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## *Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt*

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Sliding off his banquette in a gay bar in Tangiers, Roland Barthes, the semiotic pedagogue, attempts “to enumerate the stereophony of languages within earshot”: music, conversations, the sound of chairs, glasses, Arabic, French, the high notes of the English expatriates, when suddenly the inner speech of the writer turns into the exorbitant space of the Moroccan sook. “Through me passed words, tiny syntagms, bits of formulae and *no sentence formed* . . . It set up in me 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: *outside the sentence*” (1975, p. 49). At the point at which the hierarchy and the subordinations of the sentence are replaced by the definitive discontinuity of the text, at that point, the subject of discourse spatializes and moves beyond the sententious. It turns “outside” the sentence to inscribe the boundaries of meaning (not its depths) but in the affective language of cultural difference. This speech, Barthes writes, “of which Tangiers was the exemplary site, was at once very cultural and very savage”; being drunk in Tangiers reminds him, *après-coup*, of dreaming in Paris. The dream-work “makes *everything in me which is not strange, foreign, speak*: the dream is an uncivil anecdote made up of very civilized sentiments” (1975, p. 60).

From the unconscious of cultural difference and sexual difference, Barthes enacts a kind of affectivity that is outside the “sentence,” completely social and sentient, but not sententious. Barthes derives a language of performativity to contest the pedagogical. Writing aloud is the hybrid he proposes in language lined with flesh, the metonymic art of the articulation of the body not as pure presence of Voice, but as a kind of affective writing, after the sumptuousness or suffering of the signifier. And it is, coincidentally, this very passage that André Green, the psychoanalyst, uses to demonstrate the affectivity of the relation of transference in psychoanalysis. This affectivity exceeds the linearity of the written or spoken transference and allows us to grasp the space of the body in writing as a kind of present-absence or absent-presence: a “word-thing and affect presentation, acting-out affects of writing which undermine and compete with the affects of life” (1987, pp. 321–22).

It is one of the salutary features of postmodern theory to suggest that it is the disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency of those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that forces one to think outside the certainty of the sententious. It is from the affective experience of social marginality that we must conceive of a political strategy of empowerment and articulation, a strategy outside the liberatory rhetoric of idealism and beyond the sovereign subject that haunts the “civil” sentence of the law. To speak Outside the sentence, or the sententious, is to disturb the causality of what Ranajit Guha (1989) of the subaltern

studies project calls “tertiary discourse that rationalizes the ambiguities of rebel politics by placing it on a continuum of context—event—perspective”; in doing this the self-alienation of insurgency, with its polyphonic discourses of myth, ritual, and rumor, are laid to waste and regularized in a barren prose. The strategic objective of being “outside” is not to be outside theory but to be its exorbitant object, to overcome the pedagogical predictability of the sententious professor and the politician: “The sentence is hierarchical: it implies subjections, subordinations, internal reactions . . . How can a hierarchy remain open? The professor finishes his sentence . . . The politician clearly takes a great deal of trouble to imagine an ending to his sentence.”

Now the purpose of this Barthesian anecdote on discursive closure is to point to a growing tradition of the importance of “affective writing” in theoretical discourses that attempt to construct modes of political and cultural agency that are commensurate with historical conjunctures where populations are culturally diverse, racially and ethnically divided—the objects of social, racial, and sexual discrimination. In other words, what is at issue is the question of cultural diversity. In that sense, this talk is itself non-sententious because it speaks from a moment *in medias res*, from in-between unequal and often antagonistic sites without the certainty of imagining what happens or emerges at the end. From that perspective, the perspective of the “edge” rather than the end, it is no longer adequate to think or write culture from the point of view of the liberal “ethic” of tolerance, or within the pluralistic time frame of multiculturalism. My focus today is on the moment of culture caught in an aporetic, contingent position, in-between a plurality of practices that are different and yet must occupy the same space of adjudication and articulation. It is this liminal form of cultural identification that Charles Taylor proposes as the basis for non-ethnocentric, transcultural judgments in his thesis of minimal rationality emerging from the problem of cultural incommensurability which “takes us beyond merely formal criteria of rationality . . . [towards] the *human activity of articulation*; this gives the value of rationality its sense” (1985, p. 151)—a position Satya Mohanty (1989) has nicely adopted in a reading of Us and Them in critical discourses concerned with the representation of cultural difference.

