

THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

Homi K. Bhabha



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In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha sets out the conceptual imperative and the political consistency of a postcolonial intellectual project. In a dazzling series of interdisciplinary essays he explains why the culture of Western modernity must be relocated from the postcolonial perspective.

Setting its argument in contexts as diverse as nineteenth-century colonial history, contemporary literary and psychoanalytic theory and the imperatives of minority cultures, *The Location of Culture* exploits and engenders those moments of ambivalence that structure social authority. Bhabha shows how the legitimating narratives of cultural domination can be displaced to reveal a 'third space'. Here, the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries *in-between* forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, location.

The Location of Culture discusses writers as diverse as Joseph Conrad, Toni Morrison, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott. The book revisits the archives of the Indian Mutiny and the traumatic terrain of *The Satanic Verses*, and rethinks questions of identity, social agency and national affiliation. Bhabha provides a theory of cultural hybridity and the 'translation' of social differences that goes beyond the polarities of Self and Other, East and West.

The Location of Culture is a unique and exciting volume, bringing together for the first time some of the most seminal writings in the field of literary theory and cultural criticism.

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For Naju and Kharshedji Bhabha

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INTERROGATING IDENTITY

Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative

I

To read Fanon is to experience the sense of division that prefigures – and fissures – the emergence of a truly radical thought that never dawns without casting an uncertain dark. Fanon is the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth. He may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change: from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality. His voice is most clearly heard in the subversive turn of a familiar term, in the silence of sudden rupture: *'The Negro is not. Any more than the white man.'*¹ The awkward division that breaks his line of thought keeps alive the dramatic and enigmatic sense of change. That familiar alignment of colonial subjects – Black/White, Self/Other – is disturbed with one brief pause and the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed, whenever they are found to rest in the narcissistic myths of negritude or white cultural supremacy. It is this palpable pressure of division and displacement that pushes Fanon's writing to the edge of things – the cutting edge that reveals no ultimate radiance but, in his words, 'exposed an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born'.²

The psychiatric hospital at Blida-Joinville is one such place where, in the divided world of French Algeria, Fanon discovered the impossibility of his mission as a colonial psychiatrist:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. . . . The social struc-

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ture existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.³

The extremity of this colonial alienation of the person – this end of the 'idea' of the individual – produces a restless urgency in Fanon's search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation. The body of his work splits between a Hegelian–Marxist dialectic, a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the Unconscious. In his desperate, doomed search for a dialectic of deliverance Fanon explores the edge of these modes of thought: his Hegelianism restores hope to history; his existentialist evocation of the 'I' restores the presence of the marginalized; his psychoanalytic framework illuminates the madness of racism, the pleasure of pain, the agonistic fantasy of political power.

As Fanon attempts such audacious, often impossible, transformations of truth and value, the jagged testimony of colonial dislocation, its displacement of time and person, its defilement of culture and territory, refuses the ambition of any total theory of colonial oppression. The Antillean *évolué* cut to the quick by the glancing look of a frightened, confused, white child; the stereotype of the native fixed at the shifting boundaries between barbarism and civility; the insatiable fear and desire for the Negro: 'Our women are at the mercy of Negroes . . . God knows how they make love';⁴ the deep cultural fear of the black figured in the psychic trembling of Western sexuality – it is these signs and symptoms of the colonial condition that drive Fanon from one conceptual scheme to another, while the colonial relation takes shape in the gaps between them, articulated to the intrepid engagements of his style. As Fanon's texts unfold, the scientific fact comes to be aggressed by the experience of the street; sociological observations are intercut with literary artefacts, and the poetry of liberation is brought up short against the leaden, deadening prose of the colonized world.

What is the distinctive *force* of Fanon's vision? It comes, I believe, from the tradition of the oppressed, the language of a revolutionary awareness that, as Walter Benjamin suggests, 'the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that is in keeping with this insight'.⁵ And the state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence*. The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole. The analysis of colonial depersonalization not only alienates the Enlightenment idea of 'Man', but challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge. If the order of Western historicism is disturbed in the colonial state of emergency, even more deeply disturbed is the social and psychic representation of the

human subject. For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that 'naked declivity' it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning. With a question that echoes Freud's 'What does woman want?', Fanon turns to confront the colonized world. 'What does a man want?' he asks, in the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*; 'What does the black man want?'

To this loaded question where cultural alienation bears down on the ambivalence of psychic identification, Fanon responds with an agonizing performance of self-images:

I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. . . . I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects. . . . I took myself far off from my own presence. . . . What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?⁶

From within the metaphor of vision complicit with a Western metaphysics of Man emerges the displacement of the colonial relation. The black presence runs the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space for the *Socius*; its present, dismembered and dislocated, will not contain the image of identity that is questioned in the dialectic of mind/body and resolved in the epistemology of appearance and reality. The white man's eyes break up the black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed.

'What does the black man want?' Fanon insists, and in privileging the psychic dimension he not only changes what we understand by a *political* demand but transforms the very means by which we recognize and identify its *human agency*. Fanon is not principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moments. He is not raising the question of colonial man in the universalist terms of the liberal-humanist (How does colonialism deny the Rights of Man?); nor is he posing an ontological question about Man's being (*Who* is the alienated colonial man?). Fanon's question is addressed not to such a unified notion of history nor to such a unitary concept of man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. Such a traditional sociological alignment of Self and Society or

History and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon's identification of the colonial subject who is historicized in the heterogeneous assemblage of the texts of history, literature, science, myth. The colonial subject is always 'overdetermined from without', Fanon writes.⁷ It is through image and fantasy – those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious – that Fanon most profoundly evokes the colonial condition.

In articulating the problem of colonial cultural alienation in the psychoanalytic language of demand and desire, Fanon radically questions the formation of both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of social sovereignty. The social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, the autonomy of individual consciousness assume an immediate, Utopian identity with the subjects on whom they confer a civil status. The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will – Law or Culture – where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression – madness, self-hate, treason, violence – can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man.

