

January 2017
Volume 132 Number 1

PMLA

Publications of the Modern Language Association of America

Published five times a year by the association

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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

[Organized 1883, Incorporated 1900]

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PMLA

PUBLICATIONS OF
THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

[Published five times a year]

Available online at *JSTOR* and *MLAJournals.org*;
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PMLA (ISSN 0030-8129) is published five times a year, in January, March, May, September, and October, by the Modern Language Association of America. Membership in the association is open to persons who are professionally interested in the modern languages and literatures. Information about annual dues, which include subscription to *PMLA*, is available at www.mla.org/Membership/About-Membership. Membership applications are available on request and at www.mla.org/Membership/Join-the-MLA.

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Single copies of issues for the current year and the previous one are available at www.mla.org/store/CID70 and from MLA Member and Administrative Services (646 576-5161; bookorders@mla.org).

The MLA publication and editorial offices are located at 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434 (646 576-5000; pmlasubmissions@mla.org).

All communications concerning membership, including change-of-address notifications, should be sent to Member and Administrative Services, MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434 (646 576-5151; membership@mla.org).

Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 12-32040. United States Postal Service Number 449-660.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *PMLA*, Member and Administrative Services, MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434.

theories and
methodologies

The Dislocations of Cultural Translation

ROBERT J. C. YOUNG

ROBERT J. C. YOUNG is Julius Silver Professor of English and Comparative Literature at New York University and dean of arts and humanities at New York University Abu Dhabi. His most recent books are *Empire Colony Postcolony* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015) and, with Jean Khalfa, *Frantz Fanon: Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté, Œuvres II* (La Découverte, 2016).

THE TITLE *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE* SUGGESTS THAT THE BOOK'S AUTHOR, HOMI K. BHABHA, PLACES AN OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE ON A culture's spatial and geographic situation. Lest Bhabha's readers get too fixated on culture's site and locality, however, the title's emphasis on place is soon qualified by an epigraph from the book's most-cited author, Frantz Fanon, that emphasizes temporality: "The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time" (qtd. in Bhabha xiv).¹ So, while culture must be located, the architecture of *The Location of Culture* is rooted in the temporal. The place and time of its moments of production are affirmed throughout its essays with a wealth of contemporary references and opening comments like "In Britain, in the 1980s . . ." (27). No book of theory is more self-consciously embedded in its own space and time. *The Location of Culture*, published in 1994, is a very English book, written from within the political, cultural, and intellectual world of the London of the 1980s and early 1990s, in which migrant activists from the Caribbean and South Asia such as Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, and Stuart Hall were challenging the verities of a long-established, socialist, masculinist, English intellectual and political culture.² The brilliant innovation of *The Location of Culture* was to create a new language, a new articulation and understanding of minority positions—which is why the response to it has been so overwhelming, from academics, artists, and many others. The work that went into *The Location of Culture* was intimately related to Bhabha's own milieu and time: the book is the product of his *decennium mirabile* in London.

The chapters of *The Location of Culture* were—with a few exceptions—published as individual essays from 1983 to 1991. Reordering the book's chapters according to the chronological sequence of these essays can help us understand the forms of its temporality. The four previously unpublished essays in the book were drafted during 1991–93.³ The following list also includes some relevant texts published in the 1980s and early 1990s that did not become part of *The Location of Culture*:

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PMLA 132.1 (2017), published by the Modern Language Association of America

