The blood in our veins: White unease, introspection, and the promise of corporeal transparency in multicultural times

Keynote address presented at the Multiculturalism and the Arts Conference
School of Art Studies, University of Turku, 29-30 August 2008

Introduction

I'd like to begin by showing you two clips from a television series (which came with an accompanying book) titled Face of Britain (see http://www.amazon.co.uk/Face-Britain-Genes-Reveal-History/dp/0743295293 for information about the book), screened in Britain in April 2007. The narrator is archaeologist Neil Oliver (known as host of BBC Two television series Coast, which takes a group of 'experts' around the UK coasts to explore their natural and social histories). The first is the trailer for the series, made by the production company WAGtv. I'll show just the first 1 minute or so, to give you a sense of what the series was about. The second is the last chapter of the last episode (the

series had 3 episodes in total) – it lasts 5 minutes. Then I'll proceed with my talk. Please bear with me while I sort out the t

SHOW CLIP 1: 1min 22 sec. (http://www.wagtv.com/programme/Face-Of-Britain-303.html?filter=type_Series)

SHOW CLIP 2: 5 minutes. (from DVD)

Despite the ostensibly positive gloss that Neil Oliver concludes with (which I will return to later), it shouldn't distract us from the fact that the chapter begins with a sense of urgency. Allow me remind to recite the dialogue.

> [NO voice over] Time is running out; the world is shrinking. 21st century life is becoming even more mobile and cosmopolitan. Our genetic roots are becoming increasingly tangled and impenetrable. In 20 years, a project like this will probably be impossible.
>
> Neil Oliver Speaking to Sir Walter Bodmer
>
> [NO:] A large part of the fascination for me is that this is the last chance. It's now or never.
>
> [WB:] Absolutely. I think we are really quite on the cusp, the margin of being able to do this even now. And that comes with the mobility of the trains, the motor car, the planes, people living all over the place. You know, we are going to be a global village eventually, and who knows in another hundred years' time what sort of a mix there'll be. And so the opportunities for looking back in this way are rapidly disappearing.

And in the book, Bodmer writes that '[t]he traces of the origins of the people of the British Isles will very soon be lost for ever. Hence the urgency of our work. (Bodmer 2006: 11)

In the work I've been doing on multiculturalism, a key point of interest for me is how 'multiculture' or 'diversification' is something which is put to work, which is mobilized to produce desires, identities, anxieties, and so on, in the re-configuration of what connects inhabitants of a national (or transnational) space to one another. In this regard, I have proposed the phrase 'multicultural horizon' to capture that utopian or dystopian vision of diversification and social change. *Multicultural Horizons* refers to the

intricate process of simultaneous *witnessing*, *questioning*, and *imagining*: witnessing → 'we' *are/have become/are becoming* multicultural; questioning → how do we achieve 'integration with diversity', as in the UK, or 'unity in diversity, as in the EU, or alternatively, questioning how to resist assimilationist politics; and finally imagining → the future of the multicultural and of what 'we' will become. The three layers constitutive of multicultural horizons – witnessing, questioning, imagining – draw attention to the varying relations and contradictory temporal movements within the national imaginary that is grounded both on a historicist conception of timelessness, on the one hand, and the localized practices and everyday lives 'on the ground' that force the immediacy of the present to view, on the other.

While we can arguably conceive that the days of multiculturalism as a state-sponsored strategy are numbered – at least in Western democracies such as Britain, where the government no longer even uses the term because it is perceived as confusing, divisive and separatist – the 'multicultural question' (to borrow Stuart Hall's (2000) phrase), in its various guises, frames much of the national debates about the cohesion of many western (and indeed non-western) civil societies who are uncertain about their national futures. In all its different guises and throughout its agitated history, the multicultural question of the national future have come to define the urgencies of the present. Barnor Hesse (2000) wrote about multicultural transruptions as those interruptions in national representation that bring to light the impossibility of the nation as full representation. In this regard, we could, following Homi Bhabha (1990/1994), think about the multicultural question as interrupting the narrative authority of the historicist, cumulative account of origins and 'the people'. In this sense, the multicultural question re-activates an introspective process, that is, it is ultimately inward looking, aimed at strengthening the identities of national, international or transnational communities in the face of variously perceived changes brought about by internal

diversification – which is in turn brought about by immigration, dispersal, internationalisation, and so on.

In what follows, I consider one example of national introspection by looking at figurations of the Face of Britain. Broadly speaking, this is about the oscillation between individuality and universalism – when one slips into the other, and when it doesn't – in the reproduction of the national. In this sense, this paper explores the mutual constitution of particularism and universalism in the making of national community. Conceptions of the multicultural oscillate between understandings of citizenship that are disembodied – the universalized, abstract/ed, a-cultural citizen – and embodied – where people in their ordinariness are the referent and where differences *are made (in)to* matter. In what follows, the 'matter' in question is differently marked as 'genetic' or 'cultural'.