This shift from the positivistic sense of rationality, as the possession of an *a priori* subject, to a mode of minimal rationality as the process of the activity of articulation, not only changes the concept of cultural value as pleasure and instruction but also alters the very subject of culture. It shifts the focus from the validity of judgment as causality, or the negative dialectics of the “symptomatic reading,” to an attention to the place and time of the enunciative agency. There is an emphasis on the relation between temporality and meaning in the *present* of utterance, in the performativity of a history of the present; in the political struggle around the “true” (in the Foucauldian sense) rather than its pedagogical authenticity secured as an epistemological “outside,” on the problematic level of a “*General Ideology*.” Our attention is occupied with the relations of authority which secure professional, political, and pedagogical status through the strategy of speaking in a particular time and from a specific space. That is part of what is entailed in being a strategic intellectual.

The epistemological distance between subject and object, inside and outside, that is part of the cultural binarism that emerges from relativism is now replaced by a social process of enunciation. If the former focuses on function and intention, the latter focuses on signification and institutionalization. If the epistemological tends toward a “representation” of its referent, prior to performativity, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to “reinscribe” and relocate that claim to cultural and anthropological priority (High/Low; Ours/Theirs) in the act of revising and hybridizing the settled, sententious hierarchies, the locale and the locutions of the cultural. If the former is always locked into

the hermeneutic circle, in the *description* of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality, the latter is a more *dialogic* process that attempts to track the processes of displacement and realignment that are already at work, constructing something different and hybrid from the encounter: a third space that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but *revalues* the ideological bases of division and difference. For instance, the definitive discontinuity in Barthes's anecdote is reinscribed in the enunciative present. From a splitting of the psychic enunciative subject of desire into its naming in the savage/civil metaphor, we witness the possibility of a reading of cultural difference in which Tangiers simultaneously becomes the space for the writing of sexual difference. "Writing aloud," which is the hybrid articulation of such relocation, is the place of the Name of the Father and the sign of savagery-culture; alterity.

Why is the metaphor of the *articulation of language* so central to contemporary cultural theorists concerned with the problem of ambivalence and contingency in the construction of political identities within what is loosely called, a "politics of difference"—twinning the notion of "the unconscious like a language" with "the political as a language"? Listen to Cornel West enacting "a measure of synecdochical thinking"—his phrase—as he attempts to talk of the problems of address and identification in the context of a black, radical "practicalist" culture: "When it comes to speaking with the black masses, I use Christian narratives and stories, a language meaningful to them but filtered with intellectual developments from de Tocqueville to Derrida . . . . A tremendous articulateness is syncopated with the African drumbeat into an American post-modernist product: there is no subject expressing originary anguish here but a fragmented subject, pulling from past and present, innovatively producing a heterogeneous product . . . . it is part and parcel of the subversive energies of black underclass youth, energies that are forced to take cultural *mode of articulation* . . ." (1988, p. 281). Or take Stuart Hall, writing from the perspective of those fragmented, marginalized, racially discriminated, populations of a Thatcherite underclass, unskilled, unwaged, unemployed, the homeless for whom, as he says, material interests on their own have no class belonging. Hall 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, whereas . . . *politics works actually more like the logic of language* . . . The ideological sign is always multi-accentual and Janus-faced . . . Ideology does not obey the logic of rational discourse. 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 articulated around arbitrary and not natural closures" (1988b).

The address of the ideological formation must be thought in that "temporality" that gives the practice of language symbolic access to the social movement of the political imaginary. There is a continual tension between the spatial incommensurability of the articulation of cultural differences and the temporal non-synchronicity of signification as they attempt to speak, quite literally, in terms of each other. As you will see in a moment, for Stuart Hall the multi-accentual sign of discursive ideology (as he calls it) becomes in another site—in the contemporary politics of communities and race—the multivalent subject of the enunciation of what Stuart Hall calls "new ethnicities," or what *Marxism Today*, the CPGB journal, calls "New Times." It is the ambivalence and liminality enacted in the enunciative present of human articulation (C. Taylor, 1985) that results in the signs and symbols of cultural difference being conjugated (not conjoined or complemented) through the interactive temporality of signification. This produces that object of contemporary, postmodern 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 agency and identification that confuse historical temporalities, confound sententious, continuist meanings, traumatize tradition, and may even render communities contingent: The African drumbeat syncopating heterogenous American postmodernism, the arbitrary, but strategic logic of politics, the material space of the body—these moments contest the linearity of pedagogy and the sententiousness of rationalist agency. Why does the linguistic metaphor speak the affectivity of the politics of cultural difference? What form of cultural agency is accessible to heterogeneity and arbitrary closure? What lesson of the writing of culture is spoken through affective inscription at the point of human enunciation?

