the challenge of reading, into the present of a specific cultural performance, the traces of all those diverse disciplinary discourses and institutions of knowledge that constitute the condition and contexts of culture. As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, such a critical process requires a cultural temporality that is both disjunctive and capable of articulating, in Lévi-Strauss’s words, ‘forms of activity which are both at once ours and other’.

I use the word ‘traces’ to suggest a particular kind of interdisciplinary discursive transformation that the analytic of cultural difference demands. To enter into the interdisciplinarity of cultural texts means that we cannot contextualize the emergent cultural form by locating it in terms of some pre-given discursive causality or origin. We must always keep open a supplementary space for the articulation of cultural knowledges that are adjacent and adjunct but not necessarily accumulative, teleological or dialectical. The ‘difference’ of cultural knowledge that ‘adds to’ but does not ‘add up’ is the enemy of the implicit generalization of knowledge or the implicit homogenization of experience, which Claude Lefort defines as the major strategies of containment and closure in modern bourgeois ideology.

Interdisciplinarity is the acknowledgement of the emergent sign of cultural difference produced in the ambivalent movement between the pedagogical and performative address. It is never simply the harmonious addition of contents or contexts that augment the positivity of a pre-given disciplinary or symbolic presence. In the restless drive for cultural translation, hybrid sites of meaning open up a cleavage in the language of culture which suggests that the similitude of the symbol as it plays across cultural sites must not obscure the fact that repetition of the sign is, in each specific social practice, both different and differential. This disjunctive play of symbol and sign makes interdisciplinarity an instance of the borderline moment of translation that Walter Benjamin describes as the ‘foreignness of languages’.56 The ‘foreignness’ of language is the nucleus of the untranslatable that goes beyond the transferral of subject matter between cultural texts or practices. The transfer of meaning can never be total between systems of meaning, or within them, for ‘the language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds ... [it] signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien.’57
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Too often it is the slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of difference, at the expense of this disturbing process of the overpowering of content by the signifier. The erasure of content in the invisible but insistent structure of linguistic difference does not lead us to some general, formal acknowledgement of the function of the sign. The ill-fitting robe of language alienates content in the sense that it deprives it of an immediate access to a stable or holistic reference 'outside' itself. It suggests that social significations are themselves being constituted in the very act of enunciation, in the disjunctive, non-equivalent split of énoncé and enonciation, thereby undermining the division of social meaning into an inside and outside. Content becomes the alienating mise-en-scène that reveals the signifying structure of linguistic difference: a process never seen for itself, but only glimpsed in the gap or the gaping of Benjamin's royal robe, or in the brush between the similitude of the symbol and the difference of the sign.

Benjamin's argument can be elaborated for a theory of cultural difference. It is only by engaging with what he calls the 'purer linguistic air' – the sign as anterior to any site of meaning – that the reality-effect of content can be overpowered which then makes all cultural languages 'foreign' to themselves. And it is from this foreign perspective that it becomes possible to inscribe the specific locality of cultural systems – their incommensurable differences – and through that apprehension of difference, to perform the act of cultural translation. In the act of translation the 'given' content becomes alien and estranged; and that, in its turn, leaves the language of translation Aufgabe, always confronted by its double, the untranslatable – alien and foreign.

THE FOREIGNNESS OF LANGUAGES

At this point I must give way to the vox populi: to a relatively unspoken tradition of the people of the pagus – colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities – wandering peoples who will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation. They are Marx's reserve army of migrant labour who by speaking the foreignness of language split the patriotic voice of unisonance and become Nietzsche's mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms. They articulate the death-in-life of the idea of the 'imagined community' of the nation; the worn-out metaphors of the resplendent national life now circulate in another narrative of entry-permits and passports and work-permits that at once preserve and proliferate, bind and breach the human rights of the nation. Across the accumulation of the history of the West there are those people who speak the encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant.
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There is a voice that opens up a void in some ways similar to what Abraham and Torok describe as a radical anti-metaphoric: ‘the destruction in fantasy of the very act that makes metaphor possible – the act of putting the original oral void into words, the act of introjection’.

The lost object – the national Heim – is repeated in the void that at once prefigures and pre-empts the ‘unisonant’ which makes it unheimlich; analogous to the incorporation that becomes the daemonic double of introjection and identification: The object of loss is written across the bodies of the people, as it repeats in the silence that speaks the foreign-ness of language. A Turkish worker in Germany, in the words of John Berger:

His migration is like an event in a dream dreamt by another. The migrant’s intentionality is permeated by historical necessities of which neither he nor anybody he meets is aware. That is why it is as if his life were dreamt by another.... Abandon the metaphor.... They watch the gestures made and learn to imitate them .... the repetition by which gesture is laid upon gesture, precisely but inexorably, the pile of gestures being stacked minute by minute, hour by hour is exhausting. The rate of work allows no time to prepare for the gesture. The body loses its mind in the gesture. How opaque the disguise of words.... He treated the sounds of the unknown language as if they were silence. To break through his silence. He learnt twenty words of the new language. But to his amazement at first, their meaning changed as he spoke them. He asked for coffee. What the words signified to the barman was that he was asking for coffee in a bar where he should not be asking for coffee. He learnt girl. What the word meant when he used it, was that he was a randy dog. Is it possible to see through the opaqueness of the words?

Through the opaqueness of words we confront the historical memory of the Western nation which is ‘obliged to forget’. Having begun this chapter with, the nation’s need for metaphor, I want to turn now to the desolate silences of the wandering people; to that ‘oral void’ that emerges when the Turk abandons the metaphor of a heimlich national culture: for the Turkish immigrant the final return is mythic, we are told, ‘It is the stuff of longing and prayers .... as imagined it never happens. There is no final return.’

In the repetition of gesture after gesture, the dream dreamt by another, the mythical return, it is not simply the figure of repetition that is unheimlich, but the Turk’s desire to survive, to name, to fix – which is unnamed by the gesture itself. The gesture continually overlaps and accumulates, without adding up to a knowledge of work or labour. Without the language that bridges knowledge and act, without the
objectification of the social process, the Turk leads the life of the double, the automaton. It is not the struggle of master and slave, but in the mechanical reproduction of gestures a mere imitation of life and labour. The opacity of language fails to translate or break through his silence and ‘the body loses its mind in the gesture’. The gesture repeats and the body returns now, shrouded not in silence but eerily untranslated in the racist site of its enunciation: to say the word ‘girl’ is to be a randy dog, to ask for coffee is to encounter the colour bar.

The image of the body returns where there should only be its trace, as sign or letter. The Turk as dog is neither simply hallucination or phobia; it is a more complex form of social fantasy. Its ambivalence cannot be read as some simple racist/sexist projection where the white man’s guilt is projected on the black man; his anxiety contained in the body of the white woman whose body screens (in both senses of the word) the racist fantasy. What such a reading leaves out is precisely the axis of identification – the desire of a man (white) for a man (black) – that underwrites that utterance and produces the paranoid ‘delusion of reference’, the man-dog that confronts the racist language with its own alterity, its foreignness.

The silent Other of gesture and failed speech becomes what Freud calls that ‘haphazard member of the herd’; the Stranger, whose languageless presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity by impeding the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can rediscover himself, and upon which the group’s amour propre is based. If the immigrants’ desire to ‘imitate’ language produces one void in the articulation of the social space – making present the opacity of language, its untranslatable residue – then the racist fantasy, which disavows the ambivalence of its desire, opens up another void in the present. The migrant’s silence elicits those racist fantasies of purity and persecution that must always return from the Outside, to estrange the present of the life of the metropolis; to make it strangely familiar. In the process by which the paranoid position finally voids the place from where it speaks, we begin to see another history of the German language.

If the experience of the Turkish Gastarbeiter represents the radical incommensurability of translation, Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses attempts to redefine the boundaries of the Western nation, so that the ‘foreignness of languages’ becomes the inescapable cultural condition for the enunciation of the mother-tongue. In the ‘Rosa Diamond’ section of The Satanic Verses Rushdie seems to suggest that it is only through the process of dissemiNation – of meaning, time, peoples, cultural boundaries and historical traditions – that the radical alterity of the national culture will create new forms of living and writing: ‘The trouble
with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they do don’t know what it means.  

S. S. Sisodia the soak – known also as Whisky Sisodia – stutters these words as part of his litany of ‘what’s wrong with the English’. The spirit of his words fleshes out the argument of this chapter. I have suggested that the atavistic national past and its language of archaic belonging marginalize the present of the ‘modernity’ of the national culture, rather like suggesting that history happens ‘outside’ the centre and core. More specifically I have argued that appeals to the national past must also be seen as the anterior space of signification that ‘singularizes’ the nation’s cultural totality. It introduces a form of alterity of address that Rushdie embodies in the double narrative figures of Gibreel Farishta/Saladin Chamcha, or Gibreel Farishta/Sir Henry Diamond, which suggests that the national narrative is the site of an ambivalent identification; a margin of the uncertainty of cultural meaning that may become the space for an agonistic minority position. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.