For Fanon such a myth of Man and Society is fundamentally undermined in the colonial situation. Everyday life exhibits a 'constellation of delirium' that mediates the normal social relations of its subjects: 'The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.'⁸ Fanon's demand for a psychoanalytic explanation emerges from the perverse reflections of civil virtue in the alienating acts of colonial governance: the visibility of cultural mummification in the colonizer's avowed ambition to civilize or modernize the native that results in 'archaic inert institutions [that function] under the oppressor's supervision like a caricature of formerly fertile institutions';⁹ or the validity of violence in the very definition of the colonial social space; or the viability of the febrile, phantasmic images of racial hatred that come to be absorbed and acted out in the wisdom of the West. These interpositions, indeed collaborations of political and psychic violence *within* civic virtue, alienation within identity, drive Fanon to describe the splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and society as marked by a 'Manichaeian delirium'.

The representative figure of such a perversion, I want to suggest, is the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. The ambivalent identification of the racist world – moving on two planes without being in the least embarrassed by it, as Sartre says of the anti-Semitic consciousness – turns on the idea of man as his alienated image; not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity. And it is that bizarre figure of desire, which splits along the axis on which it turns, that compels Fanon to put the psychoanalytic question of the desire of the subject to the historic condition of colonial man.

'What is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact,' Fanon writes.¹⁰ This transference speaks otherwise. It reveals the deep psychic uncertainty of the colonial relation itself: its split representations stage the division of body and soul that enacts the artifice of identity, a division that cuts across the fragile skin – black and white – of individual and social authority. Three conditions that underlie an understanding of the *process of identification* in the analytic of desire emerge.

First: to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus. It is a demand that reaches outward to an external object and as Jacqueline Rose writes, 'It is the relation of this demand to the place of the object it claims that becomes the basis for identification.'¹¹ This process is visible in the exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal: 'When their glances meet he [the settler] ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place.'¹² It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: the phantasmic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, and therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles.

Second: the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger. 'Black skin, white masks' is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *évolué* (an abandonment neurotic, Fanon claims) to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity: 'You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're *different*, you're one of *us*.' It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' – to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the

Unconscious speaks of the form of otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body. It is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges.

Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self-fulfilling* prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification – that is, to be *for* an Other – entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness. Identification, as we inferred from the preceding illustrations, is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes. For Fanon, like Lacan, the primary moments of such a repetition of the self lie in the desire of the look and the limits of language. The 'atmosphere of certain uncertainty' that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment.

II

Listen to my friend, the Bombay poet Adil Jussawalla, writing of the 'missing person' that haunts the identity of the postcolonial bourgeoisie:

No Satan
warmed in the electric coils of his creatures
or Gunga Din
will make him come before you.
To see an invisible man or a missing person,
trust no Eng. Lit. That
puffs him up, narrows his eyes,
scratches his fangs. Caliban
is still not IT.
But faintly pencilled
behind a shirt . . .
. . .
savage of no sensational paint,
fangs cancelled.¹³

As that voice falters listen to its echo in the verse of a black woman, descendant of slaves, writing of the diaspora:

We arrived in the Northern Hemisphere
when summer was set in its way
running from the flames that lit the sky

over the Plantation.

We were a straggle bunch of immigrants
in a lily white landscape.

...

One day I learnt
a secret art,
Invisible-Ness, it was called.

I think it worked
as even now you look
but never see me ...

Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt,
and to turn your dreams
to chaos.¹⁴

As these images fade, and the empty eyes endlessly hold their menacing gaze, listen finally to Edward Said's attempt to historicize their chaos of identity:

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. ... If the world has become immediately accessible to a Western citizen living in the electronic age, the Orient too has drawn nearer to him, and is now less a myth perhaps than a place criss-crossed by Western, especially American interests.¹⁵

I use these postcolonial portraits because they seize on the vanishing point of two familiar traditions in the discourse of identity: the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature; and the anthropological view of the difference of human identity as located in the division of Nature/Culture. In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other. This is neither the glassy essence of Nature, to use Richard Rorty's image, nor the leaden voice of 'ideological interpellation', as Louis Althusser suggests.

What is so graphically enacted in the moment of colonial identification is the splitting of the subject in its historical place of utterance: 'No Satan .../or Gunga Din/will make him come before you/To see an invisible man or a missing person,/trust no Eng. Lit.' (my emphases). What these repeated negations of identity dramatize, in their elision of the seeing eye that must contemplate what is missing or invisible, is the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision. By disrupting the stab-

ility of the ego, expressed in the equivalence between image and identity, the secret art of invisibility of which the migrant poet speaks changes the very terms of our recognition of the person.

This change is precipitated by the peculiar temporality whereby the subject cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it – 'as even now you look/but never see me' – so that the subject speaks, and is seen, from where it is *not*; and the migrant woman can subvert the perverse satisfaction of the racist, masculinist gaze that disavowed her presence, by presenting it with an anxious absence, a counter-gaze that turns the discriminatory look, which denies her cultural and sexual difference, back on itself.

The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject. In place of that 'I' – institutionalized in the visionary, authorial ideologies of *Eng. Lit.* or the notion of 'experience' in the empiricist accounts of slave history – there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me', a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self. The elision of the eye, represented in a narrative of negation and repetition – *no ... no ... never* – insists that the phrase of identity cannot be spoken, except by putting the eye/I in the impossible position of enunciation. *To see* a missing person, or *to look* at Invisibility, is to emphasize the subject's *transitive* demand for a *direct* object of self-reflection, a point of presence that would maintain its privileged enunciatory position *qua* subject. *To see a missing person* is to *transgress* that demand; the 'I' in the position of mastery is, at *that same time*, the place of its absence, its *re*-presentation. We witness the alienation of the eye through the sound of the signifier as the scopical desire (to look/to be looked at) emerges and is erased in the *feint* of *writing*:

But faintly pencilled
behind a shirt,
a trendy jacket or tie
if he catches your eye,
he'll come screaming at you like a jet –
savage of no sensational paint,
fangs cancelled.

Why does the faintly pencilled person fail to catch your eye? What is the secret of Invisibility that enables the woman migrant to look without being seen?

What is interrogated is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed. Through the progress of this

poem 'you' are continually positioned in the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist. So that you find yourself at the point at which the Orientalist stereotype is evoked and erased *at the same time*, in the place where Eng. Lit. is *entstellt* in the ironic mimicry of its Indo-Anglican repetition. And this space of reinscription must be thought outside of those metaphysical philosophies of self-doubt, where the otherness of identity is the anguished *presence* within the Self of an existentialist agony that emerges when you look perilously through a glass darkly.