The linguistic metaphor opens up a movement of contingency and ambivalence in the positioning of cultural and political identity that is neither teleological or dialectical. What is crucial is to work out a notion of arbitrary closure for cultural judgment and political agency that leads neither to “relative autonomy” nor to an open-ended liberal pluralism where, in Rortyesque style, we must always be on the “look out for marginalization,” without necessarily shifting the finitude of our final vocabularies, unless of course the “other” is in pain or humiliated. Difficult though it is, we cannot understand what is being proposed for new times—politics at the site of cultural enunciation; culture in the place of political affiliation—if we do not see that the discourse of the language-metaphor suggests that in each achieved symbol of cultural/political identity or synchronicity there is always the repetition of the sign that represents the place of psychic ambivalence and social contingency.

This opens us a spatial movement of cultural representation which I shall call a “time-lag”: an iterative, interrogative space produced in the interruptive overlap between symbol and sign, between synchronicity and caesura or seizure (not diachronicity). In each symbolic structure of a “homogeneous empty time” there is the repetition of the iterative stoppage or caesura of the sign which is not so much arbitrary as “interruptive,” not so much a closure as a liminal interrogation “without” words of the culturally given, traditional boundaries of knowledge. This distinction between sign/symbol has a familiar Hjelmslevian history. But for my emphasis on cultural temporality, the enunciative displacement of *sign-n-symbol*, I prefer the Lacanian hybrid, because it places that linguistic distinction in the Unconscious as writing and knowledge, and, with a certain laconic irony, it also speaks of the discursive, cultural, “world of truth” at one and the same time. In “What is Speech? What is Language?” Lacan writes:

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. (1988, p. 285)

What is interesting here, is that the temporal break or intervention, associated with the activity of the sign, happens in the liminal moment of the ego-deprived of subjectivity—but that is precisely where something happens which can take on a new and differential meaning for the subject in synchronic order of symbols. Nowhere is a better illustration of this complex argument to be found than in Fanon’s famous caesura: “The Black man is not. Any more than the White Man” (1967). In this non-sententious, ungrammatical break, where the cut of the sign is the dereliction of semantic and symbolic synchrony, there opens up the site of another discourse, a reinscription and relocation—an affective writing as interrogation. Fanon goes on to say: “O my body, make of me a man who questions!”

What are the cultural dimensions of the time-lag? What conditions of narrative does it empower to reinscribe cultural differences, to relocate cultural strategies, as they emerge from the displacements and derelictions of social marginality? This conflictual articulation of meaning and place, the partial—and—double identifications of race, gender, class, generation at their point of unfamiliarity, even incommensurability, does not simply conform to the slippage of desire or jouissance. That would be a poetics of “time-lack” not time-lag—a sententious, knowing nullity in the refiguring of the subject that Borch-Jacobsen nicely describes as the “auto-enunciative even though the auto has been reduced to nothing.”

The time-lag that I want to inscribe for the analysis of postcolonial discourse as a productive, hybrid “betweenness,” relocation and reinscription, has, for instance, a descriptive history in the writings of the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris when he conceives of the complexities of social transformation as the dialectic of, what he calls, “material advance and a concurrent void”: “What does Russian American détente mean for the particular peoples on either side of the fence? If indeed any real sense is to be made of material change it can only occur with a concurrent void . . . wherein one may begin to come into confrontation with a spectre of invocation whose freedom to participate in an alien territory has become a necessity for one’s reason or salvation.” The cultural void—with its discursive “time-lag”—is part of a strategy of cultural survival in conditions of political contestation which necessitates a relocation of the specificity of difference or the incommensurable. The temporal break in cultural synchronicity that I have attempted to describe produces in the “scansion of the sign” (Lacan, 1988) a truth outside the knowledge of the subject, the sentence, or the sententious. In a reinscription of Lacan’s time of the sign—“truth deprived of the subject”—Harris describes this process as the breakdown of the “self-righteous moral privilege.”

Nothing locates this moment of enunciatory “void” as the necessity of survival with greater force than Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). The time-lag in *Beloved* is nothing less than the haunting of slavery in the very act of its “re-memoration” and reinscription as the death of Culture as continuum, historicism, linear narration, discursive generality premised on the synchronous symbolic structure of the Social Imaginary. What narrative figure could speak more compellingly of the enunciative time-lag than Morrison’s repetition of the number 124, with which the book starts? For in the “presentness” of that sign, 124, whose presence is the habitus of death and slave memory, there is the concurrent void of a history that emerges outside the sententious, synchronous narrative of historical naming. The number as sign—124—can add to without adding up but may disturb the calculation. No nouns or proper names, no cozy claims to instant history and legend, Morrison writes: Numbers constitute an address, a thrilling enough prospect for slaves who owned nothing, least of all an address (in both senses of the word). The address is therefore personalized but personalized by its own activity, not the pasted on desire for personality: “124 was spiteful. Full of baby’s venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children.”