Gifted with phantom sight, Rosa Diamond, for whom repetition had become a comfort in her antiquity, represents the English Heim or homeland. The pageant of 900-year-old history passes through her frail translucent body and inscribes itself, in a strange splitting of her language, ‘the well-worn phrases, unfinished business, grandstand view, made her feel solid, unchanging, sempiternal, instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be.’ Constructed from the well-worn pedagogies and pedigrees of national unity – her vision of the Battle of Hastings is the anchor of her being – and, at the same time, patched and fractured in the incommensurable perplexity of the nation’s living, Rosa Diamond’s green and pleasant garden is the spot where Gibreel Farishta lands when he falls out from the belly of the Boeing over sodden, southern England.

Gibreel masquerades in the clothes of Rosa’s dead husband, Sir Henry Diamond, ex-colonial landowner, and through his postcolonial mimicry, exacerbates the discursive split between the image of a continuist national history and the ‘cracks and absences’ that she knew herself to be. What emerges, at one level, is a popular tale of secret, adulterous Argentinian ‘amours, passion in the pampas with Martin de la Cruz. What is more significant and in tension with the exoticism, is the emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present – opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects. The cut or split in enunciation emerges with its iterative temporality to reinscribe the figure of Rosa Diamond in a new and terrifying avatar. Gibreel, the migrant hybrid in masquerade, as Sir Henry Diamond, mimics the
collaborative colonial ideologies of patriotism and patriarchy, depriving those narratives of their imperial authority. Gibreel’s returning gaze crosses out the synchronous history of England, the essentialist memories of William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings. In the middle of an account of her punctual domestic routine with Sir Henry — sherry always at six — Rosa Diamond is overtaken by another time and memory of narration and through the ‘grandstand view’ of imperial history you can hear its cracks and absences speak with another voice:

Then she began without bothering with once upon a time and whether it was all true or false he could see the fierce energy that was going into the telling ... this memory jumbled rag-bag of material was in fact the very heart of her, her self-portrait.... So that it was not possible to distinguish memories from wishes, guilty reconstructions from confessional truths, because even on her deathbed Rosa Diamond did not know how to look her history in the eye.64

And what of Gibreel Farishta? Well, he is the mote in the eye of history, its blind spot that will not let the nationalist gaze settle centrally. His mimicry of colonial masculinity and mimesis allows the absences of national history to speak in the ambivalent, rag-bag narrative. But it is precisely this ‘narrative sorcery’ that established Gibreel’s own re-entry into contemporary England. As the belated postcolonial he marginalizes and singularizes the totality of national culture. He is the history that happened elsewhere, overseas; his postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye.

For the liminality of the Western nation is the shadow of its own finitude: the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space; the repetition or return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history. The postcolonial space is now ‘supplementary’ to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn’t aggrandize the presence of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double.

From this splitting of time and narrative emerges a strange, empowering knowledge for the migrant that is at once schizoid and subversive. In his guise as the Archangel Gibreel he sees the bleak history of the metropolis: ‘the angry present of masks and parodies, stifled and twisted by the insupportable, unrejected burden of its past, staring into the bleakness of its impoverished future’.65 From Rosa Diamond’s decentred

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narrative 'without bothering with once upon atime' Gibreel becomes — however insanely — the principle of avenging repetition:

These powerless English! — Did they not think that their history would return to haunt them? — 'The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor' (Fanon). . . . He would make this land anew. He was the Archangel, Gibreel — And I'm back.66

If the lesson of Rosa's narrative is that the national memory is always the site of the hybridity of histories and the displacement of narratives, then through Gibreel, the avenging migrant, we learn the ambivalence of cultural difference: it is the articulation through incommensurability that structures all narratives of identification, and all acts of cultural translation.

He was joined to the adversary, their arms locked around one another's bodies, mouth to mouth, head to tail. . . . No more of these England induced ambiguities: those Biblical-satanic confusions . . . Quran 18:50 there it was as plain as the day. . . . How much more practical, down to earth comprehensible. . . . Iblis/Shaitan standing for darkness; Gibreel for the light. . . . O most devilish and slippery of cities. . . . Well then the trouble with the English was their, Their — In a word Gibreel solemnly pronounces, that most naturalised sign of cultural difference. . . . The trouble with the English was their . . . in a word . . . their weather.67

THE ENGLISH WEATHER

To end with the English weather is to invoke, at once, the most changeable and immanent signs of national difference. It encourages memories of the 'deep' nation crafted in chalk and limestone; the quilted downs; the moors menaced by the wind; the quiet cathedral towns; that corner of a foreign field that is forever England. The English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India; the dark emptiness of Africa; the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission. These imaginative geographies that spanned countries and empires are changing, those imagined communities that played on the unisonant boundaries of the nation are singing with different voices. If I began with the scattering of the people across countries, I want to end with their gathering in the city. The return of the diasporic; the postcolonial. Handsworth Songs; Rushdie's tropicalized London, grotesquely renamed Ellowen Deowen in the migrant's mimicry: it is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history
of the nation. If I have suggested that the people emerge in the finitude of the nation, marking the liminality of cultural identity, producing the double-edged discourse of social territories and temporalities, then in the West, and increasingly elsewhere, it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced.

In the narrative graftings of my chapter I have attempted no general theory, only a certain productive tension of the perplexity of language in various locations of living. I have taken the measure of Fanon’s occult instability and Kristeva’s parallel times into the ‘incommensurable narrative’ of Benjamin’s modern storyteller to suggest no salvation, but a strange cultural survival of the people. For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity. I want to end with a much translated fragment from Walter Benjamin’s essay, ‘The task of the translator’. I hope it will now be read from the nation’s edge, through the sense of the city, from the periphery of the people, in culture’s transnational dissemination:

Fragments of a vessel in order to be articulated together must follow one another in the smallest details although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of making itself similar to the meaning of the original, it must lovingly and in detail, form itself according to the manner of meaning of the original, to make them both recognizable as the broken fragments of the greater language, just as fragments are the broken parts of a vessel.68
THE POSTCOLONIAL AND THE POSTMODERN

The question of agency

For some of us the principle of indeterminism is what makes the conscious freedom of man fathomable.

Jacques Derrida, 'My chances'/"Mes chances"

THE SURVIVAL OF CULTURE

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. To bend Jürgen Habermas to our purposes, we could also argue that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies — 'loss of meaning, conditions of anomie' — that no longer simply 'cluster around class antagonism, [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies'.

These contingencies are often the grounds of historical necessity for elaborating empowering strategies of emancipation, staging other social antagonisms. To reconstitute the discourse of cultural difference demands not simply a change of cultural contents and symbols; a replacement within the same time-frame of representation is never adequate. It requires a radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the 'sign' in which cultural identities may be inscribed. And contingency as the signifying time of counter-hegemonic strategies is not a celebration of
'lack' or 'excess' or a self-perpetuating series of negative ontologies. Such 'indeterminism' is the mark of the conflictual yet productive space in which the arbitrariness of the sign of cultural signification emerges within the regulated boundaries of social discourse.

In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality – as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms – transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonization of the 'idea' of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival. Culture reaches out to create a symbolic textuality, to give the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure.

The transmission of cultures of survival does not occur in the ordered *musee imaginaire* of national cultures with their claims to the continuity of an authentic 'past' and a living 'present' – whether this scale of value is preserved in the organicist 'national' traditions of romanticism or within the more universal proportions of classicism.

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the 'voyage out' of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of 'global' media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue.

It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse of 'nation', 'peoples', or authentic 'folk' tradition, those embedded myths of culture's particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition.
THE POSTCOLONIAL AND THE POSTMODERN

The postcolonial perspective – as it is being developed by cultural historians and literary theorists – departs from the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or ‘dependency’ theory. As a mode of analysis, it attempts to revise those nationalist or ‘nativist’ pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.

It is from this hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as the translational – that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project. My growing conviction has been that the encounters and negotiations of differential meanings and values within ‘colonial’ textuality, its governmental discourses and cultural practices, have anticipated, avant la lettre, many of the problematics of signification and judgement that have become current in contemporary theory – aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to ‘totalizing’ concepts, to name but a few.

In general terms, there is a colonial contramodernity at work in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century matrices of Western modernity that, if acknowledged, would question the historicism that analogically links, in a linear narrative, late capitalism and the fragmentary, simulacral, pastiche symptoms of postmodernity. This linking does not account for the historical traditions of cultural contingency and textual indeterminacy (as forces of social discourse) generated in the attempt to produce an ‘enlightened’ colonial or postcolonial subject, and it transforms, in the process, our understanding of the narrative of modernity and the ‘values’ of progress.

Postcolonial critical discourses require forms of dialectical thinking that do not disavow or sublate the otherness (alterity) that constitutes the symbolic domain of psychic and social identifications. The incomensurability of cultural values and priorities that the postcolonial critic represents cannot be accommodated within theories of cultural relativism or pluralism. The cultural potential of such differential histories has led Fredric Jameson to recognize the ‘internationalization of the national situations’ in the postcolonial criticism of Roberto Retamar. This is not an absorption of the particular in the general, for the very act of articulating cultural differences ‘calls us into question fully as much as it acknowledges the Other... neither reduc[ing] the Third World to some homogeneous Other of the West, nor ... vacuously celebrat[ing] the astonishing pluralism of human cultures’ (Foreword xi–xii).