What is profoundly unresolved, even erased, in the discourses of poststructuralism is that *perspective of depth* through which the authenticity of identity comes to be reflected in the glassy metaphors of the mirror and its mimetic or realist narratives. Shifting the frame of identity from the field of vision to the space of writing interrogates the third dimension that gives profundity to the representation of Self and Other – that depth of perspective that cineastes call the forth wall; literary theorists describe it as the transparency of realist metanarratives. Barthes brilliantly diagnoses this as *l'effet du réel*, the 'profound, geological dimension'¹⁶ of signification, achieved by arresting the linguistic sign in its *symbolic* function. The bilateral space of the symbolic consciousness, Barthes writes, massively privileges *resemblance*, constructs an *analogical* relation between signifier and signified that ignores the question of form, and creates a vertical dimension within the sign. In this scheme the signifier is always predetermined by the signified – that conceptual or real space that is placed prior to, and outside of, the act of signification.

From our point of view, this verticality is significant for the light it sheds on that *dimension of depth* that provides the language of Identity with its sense of reality – a measure of the 'me', which emerges from an acknowledgement of my inwardness, the depth of my character, the profundity of my person, to mention only a few of those qualities through which we commonly articulate our self-consciousness. My argument about the importance of *depth* in the representation of a unified image of the self is borne out by the most decisive and influential formulation on personal identity in the English empiricist tradition.

John Locke's famous criteria for the continuity of consciousness could quite legitimately be read in the symbolic register of resemblance and analogy. For the sameness of a rational being requires a consciousness of the past which is crucial to the argument – 'as far as this consciousness can be extended *backwards* to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person' – and is precisely the unifying third dimension. The agency of *depth* brings together in an analogical relation (dismissive of the differences that construct temporality and signification) 'that same consciousness uniting those distant actions into

the same person, *whatever substances contributed to their production*' (my emphasis).¹⁷

Barthes's description of the sign-as-symbol is conveniently analogous to the language we use to designate identity. At the same time, it sheds light on the concrete linguistic concepts with which we can grasp how the language of personhood comes to be invested with a visibility or visibility of depth. This makes the moment of self-consciousness at once refracted and transparent; the question of identity always poised uncertainly, tenebrously, between shadow and substance. The symbolic consciousness gives the sign (of the Self) a sense of autonomy or solitariness 'as if it stands by itself in the world' privileging an individuality and a unitariness whose integrity is expressed in a certain richness of agony and anomie. Barthes calls it a mythic prestige, almost totemic in 'its form [which is] constantly exceeded by the power and movement of its content; . . . much less a codified form of communication than an (affective) instrument of participation.'¹⁸

This image of human identity and, indeed, human identity as *image* – both familiar frames or mirrors of selfhood that speak from deep within Western culture – are inscribed in the sign of resemblance. The analogical relation unifies the experience of self-consciousness by finding, within the mirror of nature, the symbolic certitude of the sign of culture based 'on an analogy with the compulsion to believe when staring at an object'.¹⁹ This, as Rorty writes, is part of the West's obsession that our primary relation to objects and ourselves is analogous to visual perception. Pre-eminent among these representations has been the reflection of the self that develops in the symbolic consciousness of the sign. It marks out the discursive space from which *The real Me* emerges (initially as an assertion of the authenticity of the person) and then lingers on to reverberate – *The real Me?* – as a questioning of identity.

My purpose here is to define the space of the inscription or writing of identity – beyond the visual depths of Barthes's symbolic sign. The experience of the disseminating self-image goes beyond representation as the analogical consciousness of resemblance. This is not a form of dialectical contradiction, the antagonistic consciousness of master and slave, that can be sublated and transcended. The impasse or aporia of consciousness that seems to be the representative postmodernist experience is a peculiar strategy of doubling.

Each time the encounter with identity occurs at the point at which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as site of identity and autonomy and – most important – leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance. We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which

the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics.

In place of the symbolic consciousness that gives the sign of identity its integrity and unity, its *depth*, we are faced with a dimension of doubling; a spatialization of the subject, that is occluded in the illusory perspective of what I have called the 'third dimension' of the mimetic frame or visual image of identity. The figure of the double – to which I now turn – cannot be contained within the analogical sign of resemblance; as Barthes said, this developed its totemic, vertical dimension only because 'what interests it in the sign is the signified: the signifier is always a determined element.'²⁰ For poststructuralist discourse, the priority (and play) of the signifier reveals the space of doubling (not depth) that is the very articulatory principle of discourse. It is through that space of enunciation that problems of meaning and being enter the discourses of poststructuralism, as the problematic of subjection and identification.

What emerges in the preceding poems, as the line drawing of trendy jacket and tie, or the eerie, avengeful disembodied eye, must not be read as a revelation of some suppressed truth of the postcolonial psyche/subject. In the world of double inscriptions that we have now entered, in this space of *writing*, there can be no such immediacy of a visualist perspective, no such face-to-face epiphanies in the mirror of nature. On one level, what confronts you, the reader, in the incomplete portrait of the postcolonial bourgeois – who looks uncannily like the metropolitan intellectual – is the ambivalence of your desire for the Other: 'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!'

That disturbance of your voyeuristic look enacts the complexity and contradictions of your desire to see, to fix cultural difference in a containable, *visible* object. The desire for the Other is doubled by the desire in language, which *splits the difference* between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself. As I have just shown in the portrait of the missing person, the very question of identification only emerges *in-between* disavowal and designation. It is performed in the agonistic struggle between the epistemological, visual demand for a knowledge of the Other, and its representation in the act of articulation and enunciation.

Look, a Negro . . . Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened . . . I could no longer laugh, because I already know where there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*. . . Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. . . It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. . . I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.²¹

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* reveals the doubling of identity: the difference between personal identity as an intimation of reality, or an intuition of being, and the psychoanalytic problem of identification that always begs the question of the subject: 'What does a man want?' The emergence of the human subject as socially and psychically authenticated depends on the *negation* of an originary narrative of fulfilment, or of an imaginary coincidence between individual interest or instinct and the General Will. Such binary, two-part, identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other, confronted in the language of desire by the psychoanalytic process of identification. For identification, identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality. The discursive conditions of this psychic image of identification will be clarified if we think of the perilous perspective of the concept of the image itself. For the image – as point of identification – marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split – it makes *present* something that is *absent* – and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition.

