

rich nineteenth-century tradition of Haida soapstone carving developed directly because of the new market of sailors and travellers, who began to visit the Northwest Coast for trade or for tourism. At the same time, Qajar painting in Iran developed as a complex synthesis of traditional Persian with imported Frankish forms. Spanish baroque was appropriated by indigenous artists in Mexico, and increasingly complex forms emerged (as we can see, for instance, in the work of Frida Kahlo and, more recently, artists on both sides of the Mexican–United States frontier). Indeed this new baroque once again is beginning to redefine Americanness, in a complex composite of differential times and cultures.

As the world economy becomes increasingly globalized and core and periphery are redistributed across old boundaries, this process can only accelerate and become more elaborate. The old barriers between ‘Western’ art and ‘Third World’ art (once known, symptomatically, as ‘primitive’ art) will dissolve even further – in both directions. Thus artists as diverse as Jean-Michel Basquiat or Audrey Flack or Francisco Clemente or Cheri Samba can be seen not in simple terms of identity and difference but as part of a dynamic system of aesthetic circulation. Modernism is being succeeded not by a totalizing Western postmodernism but by a hybrid new aesthetic in which the new corporate forms of communication and display will be constantly confronted by new vernacular forms of invention and expression. Creativity always comes from beneath, it always finds an unexpected and indirect path forward and it always makes use of what it can scavenge by night.

### 17 Homi K. Bhabha (b. 1949) on ‘hybridity’ and ‘moving beyond’

Bhabha is a leading theorist of cultural post-colonialism and globalization. He has remarked that his own identity mirrors the hybridity of which he writes: born in India, educated at Bombay (Mumbai) and Oxford, and now teaching in the US. His initial impact came from a series of essays published in the 1980s and subsequently collected in *The Location of Culture*. He is particularly associated with ideas of ‘boundaries’ and ‘crossings’, and with the concept of ‘hybridity’. Much of his work is rooted in discussion of literature. An exception to this is the 1998 catalogue essay Bhabha devoted to the work of the sculptor Anish Kapoor. Likewise, in the present extracts he uses the work of four visual artists to illustrate his argument about border crossing and post-colonial identity as preconditions, in his words, for reinscribing ‘our human, historic commonality’. The four are: the African-American installation artist Renée Green, the Mexican-American performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña, the Puerto Rican-American sculptor Pepon Osorio, and the American photographer Alan Sekula. Our extract is taken from ‘Border Lives: The Art of the Present’, the opening section of the Introduction to *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 1–9.

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*.

Martin Heidegger, ‘Building, dwelling, thinking’

#### Border Lives: the Art of the Present

It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*. At the century’s edge, we are less exercised by annihilation – the death of the author –

or epiphany – the birth of the ‘subject’. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’: *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism...*

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/du*, hither and thither, back and forth.

The move away from the singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed ‘in-between’, or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? [ . . . ]

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. The ‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are ‘in the minority’. The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a ‘received’ tradition. The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.

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I wanted to make shapes or set up situations that are kind of open . . . My work has a lot to do with a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth, not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being.<sup>1</sup>

Thus writes Renée Green, the African-American artist. She reflects on the need to understand cultural difference as the production of minority identities that 'split' – are estranged unto themselves – in the act of being articulated into a collective body:

Multiculturalism doesn't reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily . . . It requires a person to step outside of him/herself to actually see what he/she is doing. I don't want to condemn well-meaning people and say (like those T-shirts you can buy on the street) 'It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand.' To me that's essentialising blackness.<sup>2</sup>

Political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective. Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present:

Even then, it's still a struggle for power between various groups within ethnic groups about what's being said and who's saying what, who's representing who? What is a community anyway? What is a black community? What is a Latino community? I have trouble with thinking of all these things as monolithic fixed categories.<sup>3</sup>

If Renée Green's questions open up an interrogatory, interstitial space between the act of representation – who? what? where? – and the presence of community itself, then consider her own creative intervention within this in-between moment. Green's 'architectural' site-specific work, *Sites of Genealogy* (Out of Site, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York), displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed – Black/White, Self/Other. Green makes a metaphor of the museum building itself, rather than simply using the gallery space:

I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness.<sup>4</sup>

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy:

I always went back and forth between racial designations and designations from physics or other symbolic designations. All these things blur in some way . . . . To develop a genealogy of the way colours and noncolours function is interesting to me.<sup>5</sup>

'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going *beyond* – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. The imaginary of spatial distance – to live somehow beyond the border of our times – throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities. Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogeneous course of history, 'establishing a conception of the present as the "time of the now"'.<sup>6</sup>

If the jargon of our times – postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the 'post' to indicate sequentiality – *after*-feminism; or polarity – *anti*-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. For instance, if the interest in postmodernism is limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of postenlightenment rationalism then, for all its intellectual excitement, it remains a profoundly parochial enterprise.