The unknowing which is inscribed in the break of the number—the sign 124—constitutes in the narrative “present” the social conditions of slave history now relocated in the address of language. No native informant here, no lobby, no door, no entrance, Morrison writes, “snatched just as the slaves were from one place to the other . . . The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign.” It is this temporality of caesura and seizure—124 is “the first stroke” of the shared experience—that challenges what Morrison considers to be the synchrony of Western chronology and community. The community that she envisages is represented in the subliminal, underground life of the novel whose progress of solidarity lies in a metonymic process

of getting, as she says, from the “first to the next and next . . .” This is no sign of linearity or totality. In Morrison’s truth “without pasted on personality,” a time deprived of subjectivity, there is, as she puts it, “especially no time because memory, pre-historic memory, has no time. There is just a little music because that is all (the slaves) had . . . a little music . . . for that work, the work of language has to get out of the way,” revealing the necessity of the sign, the address of 124.

The literary figure of time-lag as the temporality of the reinscription of difference and the relocation of cultural meaning has a tragic history in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The scandal of the book focuses on the chapter called “The return of Jahilia” which, according to Mashriq Ibn Ally, a Bradford spokesman, gives offense because of the obscene and derogatory remarks made by Rushdie “on the person of the prophet . . . and the insinuations about the wives of the prophet.” What is the “person” of the prophet in the book? What is the guilt of the author? What is the source of the secular as it inscribes the literary?

These are not questions posed either by the London literary fundamentalists too busy defending liberal freedom in the name of the author, nor by the Bradford fundamentalists too zealously guarding the person of the prophet which becomes the totem of their cultural migration. To turn to the book, they both miss the moment when the migrant, exilic “sign” splits the synchronicity of the symbol of authority: God, Father, Author. The discourse of the controversy, it has recently struck me, is profoundly masculinist, even as it is racist. The Oriental despot contending the modernist, secular author; the liberal author protecting the rights of public man; the Eastern male protecting the honor of those behind the veil. As if to collude with this reading, the major political issue that has accompanied the controversy has been the setting up of muslim schools, within the state sector, to provide special education to muslim girls.

But can zealous Jahilia be read without lackadaisical Bombay being staged retroactively in its midst, *in medias res*? Can the prophet who presides over the later chapter be read without the Father who appears in the earlier one in Bombay? It is the primal scene enacted in the return to Bombay that is neither the source nor the cause of the row in Jahilia, but a kind of time-lag suggests that the one is relocated in terms of the other. That retroactive space of meaning belongs neither to author or father or God; it moves beyond the sphere of these authorities who gain their power in the presence of the phallus, possessors and protectors of the Letter and the Law. For it is the return to Bombay which turns Chamcha into a secular person and the return to Bombay is the scenario of the encounter with his dead mother—the mother’s absence—which the Father attempts to cover up by marrying the maid servant, who becomes the mother’s simulacrum, at once the symbol of her presence and the sign of her absence. The mother as enunciation is the place where, in the act of death and doubling, Bombay and Jahilia become partial and conflictual doubles of each other.

The body of the mother becomes the writing of cultural difference herself. For it is the death of the mother that makes possible the process of renaming in the book that opens up the void in the act of cultural naming that allows cultures to be translated, reinscribed, relocated. The servant as mother is named Kasturba, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, the Mother of the Independent Indian nation; the irony here, of course, reflects on the empty promises of nationalist renaming where the untouchables were renamed harijans—the people of God—by Gandhi. It is the splitting that becomes the sign of the mother in the text—totally ignored by mullahs and the literati—that enables the act of secular narration. For it is only through the difference that the mother’s place enables—at once sign and symbol, death and the double—that the act of secular discourse becomes possible. Chamcha discovers that he can talk in many voices, that he is constituted in

partial and incommensurable times. Salman, the wandering Persian scribe who interpolates the Koranic text with the Satanic Verses, loses his belief not out of conviction, not because he espouses another set of beliefs, but because in the act of inscription he is able to change words without Mohammed knowing—it is the act of performativity that unseats the authority of Koranic pedagogy. What we begin to see, forming in the present moment of this act of writing, is the ascendancy of a historical, perspectival secular text that has its own temporality. If we look beyond the conflict of belief to the temporality of writing we also find that it is Ayesha who represents the Muse of History. It is Ayesha who is locked in battle with the Imam who stands for the death of History, the end of the timeless and the totally synchronous. Ayesha's time of history, in contrast goes, we are told, tick-tock, tick-tock. . . .