Chapter	Chronological Order
N/A	"Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism" (written in 1980; published in 1984 in <i>The Theory of Reading</i> , edited by Frank Gloversmith, Harvester Press / Barnes and Noble Books, pp. 93–122)
3	"The Other Question" (first published in 1983 in <i>Screen</i> , vol. 24, pp. 18–35)
4	"Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (first published in 1984 in <i>October</i> , vol. 28, pp. 125–33)
5	"Sly Civility" (first published in 1985 in <i>October</i> , vol. 34, pp. 71–80)
6	"Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817" (presented at the 1984 Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature and first published in 1985 in <i>Critical Inquiry</i> , vol. 12, pp. 144–65)
N/A	"Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition" (published in 1986 as the foreword to <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> , by Frantz Fanon, Pluto Press, pp. vii–xxvi)
1	"The Commitment to Theory" (first published in 1988 in <i>New Formations</i> , vol. 5, pp. 5–23)
2	"Interrogating Identity: The Postcolonial Prerogative" (first published in 1990 in <i>Anatomy of Racism</i> , edited by D. T. Goldberg, U of Minnesota P, pp. 183–209)
7	"Articulating the Archaic: Notes on Colonial Nonsense" (first published in 1990 in <i>Literary Theory Today</i> , edited by Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan, Cornell UP, pp. 203–18)
8	"DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (first published in 1990 in <i>Nation and Narration</i> , by Homi Bhabha, Routledge, pp. 291–322)
N/A	"Third Space" (an interview published in 1990 in <i>Identity: Community, Culture, Difference</i> , edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 207–21)
12	"Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity" (first published in 1991 in <i>Neocolonialism</i> , a special issue of <i>The Oxford Literary Review</i> , edited by Robert J. C. Young, vol. 13, nos. 1–2, pp. 193–219)
N/A	"A Question of Survival—Nations and Psychic States" (published in 1991 in <i>Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds</i> , edited by James Donald, Macmillan Education, pp. 89–103)
Introduction	Previously unpublished (drafted by 1991)
10	"By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence" (previously unpublished; drafted by 1991)
9	"The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" (previously unpublished; drafted in 1992)
11	"How Newness Enters the World: Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation" (previously unpublished; drafted in 1991–93)

The architectural structure of *The Location of Culture* takes us from an early concern with literary and historical representation of otherness to the transformative dynam-

ics of contemporary culture. The book begins with the problem of how cultural difference is depicted in the context of colonial representations. Bhabha's essays on the stereotype

and on mimicry argue that however fixed the representation of cultural difference, and however strong the drive to fix colonial representation in the colonizer's imaginary, colonial difference uncannily contrives to represent itself otherwise through means that disconcert the viewer or reader. In his historical essays analyzing Indian colonial history that gesture toward the preoccupations of the subaltern studies historians—"Sly Civility" (1985), "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1985), and "By Bread Alone" (1991)—Bhabha shows the complex processes by which the introduction of the cultural difference embodied in colonialism does not amount to a passive form of misrepresentation but enables cultural resistance and agency among the colonized. His later essays turn from colonial representation to the question of difference in more contemporary concerns, as he considers the possibility of agency for the minority cultural theorist, critic, or artist. He shifts, therefore, from looking for agency through analysis and interpretation of forms of representation to a metadiscourse in which his own theoretical language becomes both a description of transformational change in the dynamics of contemporary culture and an example of that intervention. Hybridity and doubleness progress from being discernible on the page to the cultural idiom of minority artists and commentators who are trying, Bhabha argues, to achieve postcolonial cultural translations of Western modernity, transforming and revising our idea of that modernity by foregrounding the questions of race, slavery, and colonialism.

Though the essays in *The Location of Culture* were written in the intellectual milieu of London, from an early stage in his career Bhabha was also keyed in to contemporary debates in the United States. In December 1983, at the invitation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bhabha spoke at the MLA convention on a panel with Spivak, Edward Said, and William Pietz, and from that moment Bhabha began