The historical grounds of such an intellectual tradition are to be found in the revisionary impulse that informs many postcolonial thinkers.
C. L. R. James once remarked, in a public lecture, that the postcolonial prerogative consisted in reinterpreting and rewriting the forms and effects of an ‘older’ colonial consciousness from the later experience of the cultural displacement that marks the more recent, postwar histories of the Western metropolis. A similar process of cultural translation, and transvaluation, is evident in Edward Said’s assessment of the response from disparate postcolonial regions as a ‘tremendously energetic attempt to engage with the metropolitan world in a common effort at re-inscribing, re-interpreting and expanding the sites of intensity and the terrain contested with Europe’.4

How does the deconstruction of the ‘sign’, the emphasis on indeterminism in cultural and political judgement, transform our sense of the ‘subject’ of culture and the historical agent of change? If we contest the ‘grand narratives’, then what alternative temporalities do we create to articulate the differential (Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) historicities of race, gender, class, nation within a growing transnational culture? Do we need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the ethics of social affiliation?

Jameson’s justly famous reading of Conrad’s Lord Jim in The Political Unconscious provides a suitable example of a kind of reading against the grain that a postcolonial interpretation demands, when faced with attempts to sublate the specific ‘interruption’, or the interstices, through which the colonial text utters its interrogations, its contrapuntal critique. Reading Conrad’s narrative and ideological contradictions ‘as a canceled realism . . . like Hegelian Aufhebung’,5 Jameson represents the fundamental ambivalences of the ethical (honour/guilt) and the aesthetic (premodern/postmodern) as the allegorical restitution of the socially concrete subtext of late nineteenth-century rationalization and reification. What his brilliant allegory of late capitalism fails to represent sufficiently, in Lord Jim for instance, is the specifically colonial address of the narrative aporia contained in the ambivalent, obsessive repetition of the phrase ‘He was one of us’ as the major trope of social and psychic identification throughout the text. The repetition of ‘He was one of us’ reveals the fragile margins of the concepts of Western civility and cultural community put under colonial stress; Jim is reclaimed at the moment when he is in danger of being cast out, or made outcast, manifestly ‘not one of us’. Such a discursive ambivalence at the very heart of the issue of honour and duty in the colonial service represents the liminality, if not the end, of the masculinist, heroic ideal (and ideology) of a healthy imperial Englishness – those pink bits on the map that Conrad believed were genuinely salvaged by being the preserve of English colonization, which served the larger idea, and ideal, of Western civil society.
Such problematic issues are activated within the terms and traditions of postcolonial critique as it reinscribes the cultural relations between spheres of social antagonism. Current debates in postmodernism question the cunning of modernity—its historical ironies, its disjunctive temporalities, its paradoxes of progress, its representational aporia. It would profoundly change the values, and judgements, of such interrogations, if they were open to the argument that metropolitan histories of civitas cannot be conceived without evoking the savage colonial antecedents of the ideals of civility. It also suggests, by implication, that the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law.

The postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive 'liberal' sense of cultural community. It insists that cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity. Questions of race and cultural difference overlay issues of sexuality and gender and overdetermine the social alliances of class and democratic socialism. The time for 'assimilating' minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has dramatically passed. The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective, in a move similar to the profound shift in the language of sexuality, the self and cultural community, effected by feminists in the 1970s and the gay community in the 1980s.

Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity—between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private—as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation. It is from such narrative positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples. My use of post-structuralist theory emerges from this postcolonial contramodernity. I attempt to represent a certain defeat, or even an impossibility, of the 'West' in its authorization of the 'idea' of colonization. Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity—rather than by the failures of logocentrism—I have tried, in some small measure, to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial.
NEW TIMES

The enunciative position of contemporary cultural studies is both complex and problematic. It attempts to institutionalize a range of transgressive discourses whose strategies are elaborated around non-equivalent sites of representation where a history of discrimination and misrepresentation is common among, say, women, blacks, homosexuals and Third World migrants. However, the 'signs' that construct such histories and identities - gender, race, homophobia, postwar diaspora, refugees, the international division of labour, and so on - not only differ in content but often produce incompatible systems of signification and engage distinct forms of social subjectivity. To provide a social imaginary that is based on the articulation of differential, even disjunctive, moments of history and culture, contemporary critics resort to the peculiar temporality of the language metaphor. It is as if the arbitrariness of the sign, the indeterminacy of writing, the splitting of the subject of enunciation, these theoretical concepts, produce the most useful descriptions of the formation 'postmodern' cultural subjects.

Cornel West enacts 'a measure of synecdochical thinking' (my emphasis) as he attempts to talk of the problems of address in the context of a black, radical, 'practicalist' culture:

A tremendous articulateness is syncopated with the African drumbeat ... into an American postmodernist product: there is no subject expressing originary anguish here but a fragmented subject, pulling from past and present, innovatively producing a heterogeneous product. ... [I]t is part and parcel of the subversive energies of black underclass youth, energies that are forced to take a cultural mode of articulation.6

Stuart Hall, writing from the perspective of the fragmented, marginalized, racially discriminated against members of a post-Thatcherite underclass, questions the sententiousness of left orthodoxy where

we go on thinking a unilinear and irreversible political logic, driven by some abstract entity that we call the economic or capital unfolding to its pre-ordained end.7

Earlier in his book, he uses the linguistic sign as a metaphor for a more differential and contingent political logic of ideology:

[T]he ideological sign is always multi-accen-tual, and Janus-faced - that is, it can be discursively rearticulated to construct new meanings, connect with different social practices, and position social subjects differently. ... Like other symbolic or discursive formations, [ideology] is connective across different positions, between apparently dissimilar, sometimes contradictory, ideas. Its 'unity' is

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always in quotation marks and always complex, a suturing together of elements which have no necessary or eternal 'belongingness'. It is always, in that sense, organized around arbitrary and not natural closures.8

The 'language' metaphor raises the question of cultural difference and incommensurability, not the consensual, ethnocentric notion of the pluralistic existence of cultural diversity. It represents the temporality of cultural meaning as 'multi-accentual', 'discursively rearticulated'. It is a time of the cultural sign that unsettles the liberal ethic of tolerance and the pluralist framework of multiculturalism. Increasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agonistic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric. In Britain today this is certainly true of the experimental art and film emerging from the left, associated with the postcolonial experience of migration and diaspora and articulated in the cultural exploration of new ethnicities.

The authority of customary, traditional practices – culture's relation to the historic past – is not dehistoricized in Hall's language metaphor. Those anchoring moments are revalued as a form of anteriority – a before that has no a priori(ty) – whose causality is effective because it returns to displace the present, to make it disjunctive. This kind of disjunctive temporality is of the utmost importance for the politics of cultural difference. It creates a signifying time for the inscription of cultural incommensurability where differences cannot be sublated or totalized because 'they somehow occupy the same space'.9 It is this liminal form of cultural identification that is relevant to Charles Taylor's proposal for a 'minimal rationality' as the basis for non-ethnocentric, transcultural judgements. The effect of cultural incommensurability is that it 'takes us beyond merely formal criteria of rationality, and points us toward the human activity of articulation which gives the value of rationality its sense'.10

Minimal rationality, as the activity of articulation embodied in the language metaphor, alters the subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice. If culture as epistemology focuses on function and intention, then culture as enunciation focuses on signification and institutionalization; if the epistemological tends towards a reflection of its empirical referent or object, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to reinscribe and relocate the political claim to cultural priority and hierarchy (high/low, ours/their) in the social institution of the signifying activity. The epistemological is locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality. The enunciative is a more dialogic process that
THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations – subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation.

My shift from the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical). My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience. My theoretical argument has a descriptive history in recent work in literary and cultural studies by African American and black British writers. Hortense Spillers, for instance, evokes the field of 'enunciative possibility' to reconstitute the narrative of slavery:

[A]s many times as we re-open slavery’s closure we are hurtled rapidly forward into the dizzying motions of a symbolic enterprise, and it becomes increasingly clear that the cultural synthesis we call 'slavery' was never homogenous in its practices and conceptions, nor unitary in the faces it has yielded.