Blasphemy is the most public and legal sign of the Rushdie affair. He is being charged for blasphemy in the High Courts; the major political initiative has been to suggest widening the blasphemy laws. The first use of the word blasphemy in the text occurs when Chamcha is confused between the image of his mother and the simulacrum of the servant. "Can you tell a living ayah from your departed Ma" asked his father? In that *trompe l'oeil* moment, the England-returned exile exclaims, "Oh God," and another servant Vallabh exclaims, "Excuse, baba, but you should not blaspheme." Blasphemy is the migrant's shame at returning home; it is the time-lag effected through the absent-presence of the mother; it is the indistinguishability of being God and human in a confusion of sign and symbol without which it is difficult to speak historically, or of history: A man who invents himself needs someone to believe in him. Playing God again, you could say . . . how like a man.

How like a man, precisely. For if the masculinist discourse of the controversy stops here, in this double-bind, it is an interesting historical fact that it has been feminist groups in England that have done most to move on this controversy, which otherwise remains one between authors and priests with their horns locked, fighting for authority. The wider social and cultural implications of this issue, as it affects questions of education, schooling, domestic politics, and public policy have only really been elaborated by feminists and women's groups.

The notions of reinscription and relocation emerging out of cultural difference must not be confused with Richard Rorty's highly influential figure of the "white body in pain," which is at the bleeding heart of his concern with non-foundationalist contingent languages of solidarity and community. Rorty's language-metaphor of political culture is the consensual overlapping of "final languages" which allow "imaginative identification" with the Other, so long as certain words—kindness, decency, dignity are held in common. However, as he says, the liberal ironist can never elaborate an empowering strategy, unless you happen to be a novelist in the liberal, Western literary tradition. Just how disempowering his views are, how steeped in a Western, ethnocentric, liberal universalism is best seen, appropriately for a non-foundationalist, in a footnote.

"Liberal society already contains the institutions for its own improvement. 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 private lives alone and minimizing suffering." Appended to this statement is the footnote where suddenly the liberal ironist loses his powers of redescription: "This is not to say that the world has had the last political revolution it needs. . . . But in such countries (as South Africa, Albania, Paraguay) raw courage (like that of the leader of COSATU) is the relevant virtue, not the sort of reflective acumen which makes contributions to social theory" (1989, p. 63).

This is where Rorty's conversation stops, but we must force him to dialogue in order to teach him the social theory of pain and suffering. From the limits of liberalism emerges the subaltern perspective. "Liberal bourgeois culture hits its historical limits in colonialism," says Ranajit Guha (1989) sententiously, and almost as if to speak "outside the sentence" Veena Das reinscribes it into the affective language of metaphor and the body: Subaltern rebellions can only provide a nighttime of love . . .

In her excellent essay "Subaltern as Perspective" (1989), commissioned by the subaltern scholars, the Indian historian Veena Das demands a historiography of the subaltern that displaces the paradigm of social action as defined primarily by rational action, and seeks a form of discourse where affective 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 of . . . thought in objectified forms is now ripped open." 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 transgressive agency in "the splitting of the various types of speech produced into statements of referential truth in the indicative present . . ." 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 as relocation and reinscription. In the seizure of the sign, as I've said, there is neither dialectical sublimation nor the "empty" signifier; there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shifts the terrain of antagonism; the synchronous is challenged on its own terms, but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in a "supplementary" movement. 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. And this form of political agency is beautifully described by Das:

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.

Is this not similar to what Fanon describes as the knowledge of the practice of action? The primitive Manicheism of the settler—Black and White, Arabs and Christians—breaks down in the struggle for independence and comes 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 will drive wedges into the solid block of popular opinion.

Does this affective knowledge of the practice of action—Stuart Hall, Andrew Ross, Cornel West, Frantz Fanon, Veena Das, the subalterns—constitute the elements of a social theory? Is its emphasis on the enunciative present, splitting, disjunctive temporalities, affective writing, and contingency immediately appropriable by the poststructuralist critique of liberal humanism?

In the form of agency that I've attempted to describe—the ebb and flow of sign and symbol, affective action—the nighttime of love returns, I believe, to interrogate the major dialectic of Foucault, the doubling of "Man" and the finitude of modernity. His great influence on postcolonial and subaltern scholars cannot excuse his sanctioned ig-



norance (Gayatri Spivak) of the colonial and postcolonial moment. His own text betrays him at the magisterial end of *The Order of Things*, when the rationale of modernity is dispersed in the sciences of the Unconscious—Psychoanalysis and Anthropology. The time-lag of cultural difference, neither symbol nor sign, intervenes in Foucault's description of the "slenderness of the narrative" of nineteenth-century historicism. It is the moment when the rationalist and universalist claims of history—which were also the technologies of colonial governance: Evolutionism, Evangelism, Utilitarianism—are attenuated in their encounter with the question of cultural difference. An incommensurability ensues when history constitutes the "homeland" of the human sciences—its cultural area, chronological or geographical boundaries—and yet in making its claims to Universalism, "the subject of knowledge becomes the nexus of different times, foreign to it and heterogeneous in respect to one another" (1970, p. 369). As a result, the Western subject that arises in the nineteenth century is *heimlich*, "organicist," and dehistoricized, but at the same time, cannot stop constituting the knowledge of itself by compulsively relating one cultural episode to another in an infinitely repetitious series.