to establish his career in the United States.⁴ A fellowship brought him to Princeton University in 1992, and he moved permanently to Chicago in 1994. While it is possible to see the gradual intrusion of North American culture, particularly the writings of Toni Morrison and the foregrounding of the question of race, in the later chapters of *The Location of Culture*, most of the theoretical innovation in the book had been developed in the intellectual milieu of Oxford and London in the 1980s, so that in many ways Bhabha could be described, in his own phrase, as a cultural translator of the political idiom of British intellectual culture for an American audience. Once he relocated to the United States, that position, in which he was writing from inside one political and theoretical culture and translating it for another, in it but not of it, inevitably changed. Bhabha brought his own distinctive interpretation of the British politics of difference to the United States. Though the United States had a strong theoretical culture, much admired in Britain, it did not have a cogent way of linking that directly to contemporary political issues—it remained more literary or philosophical, apparently irrelevant to the concerns of contemporary society. Theory's remoteness from politics and society in the United States was the basis of the critique made by those such as Frank Lentricchia and, following him, Edward Said (Young, "Edward Said"). Bhabha's impact in the United States was the result of his ability to connect his audience members to their own previously unarticulated political concerns. Hasty readers read him more critically, as if he were offering another form of theoretical abstraction comparable to those of the Yale school. But Bhabha was never a de Man, arguing for the separation of reality from thought and representation. For him, it was the opposite: he was campaigning for their urgent connection—the problem was that they did not correlate.

Bhabha the cultural translator gradually theorized his own practice. He developed that

theorization through his best-known concept, hybridity, which was inspired by the fiction of Rushdie, whose finest work came out of the same 1980s London from which *The Location of Culture* was produced. As it is for Rushdie, hybridity for Bhabha is a theory of cultural mixture designed to contest the idea of an English monoculture⁵ or, in the case of colonial India, the simple antithesis of Indian and English as discrete forms existing side by side. Bhabha formulated hybridity most cogently in 1985, in "Signs Taken for Wonders," where it is advanced in relation to the insertion of an English version of Christianity into an Indian environment. The originality of Bhabha's argument about hybridity is the idea that instead of pointing to the way that colliding cultures produce a fusion of different elements, hybridity for Bhabha describes the new, distinctive forms that arise when intractably different cultures collide. The performative enactment of cultural difference is thus essentially creative, an argument fully elaborated in the last chapter of *The Location of Culture*, "How Newness Enters the World" (1991-93). This late essay shows how Bhabha's attention has turned from the question of cultural representation to a metadiscursive language that both theorizes the processes of his own conceptual creativity and establishes a further way of thinking about the apparently irresolvable differences between theoreticopolitical positions that featured in the London debates of the 1980s. Bhabha now broaches this metadiscursive component through the concept of cultural translation, which had emerged from, and implicitly referred to, the context of the ethnically and linguistically mixed London of the early 1990s.

The concept of translation is absent from Bhabha's earliest essays. It first appears in "Signs Taken for Wonders," in the context of the most substantial elaboration of hybridity. Curiously characterizing the Christian Bible as the "English book," Bhabha describes its being translated into Indian vernaculars but

remaining the same: "the Bible translated into Hindi, propagated by Dutch or native catechists, is still the English book" (108). The Bible, he shows, is translated more by its new context than by any new language into which it has been rendered. Its primary form of translation has been to precipitate the ambivalent dynamics of colonial culture.

It was not until 1988 that Bhabha began to use translation as a foundational conceptual metaphor. He introduced it in the context of the negotiation between theoreticopolitical positions, presenting it as offering new ground between them. An early statement in "The Commitment to Theory" (1988) makes the point clearly:

The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of "translation": a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the Other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the "moment" of politics. (25)

Here translation negotiates and transforms the differences between rival theoreticopolitical positions; Bhabha would later invoke the idea of cultural translation to make a similar argument with respect to competing cultures operating in the same environment. In this passage Bhabha emphasizes his thesis that the most effective forms of critique are not simply opposition and reversal. Critique "overcomes" antitheses in a Hegelian or Marxist fashion, to produce not a resolution or negation in the mode of an *Aufhebung* that preserves and cancels both but something "new, *neither the one nor the Other*." Notice how hybridity becomes a way of figuratively speaking translation: a "space" of translation is identified as a "place" of hybridity. All

three become part of the same process. The fundamental spatial metaphor implicit in the idea of translation in English is exploited so that the expansive process of translation becomes its primary creative and defining activity rather than its source or final output. What does such critique achieve? It produces, we are told, a new form of "recognition"—the very issue that Bhabha had begun with in 1980 ("Representation" 99). While the representations of the colonial text only offered recognition that confirmed a colonial point of view, the hybrid, or translational, critique becomes the means whereby static, fixed forms can be dislodged and new modes of identification and understanding developed. The development of this critical "third space" changes the possibilities of politics through the development of modified or hitherto unthought-of positions that operate outside the box.