The image is only ever an *appurtenance* to authority and identity; it must never be read mimetically as the appearance of a reality. The access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the *negation* of any sense of originality or plenitude; the process of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence, representation/repetition) renders it a liminal reality. The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss. It is precisely from this edge of meaning and being, from this shifting boundary of otherness within identity, that Fanon asks: 'What does a *black* man want?'

When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire. . . . As soon as I desire I ask to be considered. I am not merely here and now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity in so far as I pursue something other than life. . . .

I occupied space. I moved towards the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile, but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea.²²

From that overwhelming emptiness of nausea Fanon makes his answer: the black man wants the objectifying confrontation with otherness; in the colonial psyche there is an unconscious disavowal of the negating, splitting moment of desire. The place of the Other must not be imaged, as Fanon sometimes suggests, as a fixed phenomenological point opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien conscious-

ness. The Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity – cultural or psychic – that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality. If, as I have suggested, the subject of desire is never simply a *Myself*, then the Other is never simply an *It-self*, a front of identity, truth or misrecognition.

As a principle of identification, the Other bestows a degree of objectivity, but its representation – be it the social process of the Law or the psychic process of the Oedipus – is always ambivalent, disclosing a lack. For instance, the common, conversational distinction between the letter and spirit of the Law displays the otherness of Law itself; the ambiguous grey area between Justice and judicial procedure is, quite literally, a conflict of judgement. In the language of psychoanalysis, the Law of the Father or the paternal metaphor cannot be taken at its word. It is a process of substitution and exchange that inscribes a normative, normalizing place for the subject; but that metaphoric access to identity is exactly the place of prohibition and repression, a conflict of authority. Identification, as it is spoken in the *desire of the Other*, is always a question of interpretation, for it is the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self, the elision of person and place.

If the differentiating force of the Other is the process of the subject's signification in language and society's objectification in Law, then how can the Other disappear? Can desire, the moving spirit of the subject, ever evanesce?

III

Lacan's excellent, if cryptic, suggestion that 'the Other is a dual entry matrix'²³ should be understood as the partial erasure of the *depth perspective* of the symbolic sign; through the circulation of the signifier in its doubling and displacing, the signifier permits the sign no reciprocal, binary division of form/content, superstructure/infrastructure, self/other. It is only by understanding the ambivalence and the antagonism of the desire of the Other that we can avoid the increasingly facile adoption of the notion of a homogenized Other, for a celebratory, oppositional politics of the margins or minorities.

The performance of the doubleness or splitting of the subject is enacted in the *writing* of the poems I have quoted; it is evident in the play on the metonymic figures of 'missing' and 'invisibleness' around which their questioning of identity turns. It is articulated in those iterative instances that simultaneously mark the possibility and impossibility of identity, presence through absence. 'Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt,' warns Meiling Jin as that threatening part object, the disembodied eye – the evil eye – becomes the subject of a violent

discourse of *ressentiment*. Here, phantasmic and (pre)figurative rage erases the naturalistic identities of I and We that narrate a more conventional, even realist history of colonial exploitation and metropolitan racism, within the poem.

The moment of seeing that is arrested in the evil eye inscribes a timelessness, or a freezing of time – 'remain/to watch and to haunt' – that can only be represented in the destruction of the *depth* associated with the sign of symbolic consciousness. It is a depth that comes from what Barthes describes as the *analogical* relation between superficial form and massive *Abgrund*: the 'relation of form and content [as] ceaselessly renewed by time (history); the superstructure overwhelmed by the infrastructure, without our ever being able to grasp the structure itself.'²⁴

The eyes that remain – the eyes as a kind of *remainder*, producing an iterative process – cannot be part of this plenitudinous and progressive renewal of time or history. They are the signs of a structure of *writing* history, a *history* of the poetics of postcolonial diaspora, that the symbolic consciousness could never grasp. Most significantly, these partial eyes bear witness to a woman's writing of the postcolonial condition. Their circulation and repetition frustrate both the voyeuristic desire for the fixity of sexual difference and the fetishistic desire for racist stereotypes. The gaze of the evil eye alienates *both* the narratorial I of the slave and the surveillant eye of the master. It unsettles any simplistic polarities or binarisms in identifying the exercise of power – Self/Other – and erases the analogical dimension in the articulation of sexual difference. It is empty of that depth of verticality that creates a totemic resemblance of form and content (*Abgrund*) ceaselessly renewed and replenished by the groundspring of history. The evil eye – like the missing person – is nothing in itself; and it is this *structure of difference* that produces the hybridity of race and sexuality in the postcolonial discourse.

The elision of identity in these tropes of the 'secret art of Invisibleness' from which these writers speak is not an ontology of lack that, on its other side, becomes a nostalgic demand for a liberatory, non-repressed identity. It is the uncanny space and time *between* those two moments of being, their incommensurable differences – if such a place can be imagined – signified in the process of repetition, that give the evil eye or the missing person their meaning. Meaningless in/as themselves, these figures initiate the rhetorical excess of social reality and the psychic reality of social fantasy. Their poetic and political force develops through a certain strategy of duplicity or doubling (not resemblance, in Barthes's sense), which Lacan has elaborated as 'the process of gap' within which the relation of subject to Other is produced.²⁵ The primary duplicity of the missing person pencilled in before your eyes, or the woman's eyes that watch and haunt, is this: although these images emerge with a certain fixity and finality in the *present*, as if they are the last word on

the subject, they cannot identify or interpellate identity as *presence*. This is because they are created in the ambivalence of a double time of iteration that, in Derrida's felicitous phrase, 'baffles the process of appearing by dislocating any orderly time at the center of the present'.²⁶ The effect of such baffling, in both poems, is to initiate a principle of undecidability in the signification of part and whole, past and present, self and Other, such that there can be no negation or transcendence of difference.