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond that I have drawn out: 'Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks . . . . The bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses.'<sup>7</sup>

The very concepts of homogeneous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition. The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood. This side of the psychosis of patriotic fervour, I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities. [ . . . ]

Postcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance. Beyond this, however, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities – in the North and the South, urban and rural – constituted, if I may coin a phrase, 'otherwise than modernity'. Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity. Listen to Guillermo Gomez-Peña, the performance artist who lives, amongst other times and places, on the Mexico/US border:

hello America  
 this is the voice of *Gran Vato Charollero*  
*broadcasting from the hot deserts of Nogales, Arizona*  
 zona de libre comercio  
 2000 megahertz en todas direcciones

you are celebrating Labor Day in Seattle  
 while the Klan demonstrates  
 against Mexicans in Georgia  
*ironia, 100% ironia*<sup>8</sup>

Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond', becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. To engage with such invention, and intervention, as Green and Gomez-Peña enact in their distinctive work, requires a sense of the new that resonates with the hybrid chicano aesthetic of '*rasquachismo*' as Tomas Ybarra-Frausto describes it:

the utilization of available resources for syncretism, juxtaposition, and integration. *Rasquachismo* is a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluence... a delight in texture and sensuous surfaces... self-conscious manipulation of materials or iconography... the combination of found material and satiric wit... the manipulation of *rasquache* artifacts, code and sensibilities from both sides of the border.<sup>9</sup>

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.

Pepon Osorio's *objets trouvés* of the Nuyoricán (New York/Puerto Rican) community – the statistics of infant mortality, or the silent (and silenced) spread of AIDS in the Hispanic community – are elaborated into baroque allegories of social alienation.

But it is not the high drama of birth and death that captures Osorio's spectacular imagination. He is the great celebrant of the migrant act of survival, using his mixed-media works to make a hybrid cultural space that forms contingently, disjunctively, in the inscription of signs of cultural memory and sites of political agency. *La Cama (The Bed)* turns the highly decorated four-poster into the primal scene of lost-and-found childhood memories, the memorial to a dead nanny Juana, the *mise-en-scène* of the eroticism of the 'emigrant' everyday. Survival, for Osorio, is working in the interstices of a range of practices: the 'space' of installation, the spectacle of the social statistic, the transitive time of the body in performance.

Finally, it is the photographic art of Alan Sekula that takes the borderline condition of cultural translation to its global limit in *Fish Story*, his photographic project on harbours: 'the harbour is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange.'<sup>10</sup> The harbour and the stockmarket become the *paysage moralisé* of a containerized, computerized world of global trade. Yet, the non-synchronous time-space of transnational 'exchange', and exploitation, is embodied in a navigational allegory:

Things are more confused now. A scratchy recording of the Norwegian national anthem blares out from a loudspeaker at the Sailor's Home on the bluff above the channel. The container ship being greeted flies a Bahamian flag of convenience. It was built by Koreans working long hours in the giant shipyards of Ulsan. The underpaid and the understaffed crew could be Salvadorean or Filipino. Only the Captain hears a familiar melody.<sup>11</sup>

Norway's nationalist nostalgia cannot drown out the babel on the bluff. Transnational capitalism and the impoverishment of the Third World certainly create the chains of circumstance that incarcerate the Salvadorean or the Filipino/a. In their cultural passage, hither and thither, as migrant workers, part of the massive economic and political diaspora of the modern world, they embody the Benjaminian 'present': that moment blasted out of the continuum of history. Such conditions of cultural displacement and social discrimination – where political survivors become the best historical witnesses – are the grounds on which Frantz Fanon, the Martinican psychoanalyst and participant in the Algerian revolution, locates an agency of empowerment:

As soon as I *desire* I am asking 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* [my emphasis] insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world – that is a world of reciprocal recognitions.

I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.

And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle of freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Once more it is the desire for recognition, 'for somewhere else and for something else' that takes the experience of history *beyond* the instrumental hypothesis. Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the perform-

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ance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration, Fanon's desire for the recognition of cultural presence as 'negating activity' resonates with my breaking of the time-barrier of a culturally collusive 'present'.

Renee Green interviewed by Elizabeth Brown, from catalogue published by Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio.

<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted by Miriam Kwon for the exhibition 'Emerging New York Artists', Sala Mendonza, Caracas, Venezuela (xeroxed manuscript copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Renee Green in conversation with Donna Harkavy, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Worcester Museum.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in his *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> M. Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 152-3.

<sup>7</sup> G. Gomez-Pena, *Avant-Garde Theatre*, vol. 8, no. 7, October 1991.

<sup>8</sup> E. Ybarra-Frausto, 'Chicano movement/chicano art' in E. Karp and S. D. Levine (eds) (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 133-4.

<sup>9</sup> A. Sekula, *Fish Story*, manuscript, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction by H. K. Bhabha (London: Pluto, 1986), pp. 218, 229, 231.