In "The Commitment to Theory," translation is repeatedly invoked to describe an ongoing process of dislocation between theoretico-political positions. Bhabha uses versions of the phrase "negotiation or translation" four times in the essay (26, 30, 38, 38), as well as "translation and displacement" (26) and "translation or transformation" (32), in arguing "that each position is always a process of translation and transference of meaning" (26). He writes, in an intralingual translation of the passage cited above:

My illustration attempts to display the importance of the hybrid moment of political change. Here the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both. (28)

Although it is based on a binary, translation allows for a move away from a politics of polarity because it offers an ongoing, interactive dialogic operation. The way to resolve political differences is to negotiate between the

competing positions by displacing, transferring, or translating them to somewhere else, a place that enables forms of recognition that challenge the terms of both. This negotiation is not translation as such, however, since that would be to convert position A into position B, but rather the transference or passage across the no-man's-land that marks their differences. Bhabha captures this figuratively by turning the negotiating process into something at once spatial and temporal, as if the two competing positions are enabled through translation to meet across the long bridge of spies that stretches between them. Translation becomes equated not with the transformation from source to target language but with the dialectical act of metamorphosis that comprehends both languages. It does not move the elements upward onto a new plane where they become resolved in a new form but shoves them sideways into a space where all the original elements continue to operate together according to their diverse, heterogeneous terms.

Bhabha introduced the term "cultural translation" into his work two years later, in "DissemiNation" (1990). He was fully aware that the concept of cultural translation already possessed a long and contested tradition in cultural anthropology, going back to E. E. Evans-Pritchard.⁶ Cultural anthropologists used the concept in different ways. Claude Lévi-Strauss, following Roman Jakobson's translational principle of "equivalence in difference" (Jakobson 233), sought to translate the cultural differences that he analyzed into human universals (*Myth and Structural Anthropology*). He was attacked for this strategy, however, by Clifford Geertz, who argued that "what Lévi-Strauss has made for himself is an infernal culture machine. It annuls history, reduces sentiment to a shadow of the intellect, and replaces the particular minds of particular savages in particular jungles with the Savage Mind immanent in us all" ("Cerebral Savage" 355). Lévi-Strauss, Geertz argued, was a "translator of culture, *even when*

it is untranslatable. . . . Translation can only be achieved by subjecting the cultural productions (myth, arts, rituals, or whatever), the things that give these lives their immediate look of strangeness, to a universalizing analysis that, in dissolving the immediacy, dissolves the strangeness" ("World" 33).⁷ Unlike Lévi-Strauss, who saw translation as having a domesticating effect, Geertz sought to represent the foreignness of languages in the form of the particular strangeness of differences in the universal of culture, as Bhabha—and much later, following his footsteps, Dipesh Chakrabarty—would also argue. Bhabha, however, did not follow Geertz's next move—namely, his admission that at another level "culture" itself is the universal term through which the anthropologist "translates" the individual practices of the society being studied, in order to make differences equivalent. This poses the question: does not the conceptual category of culture itself imply a form of translation—that is, a mediation between a particular and a universal?

The idea of equating cultural interpretation with the transformations between discrete languages was also analyzed by Talal Asad in his well-known essay "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology" (1986). Asad focuses on the perennial concern in anthropology of how the anthropologist mediates the implicit meanings of the "primitive thought" of "savages" to present it in terms comprehensible to the "sophisticated" Western reader: how, in other words, to translate the ways and language of the "primitive" for comprehension by the recondite academic mind. Cultural translation thus becomes a means of negotiating the gap in understanding and in time between primitive and modern cultures, mediating what Johannes Fabian has criticized as anthropology's "denial of co-evalness" between Western and non-Western cultures (31), transforming the primitive into the academic language of Western rationality. This kind of translation is, perhaps, the ulti-

mate form of domesticating translation, since the material translated reemerges in a form that bears little or no resemblance to its original. As a result of these critiques, anthropologists no longer think of "translating culture"; typically, they no longer use the word *translation*, or indeed *culture*, at all.