The naming of the missing person as 'Savage of no sensational paint' is a case in point. The phrase, spoken at the end of Adil Jussawalla's poem, neither simply returns us to the Orientalist discourse of stereotypes and exotica – Gunga Din – enshrined in the history of Eng. Lit., nor allows us to rest with the line drawing of the missing person. The reader is positioned – together with the enunciation of the question of identity – in an undecidable space between 'desire and fulfillment, between perpetration and its recollection. . . . Neither future nor present, but between the two.'²⁷ The repetition of the Orientalia and their imperialist past are re-presented, made present semantically, within the same time and utterance as that in which their representations are negated syntactically – 'no sensational paint/*Fangs cancelled*.' From that erasure, in the repetition of that 'no', without being articulated at all in the phrase itself, emerges the faintly pencilled presence of the missing person who, *in absentia*, is both present in, and constitutive of, the savagery. Can you tell the postcolonial bourgeois and the Western intellectual elite apart? How does the repetition of a part of speech – no! – turn the image of civility into the double of savagery? What part does the feint of writing play in evoking these faint figures of identity? And, finally, where do *we* stand in that uncanny echo between what may be described as the attenuation of identity and its simulacra?

These questions demand a double answer. In each of them I have posed a theoretical problem in terms of its political and social effects. It is the boundary between them that I have tried to explore in my vacillations between the texture of poetry and a certain textuality of identity. One answer to my questions would be to say that we now stand at the point in the poststructuralist argument where we can see the doubleness of its own grounds: the uncanny sameness-in-difference, or the alterity of Identity of which these theories speak, and from which, in forked tongues, they communicate with each other to constitute those discourses that we name postmodernist. The rhetoric of repetition or doubling that I have traced displays the art of *becoming* through a certain metonymic logic disclosed in the 'evil eye' or the 'missing person'. Metonymy, a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole (an eye for an I), must not be read as a form of simple substitution or equivalence. Its circulation of part and whole, identity and difference,

must be understood as a *double movement* that follows what Derrida calls the logic or play of the 'supplement':

If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement [evil eye] is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes – the – place*. As substitute . . . [missing person] . . . it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere something can be filled up of itself . . . only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy.²⁸

Having illustrated, through my reading of the poems above, the supplementary nature of the subject, I want to focus on the subaltern instance of metonymy, which is the *proxy* of both presence and the present: time (*takes place on*) and space (*takes place of . . .*) at once. To conceptualize this complex doubling of time and space, as the site of enunciation, and the temporal conditionality of social discourse, is both the thrill and the threat of the poststructuralist and postmodernist discourses. How different is this representation of the sign from the symbolic consciousness where, as Barthes said, the relation of form and content is ceaselessly renewed by Time (as the *Abgrund* of the historical)? The evil eye, which seeks to outstare linear, continuist history and turn its progressive dream into nightmarish chaos, is exemplary once more. What Meiling Jin calls 'the secret art of Invisible-Ness' creates a crisis in the representation of personhood and, at the critical moment, initiates the possibility of political subversion. Invisibility erases the self-presence of that 'I' in terms of which traditional concepts of political agency and narrative mastery function. What *takes (the) place*, in Derrida's supplementary sense, is the disembodied evil eye, the subaltern instance, that wreaks its revenge by circulating, *without being seen*. It cuts across the boundaries of master and slave; it opens up a space *in-between* the poem's two locations, the Southern Hemisphere of slavery and the Northern Hemisphere of diaspora and migration, which then become uncannily doubled in the phantasmic scenario of the political unconscious. This doubling resists the traditional causal link that explains contemporary metropolitan racism as a result of the historical prejudices of imperialist nations. What it does suggest is the possibility of a new understanding of both forms of racism, based on their shared symbolic and spatial structures – Fanon's Manichaean structure – articulated within different temporal, cultural and power relations.

The *anti-dialectical* movement of the subaltern instance subverts any binary or sublatory ordering of power and sign; it defers the object of the look – 'as even now you look/but never see me' – and endows it with a strategic motion, which we may here, analogously, name the movement of the death drive. The evil eye, which is nothing in itself,

exists in its lethal traces or effects as a form of iteration that arrests time – death/chaos – and initiates a space of *intercutting* that articulates politics/psyche, sexuality/race. It does this in a relation that is differential and strategic rather than originary, ambivalent rather than accumulative, doubling rather than dialectical. The play of the evil eye is camouflaged, invisible in the common, on-going activity of looking – making present, while it is implicated in the petrifying, unblinking gaze that falls Medusa-like on its victims – dealing death, extinguishing both presence and the present. There is a specifically feminist re-presentation of political subversion in this strategy of the evil eye. The disavowal of the position of the migrant woman – her social and political *invisibility* – is used by her in her secret art of revenge, *mimicry*. In that overlap of signification – in that fold of identification as cultural and sexual difference – the ‘I’ is the initial, initiatory signature of the subject; and the ‘eye’ (in its metonymic repetition) is the sign that initiates the terminal, arrest, death:

as even now you look
but never see me . . .
Only my eyes will remain to haunt,
and to turn your dreams
to chaos.

It is in this overlapping space between the fading of identity and its faint inscription that I take my stand on the subject, amidst a celebrated gathering of poststructuralist thinkers. Although there are significant differences between them, I want to focus here on their attention to the place from which the subject speaks or is spoken.

For Lacan – who has used the arrest of the evil eye in his analysis of the gaze – this is the moment of ‘temporal pulsation’: ‘[The signifier in the field of the Other] petrif[ies] the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to speak as subject.’²⁹

Foucault repeats something of the same uncanny movement of doubling when he elaborates on the ‘quasi-invisibility of the statement’:

Perhaps it is like the over-familiar that constantly eludes one; those familiar transparencies, which although they conceal nothing in their density, are nevertheless not entirely clear. The enunciative level emerges in its very proximity. . . . It has this quasi-invisibility of the ‘there is,’ which is effaced in the very thing of which one can say: ‘there is this or that thing. . . .’ Language always seems to be inhabited by the other, the elsewhere, the distant; it is hollowed out by distance.³⁰

Lyotard holds on to the pulsating beat of the time of utterance when he discusses the narrative of Tradition:

Tradition is that which concerns time, not content. Whereas what the West wants from autonomy, invention, novelty, self-determination, is the opposite – to forget time and to preserve, and accumulate contents. To turn them into what we call history and to think that it progresses because it accumulates. On the contrary, in the case of popular traditions . . . nothing gets accumulated, that is the narratives must be repeated all the time because they are forgotten all the time. But what does not get forgotten is the temporal beat that does not stop sending the narratives to oblivion.