Deborah McDowell, in her reading of Sherley Anne Williams's Dessa Rose, argues that it is the temporality of the enunciatory ‘“present’ and its discourses ... in heterogeneous and messy array’, opened up in the narrative, that enables the book to wrestle vigorously with 'the critique of the subject and the critique of binary oppositions ... with questions of the politics and problematics of language and representation'. Paul Gilroy writes of the dialogic, performative ‘community’ of black music - rap, dub, scratching - as a way of constituting an open sense of black collectivity in the shifting, changing beat of the present. More recently, Houston A. Baker, Jr, has made a spirited argument against 'high cultural' sententiousness and for the 'very, very sound game of rap (music)', which comes through vibrantly in the title of his essay Hybridity, the Rap Race, and the Pedagogy of the 1990s. In his perceptive introduction to an anthology of black feminist criticism, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, describes the contestations and negotiations of black feminists as empowering cultural and textual strategies precisely because the critical position they occupy is free of the 'inverted' polarities of a 'counter-politics of exclusion':

They have never been obsessed with arriving at any singular self-image; or legislating who may or may not speak on the subject; or policing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

What is striking about the theoretical focus on the enunciatory present as a liberatory discursive strategy is its proposal that emergent cultural
identifications are articulated at the liminal edge of identity – in that arbitrary closure, that ‘unity … in quotation marks’ (Hall) that the language metaphor so clearly enacts. Postcolonial and black critiques propose forms of contestatory subjectivities that are empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition – the inverted polarities of a counter-politics (Gates). There is an attempt to construct a theory of the social imaginary that requires no subject expressing originary anguish (West), no singular self-image (Gates), no necessary or eternal belongingness (Hall). The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism.

It is the ambivalence enacted in the enunciative present – disjunctive and multiaccentual – that produces the objective of political desire, what Hall calls ‘arbitrary closure’, like the signifier. But this arbitrary closure is also the cultural space for opening up new forms of identification that may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound the ordering of cultural symbols, traumatize tradition. The African drumbeat syncopating heterogeneous black American postmodernism, the arbitrary but strategic logic of politics – these moments contest the sententious ‘conclusion’ of the discipline of cultural history.

We cannot understand what is being proposed as ‘new times’ within postmodernism – politics at the site of cultural enunciation, cultural signs spoken at the margins of social identity and antagonism – if we do not briefly explore the paradoxes of the language metaphor. In each of the illustrations I’ve provided, the language metaphor opens up a space where a theoretical disclosure is used to move beyond theory. A form of cultural experience and identity is envisaged in a theoretical description that does not set up a theory-practice polarity, nor does theory become ‘prior’ to the contingency of social experience. This ‘beyond theory’ is itself a liminal form of signification that creates a space for the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social ‘experience’ that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities. But it is a representation of ‘experience’ without the transparent reality of empiricism and outside the intentional mastery of the ‘author’. Nevertheless, it is a representation of social experience as the contingency of history – the indeterminacy that makes subversion and revision possible – that is profoundly concerned with questions of cultural ‘authorization’.

To evoke this ‘beyond theory’, I turn to Roland Barthes’s exploration of the cultural space ‘outside the sentence’. In The Pleasure of the Text I find a subtle suggestion that beyond theory you do not simply encounter its opposition, theory/practice, but an ‘outside’ that places the articulation of the two – theory and practice, language and politics – in a productive relation similar to Derrida’s notion of supplementarity:
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a non-dialectical middle, a structure of jointed predication, which cannot itself be comprehended by the predicates it distributes.... Not that this ability... shows a lack of power; rather this inability is constitutive of the very possibility of the logic of identity.16

OUTSIDE THE SENTENCE

Half-asleep on his banquette in a bar, of which Tangiers is the exemplary site, Barthes attempts to ‘enumerate the stereophony of languages within earshot’: music, conversations, chairs, glasses, Arabic, French.17 Suddenly the inner speech of the writer turns into the exorbitant space of the Moroccan souk:

[T]hrough me passed words, syntagms, bits of formulae and no sentence formed, as though that were the law of such a language. This speech at once very cultural and very savage, was above all lexical, sporadic; it set up in me, through its apparent flow, a definitive discontinuity: this non-sentence was in no way something that could not have acceded to the sentence, that might have been before the sentence; it was: what is... outside the sentence.18

At this point, Barthes writes, all linguistics that gives an exorbitant dignity to predicative syntax fell away. In its wake it becomes possible to subvert the ‘power of completion which defines sentence mastery and marks, as with a supreme, dearly won, conquered savoir faire, the agents of the sentence’.19 The hierarchy and the subordinations of the sentence are replaced by the definitive discontinuity of the text, and what emerges is a form of writing that Barthes describes as ‘writing aloud’:

a text of pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat... a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the tongue, not the meaning of language.20

Why return to the semiotician’s daydream? Why begin with ‘theory’ as story, as narrative and anecdote, rather than with the history or method? Beginning with the semiotic project—enumerating all the languages within earshot—evokes memories of the seminal influence of semiotics within our contemporary critical discourse. To that end, this petit récit rehearses some of the major themes of contemporary theory prefigured in the practice of semiotics—the author as an enunciative space; the formation of textuality after the fall of linguistics; the agonism between the sentence of-predicative syntax and the discontinuous subject of discourse; the disjunction between the lexical and the
grammatical dramatized in the liberty (perhaps libertinism) of the signifier.

To encounter Barthes's daydream is to acknowledge the formative contribution of semiotics to those influential concepts—sign, text, limit text, idiolect, écriture—that have become all the more important since they have passed into the unconscious of our critical trade. When Barthes attempts to produce, with his suggestive, erratic brilliance, a space for the pleasure of the text somewhere between 'the political policeman and the psychoanalytical policeman'—that is, between 'futility and/or guilt, pleasure is either idle or vain, a class notion or an illusion'—he evokes memories of the attempts, in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, to hold fast the political line while the poetic line struggled to free itself from its post-Althusserian arrest. What guilt, what pleasure.

To thematize theory is, for the moment, beside the point. To reduce this weird and wonderful daydream of the semiotic pedagogue, somewhat in his cups, to just another repetition of the theoretical litany of the death of the author would be reductive in the extreme. For the daydream takes semiotics by surprise; it turns pedagogy into the exploration of its own limits. If you seek simply the sententious or the exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence—not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signer nor signified. This intermediate space between theory and practice disrupts the disciplinary semiological demand to enumerate all the languages within earshot.

Barthes's daydream is supplementary, not alternative, to acting in the real-world, Freud reminds us; the structure of fantasy narrates the subject of daydream as the articulation of incommensurable temporalities, disavowed wishes, and discontinuous scenarios. The meaning of fantasy does not emerge in the predicative or propositional value we might attach to being outside the sentence. Rather, the performative structure of the text reveals a temporality of discourse that I believe is significant. It opens up a narrative strategy for the emergence and negotiation of those agencies of the marginal, minority, subaltern, or diasporic that incite us to think through—and beyond—theory.

What is caught anecdotally 'outside the sentence', in Barthes's concept, is that problematic space—performative rather than experiential, non-sententious but no less theoretical—of which poststructuralist theory speaks in its many varied voices. In spite of the fall of a predictable, predicative linguistics, the space of the non-sentence is not a negative ontology: not before the sentence but something that could have acceded to the sentence and yet was outside it. This discourse is indeed one of indeterminism, unexpectability, one that is neither 'pure' contingency or negativity nor endless deferral. 'Outside the sentence' is not to be opposed to the inner voice; the non-sentence does not relate to
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the sentence as a polarity. The timeless capture that stages such epistemological ‘confrontations’, in Richard Rorty’s term, is now interrupted and interrogated in the doubleness of writing – ‘at once very cultural and very savage’, ‘as though that were the law of such a language’. This disturbs what Derrida calls the occidental stereotomy, the ontological, circumscribing space between subject and object, inside and outside. It is the question of agency, as it emerges in relation to the indeterminate and the contingent, that I want to explore ‘outside the sentence’. However, I want to preserve, at all times, that menacing sense in which the non-sentence is contiguous with the sentence, near but different, not simply its anarchic disruption.

TANGIERS OR CASABLANCA?

What we encounter outside the sentence, beyond the occidental stereotomy, is what I shall call the ‘temporality’ of Tangiers. It is a structure of temporality that will emerge only slowly and indirectly, as time goes by, as they say in Moroccan bars, whether in Tangiers or Casablanca. There is, however, an instructive difference between Casablanca and Tangiers. In Casablanca the passage of time preserves the identity of language; the possibility of naming over time is fixed in the repetition:

You must remember this
a kiss is still a kiss
a sigh is but a sigh
the fundamental things apply
As times goes by.

(Casablanca)

‘Play it again, Sam’, which is perhaps the Western world’s most celebrated demand for repetition, is still an invocation to similitude, a return to the eternal verities.

In Tangiers, as time goes by, it produces an iterative temporality that erases the occidental spaces of language – inside/outside, past/present, those foundationalist epistemological positions of Western empiricism and historicism. Tangiers opens up disjunctive, incommensurable relations of spacing and temporality within the sign – an ‘internal difference of the so-called ultimate element (stoikheion, trait, letter, seminal mark)’. The non-sentence is not before (either as the past or a priori) or inside (either as depth or presence) but outside (both spatially and temporally ex-centric, interruptive, in-between, on the borders, turning inside outside). In each of these inscriptions there is a doubling and a splitting of the temporal and spatial dimensions in the very act of signification. What emerges in this agonistic, ambivalent form of speech – ‘at once very cultural and very savage’ – is a question about the
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subject of discourse and the agency of the letter: can there be a social subject of the 'non-sentence'? Is it possible to conceive of historical agency in that disjunctive, indeterminate moment of discourse outside the sentence? Is the whole thing no more than a theoretical fantasy that reduces any form of political critique to a daydream?