It is in this time-lag—"History now takes place on the outer limits of subject and object"—that we must relocate Foucault's modernity by turning to the "post-modern" position that he gives anthropology. There is a "certain position in the western ratio," Foucault writes, "that was constituted in its history and provides the foundation it can have with all other societies." Foucault fails to name that position or the moment of Constitution. By disavowing it, however, he names it in the next sentence by negating it: "Obviously this does not mean that the colonizing situation is indispensable to ethnology" (1970).

From the subaltern perspective, are we demanding that Foucault should historicize "imperialism" as the origin of modernity, so that he may "complete" the argument? Definitely not. I want to suggest that the colonial and postcolonial is, metaleptically, partially present in the text, in a spirit of subaltern resistance that will turn it toward other things. In talking of psychoanalysis Foucault is able to see how knowledge and power come together in the enunciative "present" of transference, the "calm violence" of a relationship that constitutes psychoanalytic discourse. By disavowing "the colonial moment" as an enunciative, transference relation, Foucault can say nothing of the power and knowledge that constitutes the position of the Western ratio, in its moment of modernity, as a dialogic "colonial" relation, a colonial/postcolonial discourse. Read from this perspective, we can see clearly that in insistently spatializing the "time" of history Foucault constitutes a doubling that is strangely collusive with its dispersal, equivalent to its equivocation, strangely self-constituting despite its play with the double. If we insert, in the finitude of Foucault, the time-lag where the sign and the symbol contend, the synchronous and the iterative that create the necessity for relocation, then Foucault would have had to radically reinscribe his perspective. His description of the dehistoricized emergence of the human sciences in the nineteenth century would have to be seen in relation to those "objects" of that disciplinary gaze, who, at that historical moment, in the supplementary spaces of the colonial and slave world, were tragically becoming the peoples without a history.

If I started "outside the sentence" in Morocco, with Barthes, whose semiology has had such a profound influence on cultural studies, I want to end in Algeria, with a challenge to liberal humanist sententiousness from that revolutionary psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, whose moment in cultural studies has yet to come:

Under the colonial regime anything may be done for a loaf of bread of a miserable sheep. . . . For a colonized man . . . living does not mean embodying moral values or

taking his place in the coherent world. To live means to keep on existing. Every stolen date or sheep is a victory; not the result of work but the triumph of life. Thus to steal dates . . . is not the negation of the property of others, nor the transgression of the Law . . . You are forced to come up against yourself. Here we discover the kernel of that hatred against the self which is characteristic of racial conflicts in segregated societies. (1965, p. 249)

In the colonial condition, the dictates of the Law, and the authority of the superego—embodying moral values, taking a coherent place in the world—become forms of cultural knowledge constituted of guilt and doubt. Fanon's colonial subject constitutes its identity and authority, not in relation to the "content" of the Law or its transgression of its edicts. His existence is defined in a perpetual performativity that intervenes in that syntax or grammar of the superego, in order to disarticulate it. "The native's guilt," Fanon writes, "is never a guilt which he accepts; it is rather a kind of curse, a sword of Damocles . . . he is overpowered but not tamed" (1965). This is the guilt that sonorously resists the symbolic organization of the paternal metaphor that will lead us to the narrative of melancholia.

For the installation of the phallic Damoclean sword as a Social Ideal evokes an ambivalent social identification embodied in the muscular tension of the borderline native. His "disincorporation" in paranoia and melancholia are attempts to break the marginality of the social and political limits of space; to redraw the boundaries in a psychic, fantasmatic space. The Damoclean sword installs an ambivalence in the symbolic order, where it is itself the immobile Sign of an authority whose meaning is continually contested by the fantasmatic, fragmented, motility of the signifiers of revolt. The Law is entombed as loss at the point of its ideal authority. But as the dominating force of symbolic ordering it also "mummifies" the authority of the native social order. The colonial sword is constituted in an indeterminate doubling; the native "superego" is itself displaced in the colonial contention. Here, in this order signifying a double loss, we encounter what may be a symbolic space of cultural survival—a melancholia in revolt.