...
This is a situation of continuous embedding, which makes it impossible to find a first utterer.³¹

IV

I may be accused of a form of linguistic or theoretical formalism, of establishing a rule of metonymy or the supplement and laying down the oppressive, even universalist, law of difference or doubling. How does the poststructuralist attention to *écriture* and textuality influence my experience of myself? Not directly, I would answer, but then, have our fables of identity ever been unmediated by another; have they ever been more (or less) than a detour through the word of God, or the writ of Law, or the Name of the Father; the totem, the fetish, the telephone, the superego, the voice of the analyst, the closed ritual of the weekly confessional or the ever open ear of the monthly *coiffeuse*?

I am reminded of the problem of self-portraiture in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, of which Lacan produces a startling reading. The two still figures stand at the centre of their world, surrounded by the accoutrements of *vanitas* – a globe, a lute, books and compasses, unfolding wealth. They also stand in the moment of temporal instantaneity where the Cartesian subject emerges as the subjectifying relation of geometrical perspective, described above as the *depth* of the image of identity. But off-centre, in the foreground (violating the meaningful depths of the *Abgrund*), there is a flat spherical object, obliquely angled. As you walk away from the portrait and turn to leave, you see that the disc is a skull, the reminder (and remainder) of death, that makes visible nothing more than the alienation of the subject, the anamorphic ghost.³²

Doesn’t the logic of the supplement – in its repetition and doubling – produce a historylessness; a ‘culture’ of theory that makes it impossible to give meaning to historical specificity? This is a large question that I can only answer here by proxy, by citing a text remarkable for its postcolonial specificity and for its questioning of what we might mean by cultural specificity:

A- 's a giggle now
 but on it Osiris, Ra.
 An अ an er ... a cough,
 once speaking your valleys with light.
 But the a's here to stay.
 On it St. Pancras station,
 the Indian and African railways.
 That's why you learn it today.

...
 'Get back to your language,' they say.

These lines come from an early section of Adil Jussawalla's poem 'Missing Person'. They provide an insight into the fold between the cultural and linguistic conditions articulated in the textual economy that I have described as the metonymic or the supplementary. The discourse of poststructuralism has largely been spelled out in an intriguing repetition of *a*, whether it is Lacan's *petit objet a* or Derrida's *différance*. Observe, then, the agency of this postcolonial *a*.

There is something supplementary about *a* that makes it the initial letter of the Roman alphabet and, at the same time, the indefinite article. What is dramatized in this circulation of the *a* is a double scene on a double stage, to borrow a phrase from Derrida. The A - with which the verse begins - is the sign of a linguistic objectivity, inscribed in the Indo-European language tree, institutionalized in the cultural disciplines of empire; and yet as the Hindi vowel अ, which is the first letter of the Hindi alphabet and is pronounced as 'er', testifies, the object of linguistic science is always already in an enunciatory process of cultural translation, showing up the hybridity of any genealogical or systematic filiation.

Listen: 'An अ an er ... a cough': in the same time, we hear the *a* repeated in translation, not as an object of linguistics, but in the *act* of the colonial enunciation of cultural contestation. This double scene articulates the ellipsis ... which marks the *différance* between the Hindi sign अ and the demotic English signifier - 'er, a cough'. It is through the emptiness of ellipsis that the difference of colonial culture is articulated as a *hybridity* acknowledging that all cultural specificity is belated, *different unto itself* - अ... er ... ugh! Cultures come to be represented by virtue of the processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are very vicariously addressed to - *through* - an Other. This erases any essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures which, when inscribed in the naturalistic sign of symbolic consciousness frequently become political arguments for the hierarchy and ascendancy of powerful cultures.³⁵ It is in this hybrid gap, which produces no relief, that the colonial subject *takes place*, its subaltern

position inscribed in that space of iteration where अ takes (the) place of 'er'.

If this sounds like a schematic, poststructuralist joke - 'it's all words, words, words ...' - then I must remind you of the linguistic insistence in Clifford Geertz's influential statement that the experience of understanding other cultures is 'more like grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke [or as I have suggested reading a poem] than it is like achieving communion.'³⁴ My insistence on locating the postcolonial subject *within* the play of the subaltern instance of writing is an attempt to develop Derrida's passing remark that the history of the decentred subject and its dislocation of European metaphysics is concurrent with the emergence of the problematic of cultural difference within ethnology.³⁵ He acknowledges the political nature of this moment but leaves it to us to specify it in the postcolonial text:

'Wiped out,' they say.
 Turn left or right,
 there's millions like you up here,
 picking their way through refuse,
 looking for words they lost.
 You're your country's lost property
 with no office to claim you back.
 You're polluting our sounds. You're so rude.
 'Get back to your language,' they say.³⁶

Embedded in these statements is a cultural politics of diaspora and paranoia, of migration and discrimination, of anxiety and appropriation, which is unthinkable without attention to those metonymic or subaltern moments that structure the subject of writing and meaning. Without the doubleness that I described in the postcolonial play of the 'a अ', it would be difficult to understand the anxiety provoked by the hybridizing of language, activated in the anguish associated with vacillating *boundaries* - psychic, cultural, territorial - of which these verses speak. Where do you draw the line between languages? between cultures? between disciplines? between peoples?

I have suggested here that a subversive political line is drawn in a certain poetics of 'invisibility', 'ellipsis', the evil eye and the missing person - all instances of the 'subaltern' in the Derridean sense, and near enough to the sense that Gramsci gives the concept: '[not simply an oppressed group] but lacking autonomy, subjected to the influence or hegemony of another social group, not possessing one's own hegemonic position.'³⁷ It is with this difference between the two usages that notions of autonomy and domination within the hegemonic would have to be carefully rethought, in the light of what I have said about the *proxy*-mate nature of any claim to *presence* or autonomy. However, what is

implicit in both concepts of the subaltern, as I read it, is a strategy of ambivalence in the structure of identification that occurs precisely in the elliptical *in-between*, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self.