These apprehensions about the agency of the aporetic and the ambivalent become more acute when political claims are made for their strategic action. This is precisely Terry Eagleton's recent position, in his critique of the libertarian pessimism of poststructuralism:

[It is] libertarian because something of the old model of expression/repression lingers on in the dream of an entirely free-floating signifier, an infinite textual productivity, an existence blessedly free from the shackles of truth, meaning and sociality. Pessimistic, because whatever blocks such creativity – law, meaning, power, closure – is acknowledged to be built into it, in a sceptical recognition of the imbrication of authority and desire.25

The agency implicit in this discourse is objectified in a structure of the negotiation of meaning that is not a free-floating time lack but a time-lag – a contingent moment – in the signification of closure. Tangiers, the 'sign' of the 'non-sentence' turns retroactively, at the end of Barthes's essay, into a form of discourse that he names 'writing aloud'. The time-lag between the event of the sign (Tangiers) and its discursive eventuality (writing aloud) exemplifies a process where intentionality is negotiated retrospectively.26 The sign finds its closure retroactively in a discourse that it anticipates in the semiotic fantasy: there is a contiguity, a coextensivity, between Tangiers (as sign) and writing aloud (discursive formation), in that writing aloud is the mode of inscription of which Tangiers is a sign. There is no strict causality between Tangiers as the beginning of predication and writing aloud as the end or closure; but there is no free-floating signifier or an infinity of textual productivity. There is the more complex possibility of negotiating meaning and agency through the time-lag in-between the sign (Tangiers) and its initiation of a discourse or narrative, where the relation of theory to practice is part of what Rodolphe Gasché termed 'jointed predication'. In this sense, closure comes to be effected in the contingent moment of repetition, 'an overlap without equivalence: fort:da'.27

The temporality of Tangiers is a lesson in reading the agency of the social text as ambivalent and catachrestic. Gayatri Spivak has usefully described the 'negotiation' of the postcolonial position 'in terms of reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding', constituting a catachrestic space: words or concepts wrested from their proper meaning, 'a concept-metaphor without an adequate referent' that perverts its embedded context. Spivak continues, 'Claiming catechresis from
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a space that one cannot not want to inhabit [the sentence, sententious], yet must criticize [from outside the sentence] is then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial.28

This Derridean position is close to the conceptual predicament outside the sentence. I have attempted to provide the discursive temporality, or time-lag, which is crucial to the process by which this turning around - of tropes, ideologies, concept metaphors - comes to be textualized and specified in postcolonial agency: the moment when the 'bar' of the occidental stereotomy is turned into the coextensive, contingent boundaries of relocation and reinscription: the catachrestic gesture. The insistent issue in any such move is the nature of the negotiatory agent realized through the time-lag. How does agency come to be specified and individuated, outside the discourses of individualism? How does the time-lag signify individuation as a position that is an effect of the 'intersubjective': contiguous with the social and yet contingent, indeterminate, in relation to it?29

Writing aloud, for Barthes, is neither the 'expressive' function of language as authorial intention or generic determination nor meaning personified.30 It is similar to the actio repressed by classical rhetoric, and it is the 'corporeal exteriorization of discourse'. It is the art of guiding one's body into discourse, in such a way that the subject's accession to, and erasure in, the signifier as individuated is paradoxically accompanied by its remainder, an afterbirth, a double. Its noise - 'crackle, grate, cut' - makes vocal and visible, across the flow of the sentence's communicative code, the struggle involved in the insertion of agency - wound and bow, death and life - into discourse.

In Lacanian terms, which are appropriate here, this 'noise' is the 'leftover' after the capitonnage, or positioning, of the signifier for the subject. The Lacanian 'voice' that speaks outside the sentence is itself the voice of an interrogative, calculative agency: 'Che vuoi? You are telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?' (For a clear explanation of this process, see Zizek, The Sublime Object of Ideology.31) What speaks in the place of this question, Jacques Lacan writes, is a 'third locus which is neither my speech nor my interlocutor'.32

The time-lag opens up this negotiatory space between putting the question to the subject and the subject's repetition 'around' the neither/nor of the third locus. This constitutes the return of the subject agent, as the interrogative agency in the catechrestic position. Such a disjunctive space of temporality is the locus of symbolic identification that structures the intersubjective realm - the realm of Otherness and the social - where 'we identify ourselves with the other precisely at a point at which he is inimitable, at the point which eludes resemblance.'33 My contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms
of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal moment of identifi-
cation – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subal-
tern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of
iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking. It singu-
larizes the ‘totality’ of authority by suggesting that agency requires a
grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it
requires movement and manoeuvre, but it does not require a temporality
of continuity or accumulation; it requires direction and contingent clos-
ure but no teleology and holism. (For elaboration of these concepts, see
Chapters 1 and 8.)

The individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement.
It is a pulsional incident, the split-second movement when the process
of the subject’s designation – its fixity – opens up beside it, uncannily
abseits, a ‘supplementary space of contingency. In this ‘return’ of the
subject, thrown back across the distance of the signified, outside the sen-
tence, the agent emerges as a form of retroactivity, Nachträglichkeit. It is
not agency as itself (transcendent, transparent) or in itself (unitary,
organic, autonomous). As a result of its own splitting in the time-lag of
signification, the moment of the subject’s individuation emerges as an
effect of the intersubjective – as the return of the subject as agent. This
means that those elements of social ‘consciousness’ imperative for
agency – deliberative, individuated action and specificity in analysis –
can now be thought outside that epistemology that insists on the subject
as always prior to the social or on the knowledge of the social as
necessarily subsuming or sublating the particular ‘difference’ in the
transcendent homogeneity of the general. The iterative and contingent
that marks this intersubjective relation can never be libertarian or free-
floating, as Eagleton claims, because the agent, constituted in the
subject’s return, is in the dialogic position of calculation, negotiation,
interrogation: Che vuoi?

AGENT WITHOUT A CAUSE?

Something of this genealogy of postcolonial agency has already been
encountered in my expositions of the ambivalent and the multivalent
in the language metaphor at work in West’s ‘synechdochical thinking’
about black American cultural hybridity and Hall’s notion of ‘politics
like a language’. The implications of this line of thinking were pro-
ductively realized in the work of Spillers, McDowell, Baker, Gates and
Gilroy, all of whom emphasize the importance of the creative heterogen-
ity of the enunciatory ‘present’ that liberates the discourse of emancipation from binary closures. I want to give contingency another
turn – through the Barthesian fantasy – by throwing the last line of the
text, its conclusion, together with an earlier moment when Barthes

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speaks suggestively of closure as agency. Once again, we have an overlap without equivalence. For the notion of a non-teleological and a non-dialectical form of closure has often been considered the most problematic issue for the postmodern agent without a cause:

[Writing aloud] succeed[s] in shifting the signified a great distance and in throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ear.... And this body of bliss is also my historical subject; for it is at the conclusion of a very complex process of biographical, historical, sociological, neurotic elements...that I control the contradictory interplay of [cultural] pleasure and [non-cultural] bliss that I write myself as a subject at present out of place.34

The contingency of the subject as agent is articulated in a double dimension, a dramatic action. The signified is distanced; the resulting time lag opens up the space between the lexical and the grammatical, between enunciation and enounced, in-between the anchoring of signifiers. Then, suddenly, this in-between spatial dimension, this distancing, converts itself into the temporality of the ‘throw’ that iteratively (re)turns the subject as a moment of conclusion and control: a historically or contextually specific subject. How are we to think the control or conclusion in the context of contingency?

We need, not surprisingly, to invoke both meanings of contingency and then to repeat the difference of the one in the other. Recall my suggestion that to interrupt the occidental stereotomy – inside/outside, space/time – one needs to think; outside the sentence, at once very cultural and very savage. The contingent is contiguity, metonymy, the touching of spatial boundaries at a tangent, and, at the same time, the contingent is the temporality of the indeterminate and the undecidable. It is the kinetic tension that holds this double determination together and apart within discourse. They represent the repetition of the one in or as the other, in a structure of ‘abyssal overlapping’ (a Derridean term) which enables us to conceive of strategic closure and control for the agent. Representing social contradiction or antagonism in this doubling discourse of contingency – where the spatial dimension of contiguity is reiterated in the temporality of the indeterminate – cannot be dismissed as the arcane practice of the undecidable or aporetic.

The importance of the problematic of contingency for historical discourse is evident in Ranajit Guha’s attempt to represent the specificity of rebel consciousness.35 Guha’s argument reveals the need for such a double and disjunctive sense of the contingent, although his own reading of the concept, in terms of the ‘universal-contingent’ couple, is more Hegelian in its elaboration.36 Rebel consciousness is inscribed in two major narratives. In bourgeois-nationalist historiography, it is seen as ‘pure spontaneity pitted against the will of the State as embodied in
the Raj'. The will of the rebels is either denied or subsumed in the individualized capacity of their leaders, who frequently belong to the elite gentry. Radical historiography failed to specify rebel consciousness because its continuist narrative ranged 'peasant revolts as a succession of events ranged along a direct line of descent ... as a heritage'. In assimilating all moments of rebel consciousness to the 'highest moment of the series -- indeed to an Ideal Consciousness' -- these historians 'are ill-equipped to cope with contradictions which are indeed the stuff history is made of'.