It is the shadow that guilt casts on the "object" of identification that is the origin of melancholia, according to Freud. Fanon's "guilt" is intriguingly different. Patterns of avoidance amongst the oppressed are those of the death reflex that, at the same time, never cease to drive the oppressed to resist the authority of the oppressor, to usurp his place and to transform the very basis of authority. The sword of Damocles is double-edged, striking a seizure like the temporal edge of the sign, opening up the time-lag between sign and symbol. For "the symbols of social order—the police, the bugle calls, the waving flags—are at once inhibitory and stimulating; for they do not convey the message 'Don't dare to budge'; rather they cry out 'Get ready to attack' " (1965, p. 41).

The melancholic discourse, Freud says, is a plaint in the old-fashioned sense; the insistent self—exposure and the repetition of loss must not be taken at face value for its apparent victimage and passivity. Its narrative metonymy, the repetition of the piecemeal, outside the sentence, bit by bit, its insistent self-exposure, comes also from a mental constellation of revolt: "The melancholic are not ashamed and do not hide themselves, since everything derogatory they say about themselves is at bottom said about somebody else" (1917). This inversion of meaning and address in the melancholic discourse—when it "incorporates" the loss or lack in its own body, displaying its own weeping wounds—is also an act of "disincorporating" the authority of the Master. Fanon, again, comes close to saying something similar when he suggests that the native wears his psychic wounds on the surface of his skin like an open sore—an eyesore to the colonizer.

Let us call the melancholic revolt the "projective disincorporation" by the marginal of the Master. This narrative speaks from the elision between the synchronous symbol

of loss and its non-referential, fragmented, phantasmatic narratives. It says: All these bits and pieces in which my history is fragmented, my culture piecemeal, my identifications fantasmatic and displaced; these splittings of wounds of my body are also a form of revolt. And they speak a terrible truth. In their ellipses and silences they dismantle your authority: the vanity of your mimetic narratives and your monumental history; the metaphoric emblems in which you inscribe The Great Book of Life. My revolt is to face the Life of literature and history with the scraps and fragments that constitute its double, which is living as surviving, meaning as melancholia.

Remember the lesson of the violent ingestion, or "incorporation," of the stolen, murderous Algerian date!

### DISCUSSION: HOMI BHABHA

*RUTH TOMASELLI:* I want to draw upon your discussion of the concept of constituting subaltern groups, and your recognition that people can formulate critical and/or social theory both through courageous action and through thought. I was wondering how you see those of us who function in the area of cultural studies coming to terms with the fact that we are not the instigators of theory but must make sense of theory which will happen despite us.

*BHABHA:* I was attempting to think that in relation to the critique of various traditions where a certain kind of sententious and over-rationalist notion of agency and historical transformation doesn't produce a kind of time both for the description and for eliciting such forms of subversive or subaltern agency that I tried to describe through the paper. I think that, in some sense, we *are* the instigators or the institutionalizers of theory. But I think I also take your sense that we may not be the instigators because I don't think we can describe the world with a set of binary oppositions: things out there and theory in here, or institutions here and actions there. That's what I was trying to do with the notion of inactive enunciation. Any pedagogical position, in actually trying to construct its authority, is always the internally alienated. It is always being erased in that very process, and in that sense, then, I think that the lesson we have to learn is that we cannot and must not imagine that we know exactly where the opposition is or where the interrogation is coming from. If we do, then we're only shoring up a kind of authority. My way of looking at this edge or boundary of the construction of any pedagogical position is actually to construct its authority in a position of being challenged. Now there are obviously conditions under which this can happen and there are conditions under which this doesn't happen. But I'm just trying to suggest that the inevitability of the tension between the institutionalization and the instigation is something I would like to stay with, and something I would like to develop.

*TOM PRASCH:* I want to ask a question about the paucity of the debates over Rushdie. It seems that Rushdie's book is not being read by either side. In light of this, one approach is obviously yours of giving the book a very close textual reading; another might be to look at its status as an unread book itself, its status as unreadable to these particular groups.