Bhabha thus revived the idea of cultural translation just as Asad was pronouncing its death in anthropology. Bhabha would have heard Asad give a version of his paper on cultural translation at the 1984 Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, at which Bhabha gave the original version of his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders," and he would have seen Asad's paper printed in the published proceedings of the conference. Asad, speaking together with John Dixon, emphasized the asymmetric power relation between the anthropologist as cultural translator and the society being studied: "there is a prevailing trend for the language of the dominated cultures to accommodate to the demands and concepts of the dominating culture. Equally, there are powerful resistances to making any comparable adjustments within the discursive practices of European scholarship" (171). The controlling culture, they maintained, citing Walter Benjamin's famous 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator," does not foreignize itself by integrating any aspects of the culture that it is studying. Other cultures remain entirely distant from the conceptual and discursive apparatus of anthropology. In an argument comparable to Geertz's, and in general terms to Said's in *Orientalism*, Asad and Dixon asserted that cultural translation in anthropology is a discourse of power and appropriation that destroys the particularity of the culture it translates. This might have been more than enough to toll the death knell of the concept. However, in a brilliant inversion of their argument, Bhabha retrieved and rewrote it. For Asad and Dixon the anthropologists translate the so-called primitive culture for their Western audience. For

Bhabha the direction of the translation is reversed: the "natives" become the new migrants, who then translate their culture into that of the new host community. This means that subaltern migrants, not anthropologists, become the mediators, actively intervening in the hegemonic culture with which they find themselves confronted. Cultural translation thus operates like hybridization, which, according to Bhabha, involves an agential process of intervention and interaction within the power dynamics of conflicting contemporary cultures. Bhabha counters traditional sociological theories of migrancy that involve ideas of assimilation or acculturation: in his account, the migrant transforms the receiving culture, not vice versa. As a result, the dominant culture gets culturally translated by the migrant. Bhabha's theory of cultural translation is thus one in which the translation is, in anthropological terms, back to front or, to put it in more traditional translational language, foreignizing.

While he does not challenge the concept of culture as such, Bhabha argues that culture opens up a space of difference, which enables us to experience forms of alterity rather than become fixed in oppositional bunkers.⁸ Culture is the in-between, embodying heterogeneous experiences that do not add up to a homogeneous totality, enabling the articulation of the voices that are customarily repressed. Bhabha also suggests that as symbolic interpellative practices, all cultures are always articulated with each other as open systems. Culture holds together different cultures while remaining incomplete and so gives us the experience of their difference.⁹ Such internally differentiated culture can also provide the context for agential intervention by the angels of progress, the cultural translators who will open up the potential heterogeneous spaces within and between the symbolic systems of different cultures. Those living on the borderlines between different cultures, above all migrants, not only exist in

a state of cultural hybridity, negotiating cultural differences every day, they also "deploy . . . their borderline conditions" to "translate . . . the social imaginary" of the metropolis (6).¹⁰ Cultures are continually developing in relation to other cultures that produce "hybrid sites of meanings" that open up fissures of transformative possibility.¹¹