Guha's elaborations of rebel contradiction as consciousness are strongly suggestive of agency as the activity of the contingent. What I have described as the return of the subject is present in his account of rebel consciousness as self-alienated. My suggestion that the problematic of contingency strategically allows for a spatial contiguity -- solidarity, collective action -- to be (re)articulated in the moment of indeterminacy is, reading between the lines, very close to his sense of the strategic alliances at work in the contradictory and hybrid sites, and symbols, of peasant revolt. What historiography fails to grasp is indeed agency at the point of the 'combination of sectarianism and militancy ... [specifically] the ambiguity of such phenomena'; causality as the 'time' of indeterminate articulation: 'the swift transformation of class struggle into communal strife and vice versa in our countryside'; and ambivalence at the point of 'individuation' as an intersubjective affect:

Blinded by the glare of a perfect and immaculate consciousness the historian sees nothing ... but solidarity in rebel behaviour and fails to notice its Other, namely, betrayal. ... He underestimates the brakes put on [insurgency as a generalized movement] by localism and territoriality.

Finally, as if to provide an emblem for my notion of agency in the apparatus of contingency -- its hybrid figuring of space and time -- Guha, quoting Sunil Sen's Agrarian Struggle in Bengal, beautifully describes the 'ambiguity of such phenomena' as the hybridized signs and sites during the Tebhaga movement in Dinajpur:

Muslim peasants [came] to the Kisan Sabha 'sometimes inscribing a hammer and a sickle on the Muslim League flag' and young maulavis '[recited] melodious verses from the Koran' at village meetings 'as they condemned the jotedari system and the practice of charging high interest rates.'
The contingent conditions of agency also take us to the heart of Mikhail M. Bakhtin's important attempt, in speech genres, to designate the enunciative subject of heteroglossia and dialogism. As with Guha, my reading will be catechrestic: reading between the lines, taking neither him at his word nor me fully at mine. In focusing on how the chain of speech communication comes to be constituted, I deal with Bakhtin's attempt to individuate social agency as an after-effect of the intersubjective. My cross-hatched matrix of contingency — as spatial difference and temporal distance, to turn the terms somewhat — enables us to see how Bakhtin provides a knowledge of the transformation of social discourse while displacing the originating subject and the causal and continuist progress of discourse:

The object, as it were, has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated and evaluated in various ways. . . . The speaker is not the biblical Adam . . . as simplistic ideas about communication as a logical-psychological basis for the sentence suggest.41

Bakhtin's use of the metaphor of the chain of communication picks up the sense of contingency as contiguity, while the question of the 'link', immediately raises the issue of contingency as the indeterminate. Bakhtin's displacement of the author as agent results from his acknowledgement of the 'complex, multiplanar' structure of the speech genre that exists in that kinetic tension in-between the two forces of contingency. The spatial boundaries of the object of utterance are contiguous in the assimilation of the other's speech; but the allusion to another's utterance produces a dialogical turn, a moment of indeterminacy in the act of 'addressivity' (Bakhtin's concept) that gives rise within the chain of speech communion to 'unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations'.42

Although Bakhtin acknowledges this double movement in the chain of the utterance, there is a sense in which he disavows its effectivity at the point of the enunciation of discursive agency. He displaces this conceptual problem that concerns the performativity of the speech-act — its enunciative modalities of time and space — to an empiricist acknowledgement of the 'area of human activity and everyday life to which the given utterance is related'.43 It is not that the social context does not localize the utterance; it is simply that the process of specification and individuation still needs to be elaborated within Bakhtin's theory, as the modality through which the speech genre comes to recognize the specific as a signifying limit, a discursive boundary. There are moments when Bakhtin obliquely touches on the tense doubling of the contingent that I have described. When he talks of the
'dialogic overtones' that permeate the agency of utterance – 'many half-concealed or completely concealed words of others with varying degrees of foreignness' – his metaphors hint at the iterative intersubjective temporality in which the agency is realized 'outside' the author:

[T]he utterance appears to be furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subjects and dialogic overtones, greatly weakened utterance boundaries that are completely permeable to the author's expression. The utterance proves to be a very complex and multiplanar phenomenon if considered not in isolation and with respect to its author ... but as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other related utterances... 

Through this landscape of echoes and ambivalent boundaries, framed in passing, furrowed horizons, the agent who is 'not Adam' but is, indeed, time-lagged, emerges into the social realm of discourse. Agency, as the return of the subject, as 'not Adam', has a more directly political history in Hannah Arendt's portrayal of the troubled narrative of social causality. According to Arendt the notorious uncertainty of all political matters arises from the fact that the disclosure of who – the agent as individuation – is contiguous with the what of the intersubjective realm. This contiguous relation between who and what cannot be transcended but must be accepted as a form of indeterminism and doubling. The who of agency bears no mimetic immediacy or adequacy of representation. It can only be signified outside the sentence in that sporadic, ambivalent temporality that inhabits the notorious unreliability of ancient oracles who 'neither reveal nor hide in words but give manifest signs'. The unreliability of signs introduces a perplexity in the social text:

The perplexity is that in any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the 'hero' of the story, we can never point unequivocally to him as the author of its outcome.

This is the structure of the intersubjective space between agents, what Arendt terms human 'inter-est'. It is this public sphere of language and action that must become at once the theatre and the screen for the manifestation of the capacities of human agency. Tangiers-like, the event and its eventuality are separated; the narrative time-lag makes the who and the what contingent, splitting them, so that the agent remains the subject, in suspension, outside the sentence. The agent who 'causes' the narrative becomes part of the interest, only because we cannot point unequivocally to that agent at the point of outcome. It is the contingency
that constitutes individuation – in the return of the subject as agent – that protects the interest of the intersubjective realm.

The contingency of closure socializes the agent as a collective ‘effect’ through the distancing of the author. Between the cause and its intentionality falls the shadow. Can we then unquestionably propose that a story has a unique meaning in the first place? To what end does the series of events tend if the author of the outcome is not unequivocally the author of the cause? Does it not suggest that agency arises in the return of the subject, from the interruption of the series of events as a kind of interrogation and reinscription of before and after? Where the two touch is there not that kinetic tension between the contingent as the contiguous and the indeterminate? Is it not from there that agency speaks and acts: Che vuoi?

These questions are provoked by Arendt’s brilliant suggestiveness, for her writing symptomatically performs the perplexities she evokes. Having brought close together the unique meaning and the causal agent, she says that the ‘invisible actor’ is an ‘invention arising from a mental perplexity’ corresponding to no real experience. It is this distancing of the signified, this anxious fantasm or simulacrum – in the place of the author – that, according to Arendt, indicates most clearly the political nature of history. The sign of the political is, moreover, not invested in ‘the character of the story itself but only [in] the mode in which it came into existence’. So it is the realm of representation and the process of signification that constitutes the space of the political. What is temporal in the mode of existence of the political? Here Arendt resorts to a form of repetition to resolve the ambivalence of her argument. The ‘reification’ of the agent can only occur, she writes, through ‘a kind of repetition, the imitation of mimesis, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate to the drama’.

This repetition of the agent, reified in the liberal vision of togetherness, is quite different from my sense of the contingent agency for our postcolonial age. The reasons for this are not difficult to find. Arendt’s belief in the revelatory qualities of Aristotelian mimesis are grounded in a notion of community, or the public sphere, that is largely consensual: ‘where people are with others and neither for nor against them – that is sheer human togetherness’. When people are passionately for or against one another, then human togetherness is lost as they deny the fullness of Aristotelian mimetic time. Arendt’s form of social mimesis does not deal with social marginality as a product of the liberal State, which can, if articulated, reveal the limitations of its common sense (inter-est) of society from the perspective of minorities or the marginalized. Social violence is, for Arendt, the denial of the disclosure of agency, the point at which ‘speech becomes “mere talk”, simply one more means towards the end’.
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My concern is with other articulations of human togetherness, as they are related to cultural difference and discrimination. For instance, human togetherness may come to represent the forces of hegemonic authority; or a solidarity founded in victimization and suffering may, implacably, sometimes violently, become bound against oppression; or a subaltern or minority agency may attempt to interrogate and rearticulate the 'inter-est' of society that marginalizes its interests. These discourses of cultural dissent and social antagonism cannot find their agents in Arendt's Aristotelian mimesis. In the process I've described as the return of the subject, there is an agency that seeks revision and reinscription: the attempt to renegotiate the third locus, the intersubjective realm. The repetition of the iterative, the activity of the time-lag, is not so much arbitrary as interruptive, a closure that is not conclusion but a liminal interrogation outside the sentence.