*BHABHA:* I have never taken the line that somehow, because the book had not been read, that made it less culturally symptomatic or interesting. Yet, I also agree with you: the fact that an unread book, and a book of this kind, has generated the sort of situation it has, is in fact very important. This idea of the individual reader and the individual book, which is a kind of paradigm of a certain kind of literary history has, for me, very questionable cultural, philosophical, and political assumptions. The unreadness of the

book raises the question of authorship in a displaced and much more interesting way than, Who is writing the book, or How is the book being written now? Instead—Where is the book being authored from?—which is not a simple question. I think that we must look at the many disseminated authors of the book, groups of people who felt, not only that they were not being listened to but that they were unheard. So in that sense, one of the authors of the unread book is the whole racial situation. An other, of course, has been both the political and the international situation in and around Iran. The third set has been (the uncomprehending response on the part of) the English, London and international literati who seem to be, in one sense, in a very important position because they have preserved, through their activities, the life of Salman Rushdie. But, on the other hand, the literati has totally disavowed the changing status of Britain as a multi-ethnic community. This is very clear if you read recent responses which recuperate a romantic nineteenth-century notion of the writer, even Rushdie's work. I'll just give you one example of the inappropriateness of this. At the end of Rushdie's Herbert Reeve Memorial Lecture, he wrote a passage which clearly moved away from any form of intentionality. It's a very complex image of living in a house: you hear voices, you see people, and then you go into a room, and all these voices start speaking from your own head. I think he was enacting, without knowing it himself, the whole problem of paranoia about cultural dissemination, incommensurability, the kinds of texts that that produces, literature in a way almost out of control, and so forth. In the newspapers the next day, the headline was, "Rushdie pleads for the little room of literature to be preserved."

*FRED PFEIL*: I confess that I found your paper of forbidding difficulty, as I think many people here did. What I want to ask about is your emphasis on and what seemed to me your valorization of: splitting; disjunctive; enunciation; affective strategies; and the night of love. Perhaps I can locate my problem in your reading of *Beloved*. The silence, the prehistoric time without language, around which the book draws its circle, is precisely a time that must be gotten through so that historic time can begin. That space is represented as the space of catastrophe, not a valorized place, but the place where a catastrophe happens and a dilemma asserts itself that must be resolved. Another way of putting this, is that you seem to be offering an aesthetic of the fragment, not a politics.

*BHABHA*: I can't apologize for the fact that you found my paper completely impenetrable. I did it quite consciously, I had a problem, I worked it out. And if a few people got what I was saying or some of what I am saying, I'm happy. If not, obviously it's a disaster. So that's something that I shall face when I step down from here and meet a few people and see what has happened. My reading of *Beloved* was in fact inspired in some ways by Toni Morrison's Tanner lecture where she actually talks about the openings of her books. Although our objects were different, for me there was a real project there in trying to work out the kind of temporality she's talking about. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is in fact a re-historicization, as she calls it, a "re-memoration." She is producing precisely this temporality now, not because she wants us to move out of it into what she calls a kind of Western chronology; I think she's constructing a kind of cultural temporality, emerging from certain experiences of suffering which she is not valorizing in any kind of politically indulgent way. She's saying, just as indeed Fanon is saying, if you start with a different time and in a different space and from a different point, you do not construct the kind of history that I think she's arguing against in the book. So I actually do take very positively the kinds of temporality she's opening up in the book, for it allows a different kind of construction of the political. That's precisely what was signaled in the work of the subaltern studies writers: yet the totalizing moment is not

*the* moment. For a lot of the people within *Beloved* or indeed within the annals and archives of colonial polity and policy, the attempt at totalization was in fact the attempt at a kind of absolutism and the consequence of the whole problem of oppression. So I want to learn from those disjunctive temporalities; I do not see them as small scale, and I do not see them as the aestheticization of the fragment, I see them precisely as other points from which to start.

*CARY NELSON*: I wonder whether the kind of general theorizing that people do is constrained and conditioned by the material circumstances and historical moments that they are also focusing on. My sense is that your mapping of the linguisticity of the fragment was partly shaped by the situation of the postcolonial subject. I wonder if you would say something about the way in which the theorizing was prompted by the historical situations you're talking about.

*BHABHA*: Yes, but that is something I marked at every step in my talk. That's where I started and those are the conditions I wanted to address. Why, at a particular time, do people who want to construct the question of agency use a linguistic metaphor? My suggestion was that it was not to do with some formal linguistics; it was actually to do with introducing a new time into meaning. And that I represented and then again located in developments of Afro-American literary criticism and indeed in black theory with very specific examples. I could go on like this, at that point I looked at two texts where the whole question of cultural difference, reinscription, and relocation have actually produced political issues. My reading of Rushdie located it very much both in what the row was on the ground, so to speak, and in the text. Subaltern studies may be unfamiliar to some people, but I think it's a very important historical development in the history of South Asia. Fanon is also unfamiliar, but I think very important; psychoanalysis is certainly a moment of placing of that kind, particularly in the work and use of it by Fanon. So I think I ranged from what you could call the language and the discourse of postmodern linguistic metaphors in metropolitan countries to questions of colonial agency. And at each point I was not speaking out some private thoughts for a private meditative moment. I was trying to at least face texts which have been very influential.