Bhabha develops this idea of cultural translation by returning to Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." Despite citing Rodolphe Gasché's account of Benjamin's spiritual or idealist understanding of the nature of language and translation, Bhabha chooses to read Benjamin in more materialist, normative terms. What he takes from Benjamin are less the latter's own idiosyncratic ideas about translation than those found in Benjamin's quotation from Rudolf Pannwitz, also invoked by Asad and Dixon, which poses the alternatives of domesticating and foreignizing translation, a time-honored antithesis of possibilities in translation theory that goes back at least to Friedrich Schleiermacher's essay "On the Different Methods of Translating" (1813) and that has been more recently championed, in 1993, by Lawrence Venuti.¹² Bhabha's cultural translation is essentially based on the idea of a foreignizing translation, in which the untranslatable components of the language of the source text are infiltrated into the texture of the target language: so the migrants' cultural translation intervenes by interweaving elements of their culture into those of the dominant culture. Through this foreignizing procedure newness comes into the world, in culture just as in language. Cultural translation is not simply about moving the source culture into the target culture but about translating the target culture into a new form:

And it is from this foreign perspective that it becomes possible to inscribe the specific locality of cultural systems—their incommensurable differences—and through that

apprehension of difference, to perform the act of cultural translation. In the act of translation the "given" content becomes alien and estranged; and that, in its turn, leaves the language of translation *Aufgabe*, always confronted by its double, the untranslatable—alien and foreign. (164)

The act of translation will embed its difference in what has been translated, leaving an unassimilable residue of cultural difference: the untranslatable thus uncannily transforms the target culture.

The most sustained elaboration of the idea of cultural translation as a form of agency, transforming one system through another, appears in the last essay written for *The Location of Culture*, "How Newness Enters the World: Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation" (1991–93). Bhabha's title invokes an event that had recently animated the London world in which he lived—the fatwa pronounced on Rushdie. The controversy began in January 1989 when a group of Muslims in Bradford, England, burned a copy of *The Satanic Verses* in a public protest against it. The following month, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa calling on all Muslims to kill Rushdie and anyone involved in publishing the book. Rushdie went into hiding. In "How Newness Enters the World," cultural translation forms a central part of Bhabha's discussion of the fatwa and his defense of Rushdie.

The title of Bhabha's article is an unacknowledged quotation from a passage in Rushdie's 1990 essay on the *Satanic Verses* controversy, "In Good Faith," in which Rushdie defends himself on the grounds that

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how

newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.

(Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 394)¹³

Bhabha supports Rushdie by identifying the processes that the novelist describes with his own account of cultural translation, building on an idea already invoked in *The Satanic Verses*, where the narrator asks, "How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?" (8).¹⁴ Bhabha then conflates his own concept of a "third space" with Rushdie's idea that migration and immigration are transforming our cultures ("New professors, new painters, the lot. It's a bloody revolution" [Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* 270]): instead of assimilation, or nativism, the hybridity of the third space produces innovative forms of what Bhabha calls "the borderline negotiations of cultural translation" (223). The subject of cultural difference becomes the resisting untranslatable element in cultural translation. Bhabha then follows Rushdie directly by identifying the newness of cultural translations with the act of blasphemy. In Bhabha's account, Rushdie and his characters are ascribed the agency of the migrant encountering a determinate tradition, for which, Bhabha argues, "hybridity is heresy."¹⁵ Bhabha then directly identifies blasphemy, together with heresy, as the form of the migrant's "transgressive act of cultural translation" (226).

While Rushdie's transgressive poetics perfectly fit Bhabha's earlier arguments for the agential strategies of the migrant, what gets lost here is that while Rushdie's opponents may be the upholders of tradition, they were first- or second-generation migrants too, rather less entitled and privileged than Rushdie. The controversy arose because migrants were rejecting Rushdie's cultural translations as blasphemous, not identifying