In 'Where is speech? Where is language?' Lacan describes this moment of negotiation from within the 'metaphoricity' of language while making a laconic reference to the ordering of symbols in the realm of social discourse:

'It is the temporal element ... or the temporal break ... the intervention of a scansion permitting the intervention of something which can take on meaning for a subject.... There is in fact a reality of signs within which there exists a world of truth entirely deprived of subjectivity, and that, on the other hand there has been a historical development of subjectivity manifestly directed towards the rediscovery of truth which lies in the order of symbols.52

The process of reinscription and negotiation – the insertion or intervention of something that takes on new meaning – happens in the temporal break in-between the sign, deprived of subjectivity, in the realm of the intersubjective. Through this time-lag – the temporal break in representation – emerges the process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse. What comes out so clearly in Lacan's genealogy of the subject is that the agent's intentionality, which seems 'manifestly directed' towards the truth of the order of symbols in the social imaginary, is also an effect of the rediscovery of the world of truth denied subjectivity (because it is intersubjective) at the level of the sign. It is in the contingent tension that results, that sign and symbol overlap and are indeterminately articulated through the 'temporal break'. Where the sign deprived of the subject – intersubjectivity – returns as subjectivity directed towards the rediscovery of truth, then a (re)ordering of symbols becomes possible in the sphere of the social. When the sign ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol, it also seizes the power to elaborate – through the time-
lag – new and hybrid agencies and articulations. This is the moment for revisions.

REVISIONS

The concept of reinscription and negotiation that I am elaborating must not be confused with the powers of ‘redescription’ that have become the hallmark of the liberal ironist or neo-pragmatist. I do not offer a critique of this influential non-foundationalist position here except to point to the obvious differences of approach. Rorty’s conception of the representation of difference in social discourse is the consensual overlapping of ‘final vocabularies’ that allow imaginative identification with the other so long as certain words – ‘kindness, decency, dignity’ – are held in common. However, as he says, the liberal ironist can never elaborate an empowering strategy. Just how disempowering his views are for the non-Western other, how steeped in a Western ethnocentrism, is seen, appropriately for a non-foundationalist, in a footnote.

Rorty suggests that

liberal society already contains the institutions for its own improvement [and that] Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution it needs in J. S. Mill’s suggestion that governments should optimize the balance between leaving people’s private lives alone and preventing suffering.

Appended to this is the footnote where liberal ironists suddenly lose their powers of redescription:

This is not to say that the world has had the last political revolution it needs. It is hard to imagine the diminution of cruelty in countries like South Africa, Paraguay, and Albania without violent revolution. . . . But in such countries raw courage (like that of the leaders of COSATU or the signers of Charta 77) is the relevant virtue, not the sort of reflective acumen which makes contributions to social theory.

This is where Rorty’s conversation stops, but we must force the dialogue to acknowledge postcolonial social and cultural theory that reveals the limits of liberalism in the postcolonial perspective: ‘Bourgeois culture hits its historical limit in colonialism,’ writes Guha sententiously, and, almost as if to speak ‘outside the sentence’, Veena Das reinscribes Guha’s thought into the affective language of a metaphor and the body: ‘Subaltern rebellions can only provide a night-time of love. . . . Yet perhaps in capturing this defiance the historian has given us a means of constructing the objects of such power as subjects.’

In her excellent essay ‘Subaltern as perspective’, Das demands a
historiography of the subaltern that displaces the paradigm of social action as defined primarily by rational action. She seeks a form of discourse where affective and iterative writing develops its own language. History as a writing that constructs the moment of defiance emerges in the 'magma of significations', for the 'representational closure which presents itself when we encounter thought in objectified forms is now ripped open. Instead we see this order interrogated.\textsuperscript{58} In an argument that demands an enunciative temporality remarkably close to my notion of the time-lag that circulates at the point of the sign's seizure/caesura of symbolic synchronicity, Das locates the moment of transgression in the splitting of the discursive present: a greater attention is required to locate transgressive agency in 'the splitting of the various types of speech produced into statements of referential truth in the indicative present'.\textsuperscript{59}

This emphasis on the disjunctive present of utterance enables the historian to get away from defining subaltern consciousness as binary, as having positive or negative dimensions. It allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription. In the seizure of the sign, as I've argued, there is neither dialectical sublation nor the empty signer: there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms, but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in a supplementary movement that exceeds those terms. This is the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement. It is this theoretical form of political agency I've attempted to develop that Das beautifully fleshes out in a historical argument:

It is the nature of the conflict within which a caste or tribe is locked which may provide the characteristics of the historical moment; to assume that we may know a priori the mentalities of castes or communities is to take an essentialist perspective which the evidence produced in the very volumes of \textit{Subaltern Studies} would not support.\textsuperscript{60}

Is the contingent structure of agency not similar to what Frantz Fanon describes as the knowledge of the practice of action?\textsuperscript{61} Fanon argues that the primitive Manichaeanism of the settler – black and white, Arab and Christian – breaks down in the present of struggle for independence. Polarities come to be replaced with truths that are only partial, limited and unstable. Each 'local ebb of the tide reviews the political question from the standpoint of all political networks.' The leaders should stand firmly against those within the movement who tend to think that 'shades of meaning constitute dangers and drive wedges into the solid block of
What Das and Fanon both describe is the potentiality of agency constituted through the strategic use of historical contingency.

The form of agency that I've attempted to describe through the cut and thrust of sign and symbol, the signifying conditions of contingency, returns to interrogate that most audacious dialectic of modernity provided by contemporary theory – Foucault's 'Man and his doubles'. Foucault's productive influence on postcolonial scholars, from Australia to India, has not been unqualified, particularly in his construction of modernity. Mitchell Dean, writing in the Melbourne journal Thesis Eleven, remarks that the identity of the West's modernity obsessively remains 'the most general horizon under which all of Foucault's actual historical analyses are landmarked'. And for this very reason, Partha Chatterjee argues that Foucault's genealogy of power has limited uses in the developing world. The combination of modern and archaic regimes of power produces unexpected forms of disciplinarity and governmentality that make Foucault's epistemes inappropriate, even obsolete.

But could Foucault's text, which bears such an attenuated relation to Western modernity, be free of that epistemic displacement – through the (post)colonial formation – that constitutes the West's sense of itself as progressive, civil, modern? Does the disavowal of colonialism turn Foucault's 'sign' of the West into the symptom of an obsessional modernity? Can the colonial moment ever not be contingent – the contiguous as indeterminacy – to Foucault's argument? At the magisterial end of Foucault's The Order of Things, when the section on history confronts its uncanny doubles – the counter-sciences of anthropology and psychoanalysis – the argument begins to unravel. It happens at a symptomatic moment when the representation of cultural difference attenuates the sense of history as the embedding, domesticating 'homeland' of the human sciences. For the finitude of history – its moment of doubling – participates in the conditionality of the contingent. An incommensurable doubleness ensues between history as the 'homeland' of the human sciences – its cultural area, its chronological or geographical boundaries – and the claims of historicism to universalism. At that point, 'the subject of knowledge becomes the nexus of different times, foreign to it and heterogeneous in respect to one another.' In that contingent doubling of history and nineteenth-century historicism the time-lag in the discourse enables the return of historical agency:

Since time comes to him from somewhere other than himself he constitutes himself as a subject of history only by the superimposition of . . . the history of things, the history of words. . . . But this relation of simple passivity is immediately reversed . . . for he too
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has a right to a development quite as positive as that of beings and things, one no less autonomous. 66

As a result the heimlich historical subject that arises in the nineteenth century cannot stop constituting the unheimlich knowledge of itself by compulsively relating one cultural episode to another in an infinitely repetitive series of events that are metonymic and indeterminate. The grand narratives of nineteenth-century historicism on which its claims to universalism were founded – evolutionism, utilitarianism, evangelism – were also, in another textual and territorial, time/ space, the technologies of colonial and imperialist governance. It is the ‘rationalism’ of these ideologies of progress that increasingly comes to be eroded in the encounter with the contingency of cultural difference. Elsewhere I have explored this historical process, perfectly caught in the picturesque words of a desperate missionary in the early nineteenth century as the colonial predicament of ‘sly civility’ (see Chapter 5). The result of this colonial encounter, its antagonisms and ambivalences, has a major effect on what Foucault beautifully describes as the ‘slenderness of the narrative’ of history in that era most renowned for its historicizing (and colonizing) of the world and the word. 67

History now ‘takes place on the outer limits of the object and subject’, Foucault writes, 68 and it is to probe the uncanny unconscious of history’s doubling that he resorts to anthropology and psychoanalysis. In these disciplines the cultural unconscious is spoken in the slenderness of narrative – ambivalence, catachresis, contingency, iteration, abyssal overlapping. In the agonistic temporal break that articulates the cultural symbol to the psychic sign, we shall discover the postcolonial symptom of Foucault’s discourse. Writing of the history of anthropology as the ‘counter-discourse’ to modernity – as the possibility of a human science postmodernism – Foucault says:

There is a certain position in the Western ratio that was constituted in its history and provides a foundation for the relation it can have with all other societies, even with the society in which it historically appeared. 69

Foucault fails to elaborate that ‘certain position’ and its historical constitution. By disavowing it, however, he names it as a negation in the very next line which reads: ‘Obviously this does not mean that the colonizing situation is indispensable to ethnology.’