From that shadow (in which the postcolonial *a* plays) emerges cultural difference as an *enunciative* category; opposed to relativistic notions of cultural diversity, or the exoticism of the 'diversity' of cultures. It is the 'between' that is articulated in the camouflaged subversion of the 'evil eye' and the transgressive mimicry of the 'missing person'. The force of cultural difference is, as Barthes once said of the practice of metonymy, 'the violation of a signifying *limit of space*, it permits on the very level of discourse, a counterdivision of objects, usages, meanings, spaces and properties' (my emphasis).³⁸

It is by placing the violence of the poetic sign *within* the threat of political violation that we can understand the powers of language. Then, we can grasp the importance of the imposition of the imperial *a* as the cultural condition for the very movement of empire, its *logomotion* – the colonial creation of the Indian and African railways as the poet wrote. Now, we can begin to see why the threat of the (mis)translation of *Ἀ* and 'er', among the displaced and diasporic peoples who pick through the refuse, is a constant reminder to the postimperial West, of the hybridity of its mother tongue, and the heterogeneity of its national space.

V

In his analytic mode Fanon explores such questions of the ambivalence of colonial inscription and identification. The state of emergency from which he writes demands insurgent answers, more immediate identifications. Fanon frequently attempts a close correspondence between the *mise-en-scène* of unconscious fantasy and the phantoms of racist fear and hate that stalk the colonial scene; he turns from the ambivalences of identification to the antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination. There are times when he is too quick to name the Other, to personalize its presence in the language of colonial racism – 'the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely.'³⁹ Restoring the dream to its proper political time and cultural space can, at times, blunt the edge of Fanon's brilliant illustrations of the complexity of the psychic projections in the pathological colonial relation. Jean Veneuse, the Antillean *évolué*, desires not merely to be in the place of the white man but compulsively seeks to look back and down on himself from that position. Equally, the white racist cannot merely deny what he fears and desires by projecting it on 'them'. Fanon sometimes forgets that social paranoia does not indefi-

nately authorize its projections. The compulsive, fantasmatic identification with a persecutory 'they' is accompanied, even undermined, by an emptying, an evacuation of the racist 'I' who projects.

Fanon's sociodiagnostic psychiatry tends to explain away the ambivalent turns and returns of the subject of colonial desire, its masquerade of Western Man and the 'long' historical perspective. It is as if Fanon is fearful of his most radical insights: that the politics of race will not be entirely contained within the humanist myth of man or economic necessity or historical progress, for its psychic affects question such forms of determinism; that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are only realizable in the order of otherness. It is as if the question of desire that emerged from the traumatic tradition of the oppressed has to be modified, at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, to make way for an existentialist humanism that is as banal as it is beatific:

Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? . . . At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness.⁴⁰

Despite Fanon's insight into the dark side of man, such a deep hunger for humanism must be an overcompensation for the closed consciousness or 'dual narcissism' to which he attributes the depersonalization of colonial man: 'There one lies body to body, with one's blackness or one's whiteness in full narcissistic cry, each sealed into his own particularity – with, it is true, now and then a flash or so.'⁴¹ It is this flash of recognition – in its Hegelian sense with its transcendental, sublimative spirit – that fails to ignite in the colonial relation where there is only narcissistic indifference: 'And yet the Negro knows there is a difference. He wants it. . . . The former slave needs a challenge to his humanity.'⁴² In the absence of such a challenge, Fanon argues, the colonized can only imitate, a distinction nicely made by the psychoanalyst Annie Reich: 'It is imitation . . . when the child holds the newspaper *like* his father. It is identification when the child learns to read.'⁴³ In disavowing the culturally differentiated condition of the colonial world – in demanding 'Turn white or disappear' – the colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoid identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution.

However, Fanon's Hegelian dream for a human reality *in-itself-for-itself* is ironized, even mocked, by his view of the Manichaean structure of colonial consciousness and its non-dialectical division. What he says in *The Wretched of the Earth* of the demography of the colonial city reflects his view of the psychic structure of the colonial relation. The native and settler zones, like the juxtaposition of black and white bodies,

are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. No conciliation is possible, he concludes, for of the two terms one is superfluous.

No, there can be no reconciliation, no Hegelian recognition, no simple, sentimental promise of a humanistic 'world of the You'. Can there be life without transcendence? Politics without the dream of perfectibility? Unlike Fanon, I think the *non-dialectical* moment of Manichaeism suggests an answer. By following the trajectory of colonial desire – in the company of the bizarre colonial figure, the tethered shadow – it becomes possible to cross, even to shift the Manichaean boundaries. Where there is no human *nature*, hope can hardly spring eternal; but it emerges surely and surreptitiously in the strategic return of that difference that informs and deforms the image of identity, in the margin of otherness that displays identification. There may be no Hegelian negation, but Fanon must sometimes be reminded that the disavowal of the Other always exacerbates the edge of identification, reveals that dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned. For denial is always a retroactive process; a half acknowledgement of that otherness has left its traumatic mark.

In that uncertainty lurks the white-masked black man; and from such ambivalent identification – black skin, white masks – it is possible, I believe, to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion. We cannot agree with Fanon that 'since the racial drama is played out in the open the black man has no time to make it unconscious',⁴⁴ but that is a provocative thought. In occupying two places at once – or three in Fanon's case – the depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects. For the strategy of colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point which the black man *slips* to reveal the white skin. At the edge, in-between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire, which is the psychic counterpart to that muscular tension that inhabits the native body:

The symbols of social order – the police, the bugle calls in the barracks, military parades and waving flags – are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message 'Don't dare to budge'; rather, they cry out 'Get ready to attack.'⁴⁵

It is from such tensions – both psychic and political – that a strategy of subversion emerges. It is a mode of negation that seeks not to unveil the fullness of Man but to manipulate his representation. It is a form of power that is exercised at the very limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image; it is the lesson taught by the

veiled Algerian woman in the course of the revolution as she crossed the Manichaean lines to claim her liberty. In Fanon's essay 'Algeria unveiled' the colonizer's attempt to unveil the Algerian woman does not simply turn the veil into a symbol of resistance; it becomes a technique of camouflage, a means of struggle – the veil conceals bombs. The veil that once secured the boundary of the home – the limits of woman – now masks the woman in her revolutionary activity, linking the Arab city and French quarter, transgressing the familial and colonial boundary. As the veil is liberated in the public sphere, circulation between and beyond cultural and social norms and spaces, it becomes the object of paranoid surveillance and interrogation. Every veiled woman, writes Fanon, became suspect. And when the veil is shed in order to penetrate deeper into the European quarter, the colonial police see everything and nothing. An Algerian woman is only, after all, a woman. But the Algerian *fidai* is an arsenal, and in her handbag she carries her hand grenades.

Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. It is such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity, that Fanon reveals with greater profundity and poetry than any other writer. What he achieves, I believe, is something far greater: for in seeing the phobic image of the Negro, the native, the colonized, deeply woven into the psychic pattern of the West, he offers the master and slave a deeper reflection of their interpositions, as well as the hope of a difficult, even dangerous, freedom: 'It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world'.⁴⁶

This leads to a meditation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation – psychic and social – which speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who have to live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference. In shifting the focus of cultural racism from the politics of nationalism to the politics of narcissism, Fanon opens up a margin of interrogation that causes a subversive slippage of identity and authority. Nowhere is this subaltern activity more visible than in his work itself, where a range of texts and traditions – from the classical repertoire to the quotidian, conversational culture of racism – vie to utter that last word that remains unspoken.

As a range of culturally and racially marginalized groups readily assume the mask of the black, or the position of the minority, not to deny their diversity, but audaciously to announce the important artifice

of cultural identity and its difference, the need for Fanon becomes urgent. As political groups from different directions, refuse to homogenize their oppression, but make of it a common cause, a public image of the identity of otherness, the need for Fanon becomes urgent – urgent, in order to remind us of that crucial engagement between mask and identity, image and identification, from which comes the lasting tension of our freedom and the lasting impression of ourselves as others:

In case of display . . . the play of combat in the form of intimidation, the being gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield. It is through this separated form of himself that the being comes into play in his effects of life and death.⁴⁷

The time has come to return to Fanon; as always, I believe, with a question: how can the human world live its difference; how can a human being live Other-wise?

VI

I have chosen to give poststructuralism a specifically postcolonial provenance in order to engage with an influential objection repeated by Terry Eagleton in his essay, 'The politics of subjectivity':

We have as yet no political theory, or theory of the subject, which is capable in this dialectical way of grasping social transformation as at once diffusion and affirmation, the death and birth of the subject – or at least we have no such theories that are not vacuously apocalyptic.⁴⁸

Taking my lead from the 'doubly inscribed' subaltern instance, I would argue that it is the *dialectical* hinge between the birth and death of the subject that needs to be interrogated. Perhaps the charge that a politics of the subject results in a vacuous apocalypse is itself a response to the poststructuralist probing of the notion of progressive negation – or sublation – in dialectical thinking. The subaltern or metonymic are *neither* empty nor full, *neither* part nor whole. Their compensatory and vicarious processes of signification are a spur to social translation, the production of something else *besides* which is not only the cut or gap of the subject but also the intercut across social sites and disciplines. This hybridity initiates the project of political thinking by continually facing it with the strategic and the contingent, with the countervailing thought of its own 'unthought'. It has to negotiate its goals through an acknowledgement of differential objects and discursive levels articulated not simply as contents but in their *address* as forms of textual or narrative

subjections – be they governmental, judicial or artistic. Despite its firm commitments, the political must always pose as a problem, or a question, the *priority of the place from which it begins*, if its authority is not to become autocratic.

What must be left an open question is how we are to rethink ourselves once we have undermined the immediacy and autonomy of self-consciousness. It is not difficult to question the civil argument that the people are a conjugation of individuals, harmonious *under* the Law. We can dispute the political argument that the radical, vanguardist part and its masses represent a certain objectification in a historical process or stage, of social transformation. What remains to be thought is the *repetitious* desire to recognize ourselves doubly, as, at once, decentred in the solidary processes of the political group, and yet, ourselves as a consciously committed, even individuated, agent of change – the bearer of belief. What is this ethical pressure to 'account for ourselves' – but only *partially* – within a political theatre of agonism, bureaucratic obfuscation, violence and violation? Is this political desire for partial identification beautifully human, even pathetic attempt to disavow the realization that, *betwixt and besides* the lofty dreams of political thinking, there exists an acknowledgement, somewhere between fact and fantasy, that the techniques and technologies of politics need not be *humanizing* at all, no way endorsing of what we understand to be the human – humanist – predicament. We may have to force the limits of the social as we know it to rediscover a sense of political and personal agency through the unthought within the civic and the psychic realms. This may be a place to end but it may be a place to begin.

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

[F]or some of us the principle of indeterminism is what makes the conscious freedom of man fathomable.

Jacques Derrida, 'My chances' / 'Mes chances'¹

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'.²

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 *museé 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 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 sublimate the otherness (alterity) that constitutes the symbolic domain of psychic and social identifications. The incommensurability 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).³

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 sublimate 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 post-colonial.

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 *synechdochical* 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-accentual, 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

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(ity) – 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/theirs) 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

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.¹¹

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’.¹² 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.¹³ More recently, Houston A. Baker, Jr, has made a spirited argument against ‘high cultural’ sentimentousness 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*.¹⁴ 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’.¹⁵

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:

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'²¹ – 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 signifier 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

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'.²² This disturbs what Derrida calls the occidental stereotomy, the ontological, circumscribing space between subject and object, inside and outside.²³ 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)'.²⁴ 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 borderlines, 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

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

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 Žižek, *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 identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking. It singularizes 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 closure 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 sentence, 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 productively realized in the work of Spillers, McDowell, Baker, Gates and Gilroy, all of whom emphasize the importance of the creative heterogeneity 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

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'.³⁷

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, collectivite 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.³⁸

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.'³⁹

THE SOCIAL TEXT: BAKHTIN AND ARENDT

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.⁴⁰ 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. . . .⁴⁴

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'.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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'.⁴⁸ 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'.⁴⁹

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'.⁵⁰ 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'.⁵¹

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

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,⁵⁶ 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*.'⁵⁷

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.'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'.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 signifier: 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 *Subaltern Studies* would not support.⁶⁰

Is the contingent structure of agency not similar to what Frantz Fanon describes as the knowledge of the practice of action?⁶¹ Fanon argues that the primitive Manichaeism 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

popular opinion'.⁶² 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, the night-time of love, 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'.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴

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'.⁶⁵ 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

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 repetitious 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 contiguity of his argument

– 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 transference 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.'⁷⁰

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 transference 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.'⁷¹

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.