with them. The ensuing fatwa, moreover, signaled an era in which cultural and religious tenets, while articulated locally, formed part of a global movement: the fatwa was the first example of the global, nonlocational cultural disjunction of what is now referred to as Islamism. The opposition to Rushdie's book began in Britain and then developed across the countries of the global South, forming a tricontinental movement (in Africa, Asia, and Latin America) that challenged the secular precepts of Western modernity. Those who defended Rushdie were the upholders of the Western liberal tradition, the same constituency that had been encouraging the cultural translation of mainstream British culture. Equating cultural translation with heresy and blasphemy while focusing on detailed interpretations of Rushdie's text, Bhabha seems oblivious to the larger political perspectives that would become a dominant feature of the politics of the twenty-first century after 9/11. The espousal of difference and its hybrid effects became less germane in a radicalized world in which such forms of modernity, whether countercultural or not, were being rejected. Summarily dismissing the objections to *The Satanic Verses* as "the righteous indignation of Magus and Mullah" and claiming that "cultural translation desecralizes [such] transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy" (228), Bhabha moves on to a discussion of feminist antifundamentalist discourse. What remains unaddressed is the question of whose cultural supremacy is being desecralized and by whom, and the fact that resistance to Rushdie's idea of hybridity was being articulated by Muslims across the world for whom cultural translation had become symptomatic of the West's habitual claims to cultural supremacy, of the West's unequal, disrespectful, and patronizing relation to the non-West. The structural position of cultural translation had been returned to the same power structure criticized by Asad and Geertz.

In identifying cultural translation with blasphemy, Bhabha seems to miss the fact that a section of the Muslim minority in Britain, mostly poor and working-class, had written back in terms very different from those of metropolitan intellectuals and had explicitly rejected their cultural politics of the 1980s. While the Iranian Revolution of 1979 did not register hugely with local British politics, the Rushdie fatwa of 1989 certainly did. Rushdie was never to regain the literary greatness and social relevance of his London years. He may have survived the fatwa but it certainly seems to have killed him as a novelist. The new politics first signaled by *The Satanic Verses* controversy effectively shifted the politico-cultural agenda away from the diasporic Caribbean model of Stuart Hall ("Cultural Identity" and "New Ethnicities"), of hybridized performative identities, to a starker world in which difference, hybridity, and in-betweens no longer served as the definitive markers of progressive cultural and political issues. In the face of the "implacable antagonism" of the public demonstrations against Rushdie's cultural translation (Bhabha, "Black Voices" 112), the theory itself became alienated and estranged, leaving its language of cultural translation confronted by its dark double, the untranslatable—something truly alien and foreign—for which it had no language or understanding and to which it had no response.

Bhabha's theory of cultural translation as a form of blasphemy perhaps best characterizes the "performative, deformative structure" of his own theoretical practice (241). Even when Bhabha reads others, he translates them into his own terms, colliding with them and transfiguring them to say something new and unexpected. Throughout *The Location of Culture* the reader encounters remarks such as "To bend Jürgen Habermas to our purposes . . ." (171). The book is truly transformative, ending by reaffirming its challenge to normative ideas of Western modernity—a manifesto of the revisionary process of postcolonial contramoder-

nity that followed in the wake of its appearance twenty years ago.¹⁶ At the same time, however, as the book itself obliquely acknowledges, other, more militant challenges to Western modernity have arisen from other places and other times, untranslatables that Western cultural translators cannot simply deflect to their own values. The irresolvable differences that Bhabha so persuasively renegotiated have returned in a radically new, undreamed-of form.

NOTES

In discussing works that Bhabha refers to or quotes from in *The Location of Culture*, I have, when possible, cited the same editions used by him or contemporary with the time line of *The Location of Culture*.

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of Bhabha refer to *The Location of Culture*.

2. In a longer, unpublished version of this essay, I examine Bhabha's early writings in the context of the theoretical, cultural, and political milieus in which Bhabha worked in Oxford and London from 1970 to 1984.

3. The penultimate essay in the book, "How Newness Enters the World," cites two published works—Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992) and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)—both of which Bhabha describes as "recent" (272). This late essay, along with the other three previously unpublished essays in *The Location of Culture*, are not part of the dissertation version of the book, which includes "Representation and the Colonial Text" and "A Question of Survival—Nations and Psychic States" (DPhil dissertation completed in 1991 at Oxford University). My own analysis of Bhabha in *White Mythologies*, published in 1990, discusses Bhabha's work up to that date, and therefore not the later chapters of *The Location of Culture*.