Are we demanding that Foucault should reinstate colonialism as the missing moment in the dialectic of modernity? Do we want him to ‘complete’ the argument by appropriating ours? Definitely not. I suggest that the postcolonial perspective is subversively working in his text in that moment of contingency that allows the contingency of his argument
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- thought following thought - to progress. Then, suddenly, at the point of its closure, a curious indeterminacy enters the chain of discourse. This becomes the space for a new discursive temporality, another place of enunciation that will not allow the argument to expand into an unproblematic generality.

In this spirit of conclusion, I want to suggest a departure for the postcolonial text in the Foucauldian forgetting. In talking of psychoanalysis Foucault is able to see how knowledge and power come together in the enunciative 'present' of transference: the 'calm violence' - as he calls it - of a relationship that constitutes the discourse. By disavowing the colonial moment as an enunciative present in the historical and epistemological condition of Western modernity, Foucault can say little about the transferential relation between the West and its colonial history. He disavows precisely the colonial text as the foundation for the relation the Western ratio can have 'even with the society in which it historically appeared.'

Reading from this perspective we can see that, in insistently spatializing the 'time' of history, Foucault constitutes a doubling of 'man' that is strangely collusive with its dispersal, equivalent to its equivocation, and uncannily self-constituting, despite its game of 'double and splits'. Reading from the transferential perspective, where the Western ratio returns to itself from the time-lag of the colonial relation, then we see how modernity and postmodernity are themselves constituted from the marginal perspective of cultural difference. They encounter themselves contingently at the point at which the internal difference of their own society is reiterated in terms of the difference of the other, the alterity of the postcolonial site.

At this point of self-alienation postcolonial agency returns, in a spirit of calm violence, to interrogate Foucault's fluent doubling of the figures of modernity. What it reveals is not some buried concept but a truth about the symptom of Foucault's thinking, the style of discourse and narrative that objectifies his concepts. It reveals the reason for Foucault's desire to anxiously play with the folds of Western modernity, fraying the finitudes of human beings, obsessively undoing and doing up the threads of that 'slender narrative' of nineteenth-century historicism. This nervous narrative illustrates and attenuates his own argument; like the slender thread of history, it refuses to be woven in, menacingly hanging loose from the margins. What stops the narrative thread from breaking is Foucault's concern to introduce, at the nexus of his doubling, the idea that 'the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is dehistoricized.'

The dehistoricized authority of 'Man and his doubles' produces, in the same historical period, those forces of normalization and naturalization that create a modern Western disciplinary society. The
invisible power that is invested in this dehistoricized figure of Man is gained at the cost of those ‘others’ – women, natives, the colonized, the indentured and enslaved – who, at the same time but in other spaces, were becoming the peoples without a history.
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26 ibid., p. 111.
28 ibid., p. 41.
31 Duff, India and India Missions, p. 564.
32 ibid., p. 563.
33 ibid., p. 323.
34 ibid., p. 225.
35 ibid.
38 E. T. A. Hoffmann, The Sandman.

8 DISSEMINATION


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8 B. Anderson, "Narrating the nation," The Times Literary Supplement, 
9 P. Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse 
11 ibid., p. 38.
13 M. Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, C. Emerson and M. Holquist 
   (eds), V. W. McGee (trans.) (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986), 
   p. 31.
14 ibid., p. 34.
15 ibid., p. 36 and passim.
16 ibid., pp. 47–9.
19 H. A. Baker, Jr, Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance (Chicago: Chicago Univer-
20 Barrell, English Literature, p. 78.
21 ibid., p. 203.
22 Baker, Modernism, p. 77.
23 R. Price, Maroon Societies, quoted in Baker, Modernism, p. 77.
24 C. Lefort, The Political Forms of Modern Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University 
   I must thank Prof. David Lloyd of the University of California, Berkeley, for 
   reminding me of Williams's important concept.
28 E. Said, 'Representing the colonized', Critical Inquiry, vol. 15, no. 2 (winter 
30 ibid.
31 J.-F. Lyotard and J.-L. Thebaud, Just Gaming, W. Godzich (trans.) (Manchester: 
32 C. Lévi-Strauss, Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss, F. Baker (trans.) 
   (London: Routledge, 1987). Mark Cousins pointed me in the direction of this 
   remarkable text. See his review in New Formation, no. 7 (spring 1989). What 
   follows is an account of Lévi-Strauss's argument to be found in section 11 of 
   the book, pp. 21–44.
33 M. Foucault, Technologies of the Self, H. Gutman et al. (eds) (London: Tavistock, 
   1988).
34 ibid., pp. 151–4. I have abbreviated the argument for my convenience.
   have, for convenience, produced a composite quotation from Althusser's 
   various descriptions of the ideological effects of historicism.
36 Foucault, Technologies, pp. 162–3.
37 F. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Harmonsdworth: Penguin, 1969). My 
   quotations and references come from pp. 174–90.
38 J.-F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, G. Bennington and B. Massumi (trans.) 
39 J. Kristeva, 'Women's time', in T. Moi (ed.) The Kristeva Reader (Oxford: 
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Blackwell, 1986), pp.187-213. This passage was written in response to the insistent questioning of Nandini and Praminda in Prof. Tshome Gabriel’s seminar on ‘syncretic cultures’ at the University of California, Los Angeles.

40 Anderson, ‘Narrating the nation’, p. 35.
42 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.145.
43 Gasché, Tain of the Mirror, p. 211.
44 Kristeva, ‘Women’s time’, p. 210. I have also referred here to an argument to be found on p. 296.
45 All quotations are from the shooting script of Handsworth Songs, generously provided by the Black Audio and Film Collective.
47 ibid., p. 132.
48 ibid.
49 ibid.
50 Lévi-Strauss, Work of Marcel Mauss, p. 58.
52 ibid., p. 11.
53 Lefort, Political Forms, p. 303.
55 Lévi-Strauss, Work of Marcel Mauss, p. 35.
59 J. Berger, A Seventh Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). I have composed this passage from quotations that are scattered through the text.
60 ibid., p. 216.
62 S. Rushdie, The Satanic Verses (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 343. This is a condensed version of this quotation.
63 ibid., p. 130.
64 ibid., p. 145.
65 ibid., p. 320.
66 ibid., p. 353.
67 ibid., p. 354. I have slightly altered the presentation of this passage to fit in with the sequence of my argument.
68 Timothy Bahti and Andrew Benjamin have translated this much-discussed passage for me. What I want to emphasize is a form of the articulation of cultural difference that Paul de Man clarifies in his reading of Walter Benjamin’s complex image of amphora.

[Benjamin] is not saying that the fragments constitute a totality, he
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says that fragments are fragments, and that they remain essentially fragmentary. They follow each other metonymically, and they never constitute a totality. (P. de Man, The Resistance to Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 91).

9 THE POSTCOLONIAL AND THE POSTMODERN

8 ibid., pp. 9–10.
10 ibid., p. 151 (my emphasis).
13 P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (London: Hutchinson, 1987), ch. 5.
17 I wrote this section in response to Stephen Greenblatt's musing question, put in a bar in Cambridge, Massachusetts: 'What happens in that partial, passing moment in-between the chain of signifiers?' As it turns out, Cambridge is not that far from Tangiers.
19 ibid., p. 50.
20 ibid., pp. 66–7.
21 ibid., p. 57.
22 ibid., p. 49.
23 Derrida, 'My chances', p. 25.
24 ibid., p. 10.
I have argued for a related temporality of political intervention in ‘The commitment to theory’, New Formations, vol. 5 (summer 1988), pp. 5–23.

30 Barthes, Pleasure of the Text, pp. 66–7. Mine is a tendentious exploration and reconstitution of Barthes’s concept, often read against the grain of Barthes’s celebratory, situationist détournement. It is not an exposition, as I have made clear repeatedly throughout the chapter.


33 Zizek, Sublime Object, p. 109.

34 Barthes, Pleasure of the Text, pp. 62, 67 (my emphasis).


36 ibid., p. 230.


38 ibid., p. 40.

39 ibid., p. 39.


41 ibid., p. 93.

42 ibid., p. 94.

43 ibid., p. 93.

44 ibid.


46 ibid., p. 185.

47 ibid., p. 184.

48 ibid., p. 186.

49 ibid., p. 187.

50 ibid., p. 180.

51 ibid.

52 J. Lacan, ‘Where is speech? Where is ‘language?’, The Seminars of Jacques
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54 ibid., p. 63.
55 ibid., p. 63, n. 21
57 ibid. (my emphasis).
59 ibid., p. 316.
60 ibid., p. 320.
61 I have changed the order of Fanon’s argument to give an efficient summary of it.
66 ibid.
67 ibid., p. 371.
68 ibid., p. 372.
69 ibid., p. 377 (my emphasis).
70 ibid.
71 ibid., p. 369.

10 BY BREAD ALONE

5 Morrison, ‘Unspeakable things unsaid’, p. 31.
6 ibid., p. 32.
7 I am deeply indebted to Ranajit Guha’s reading of the ‘chapati’ story in his classic account of rebel politics, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). See ch. 6, in particular pp. 239–46, Although my analysis of the event differs from his in ways that will become clearer as the argument proceeds, his splendid reading produces an important framework for all successive readings.

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