4. The contrast between the title of Said's talk at the convention, "Postcolonial Discourse," and Bhabha's, "Stereotype and Fantasy: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," nicely points to the differences between the two critics' approaches (*Program* 1030).

5. If this was how English culture appeared to some in the 1980s, it was nevertheless highly stratified (Young, *Idea*).

6. The following paragraph draws on some material from my article "Hybridity and Cultural Translation." On Evans-Pritchard as the originator of the metaphor of translation in anthropology, see Geertz, *Local Knowledge* 9. In "Articulating the Archaic," Bhabha cites Geertz's

discussion in *Local Knowledge* of understanding between different cultures (59).

7. Bhabha himself had already made a comparable argument in "Representation and the Colonial Text" (1980), about the fate of colonial texts losing their particularity in the process of attaining literary universality (114).

8. "To that end," Bhabha writes in the original ending to "The Commitment to Theory," "we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between*, the space of the *entre* that Derrida has opened up in writing itself—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, antinationalist, histories of the 'people.' It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space,' we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" ("Commitment" 22).

9. "Cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures—th(r)ough that displacement or liminality [there] opens up the possibility of articulating *different*, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities" (Bhabha, "Third Space" 210–11; cf. *Location* 162–63).

10. In the introduction, cited here, Bhabha uses the term *cultural translation* only once, and somewhat differently, to characterize the photographs of Allan Sekula (1951–2013), who "takes the borderline condition of cultural translation to its global limit in *Fish Story* [1989–95], his photographic project on harbours" (8). *Fish Story*, as an exhibition catalog at the Santa Monica Museum of Art described it in 1996, "explored the historical, sociopolitical, aesthetic, and literary connections among such far-flung port cities as New York, Rotterdam, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Seoul. Consisting of a sequence of 105 large-scale, color photographs interspersed with narrative panels authored by Sekula, as well as two slide projections, *Fish Story* wove an intricate web of visual and verbal associations among panoramic views of the sea, detailed close-ups of nautical devices, cargo containers, warehouses, sailors, and shipyard workers, locating the individual elements in an ever-shifting cross-current of global exchange: of goods, money, knowledge, and power." It is not entirely clear how the hybrid cultural conditions that Bhabha describes earlier for the migrant apply to the work of a white Marxist photographer demonstrating the processes of globalized commercial traffic and exchange.

11. Compare the idea of using the instability of culture as a means for its transformation with the arguments of Fanon (Young, "Fanon").

12. Benjamin's quotation from Pannwitz, in the Harry Zohn translation of "The Task of the Translator" that Bhabha cites (228), reads, "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning

German into Hindi, Greek, English. . . . The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (qtd. in Benjamin 80–81). By contrast, Bhabha writes that "[t]he Bible translated into Hindi . . . is still the English book" (108).

13. *Imaginary Homelands*, the collection in which "In Good Faith" appeared, ended with the 1990 essay "Why I Have Embraced Islam." Rushdie subsequently revoked his declaration of faith, and the essay was dropped from the 1992 edition.

14. Bhabha first used the term *third space* at the end of his essay "Sly Civility" (101), but he did not substantially develop the idea of a third space until his interview with Jonathan Rutherford, in 1990, the year before he began "How Newness Enters the World." In this later essay, he introduces the concept through an uncharacteristically extended discussion of Fredric Jameson's argument about the unrepresentability of postmodern space. I further analyze the concept of a third space in "Void."

15. "Rushdie repeatedly uses the word 'blasphemy' in the migrant sections of the book to indicate a theatrical form of the staging of cross-genre, cross-cultural identities. Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation" (225; cf. Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* 272). Rushdie uses the word *blaspheme/blasphemy* nine times (225–26), but he only uses *heresy* in relation to ideas of evolution (75, 251).

16. A slightly earlier example, written from the same location as *The Location of Culture*, would be Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993). A more recent one, from 2009, would be Susan Buck-Morss's *Hegel, Haiti, and Human History*.

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