More specifically, this paper is about how digital photography, morphing technologies, population statistics and genetics are variously combined to operate as technologies of reassurance at a time of when we are said to be undergoing deeply transformative changes that threaten to fragment white Britain. What does making composite images into a national portrait tell us about the fantasy of the national self? What do these figurations of a multicultural nation tell us about the wider anxieties, desires and imaginings that haunt the prospect, and project, of national introspection and self-transformation? These figurations of national transformation draw on the body as evidence. This is about what Lauren Berlant has referred to as 'modal citizen' (1997: 21) whose form is taken up as the reflection, expression, promise or threat of the changing nation. The focus on form and on the body as evidence is paramount to my argument here which considers examples of photographic stills resulting from morphing technologies. The photograph suggests stillness; it captures a moment but it also suggests timelessness in the sense of being out of time. In this regard, it stabilizes – in the cases that interest me here, the photograph stabilizes the nation, it makes it whole. However, as I show below, the photograph can also bring a

depth of disturbance – Barthes (1980) would call this its *punctum* – that questions what we see, and invites to look for something different *within* the photograph. This depth of disturbance is given further meaning through the DNA discourse deployed in the *Face of Britain* series. In this regards, the photographic stills are the matter through which the 'figure' of the 'average' British man and woman is not merely represented, but whose existence they (seemingly) evidence. As the products of morphing technologies, these composite images take stills and de-still them into a greater still – the Faces of Britain.

The paper is divided in two parts. First, I examine two 'average' multicultural faces of Britain – one produced in 2001 and the other in 2007. In the second section, I centre on the 'average faces of Britain' resulting from Sir Walter's DNA mapping of Britain. Moving from one section to the other takes us from the 'generic' to the 'genetic' 'man', literally (from the 'average' to the 'genetic') as well as indirectly, i.e. from a figuration of contemporary Britain as 'contained diversity' (Bhabha 1990) to one of connected variation; from a representation of the 'typical' Briton, to the Briton as type.[1]

[SLIDE] Faces of Britain Part I

The 2007 *Face of Britain* series concludes with the face of a multicultural Britain, in its male and female incarnation. **SLIDE (still)** This face was produced from hundreds of photographs, and using the statistical data about ethnic identity from the 2001 national Census. Although they do not provide the statistics used, the assumption is that it is the accurate representation of what the average British man or woman might look like if they had characteristics that represented the proportional ethnic make-up of Britain today. This reminds me of another face, produced for a special report on Britain in the *Economist* magazine in Feb 2007. **[SLIDE]** This prototype of 'Mr Average today' was created to show '[T]he face of multicultural Britain', as he was also called (Manchester Evening

News). Mr Average today is 92.4% White, 1.8% Black, 5% Asian, 0.32% Chinese and 0.41% Other. (Manchester Evening News)

It is worth noting that the Economist face was compared to an E-fit of a 1961 face of the 'average' British man **CLICK** – this one would be 96% White, 1.7% Black, 1.6% Asian, 0.18% Chinese and 0.4% Other. Merril Stevenson, author of the report said:

> These faces show something that may surprise people. At a time when concern about social segregation and racial tension dominates the headlines, the proportion of ethnic minorities in Britain is actually relatively small. Although their share is growing, it is still far less than in many countries. And we can also see that the Face of Britain hasn't changed all that much in 40 years. This suggests that the hysteria about immigration that often surfaces is overdone. In fact, immigrants have boosted economic output and filled many skill gaps.[2] (see footnote for URL)

In line with its no-border politics, the *Economist* is presenting this computerised representation of 'Mr Britain' today to argue against the 'hysteria' about immigration and the diversity it brings. So we have imaginings of the multicultural face of Britain that are cast in contexts of crisis, of hysteria, of urgency in the face of relentless and accelerated change. 'Multicultural', here, is marked as a source of unease, discomfort, discontinuity and loss.

Since 2006, several commentators and politicians have been claiming to voice the mood of unease prevailing among white Britons (particularly the white poor) and their fears about uncontrolled immigration and the legacies of what is now widely conceived as failed multiculturalism.[3] In August 2006, the former Communities Secretary (minister?) Ruth Kelly stated that 'white Britons who do not feel comfortable with change'. Similarly, in his remarks about the changing face of Britain, Merril Stevenson is in *The Economist* was quick to add:

> But it should also make us think about a group that is often neglected: those who are poor, white and British-born. These are the people who are increasingly being left behind in schools, housing and the job market.

> Many of them feel dispossessed by newer arrivals and unrepresented by mainstream political parties. [4]

White unease is in the air (and on the air!). We are repeatedly told that poor white Britons are uneasy, uncomfortable, fearful, in the face of the increased diversification of their local communities. Indeed, new social policies and programmes about cohesion and integration have explicitly called for 're-balancing our perspective [and for the] need to challenge . . . an obsession with a narrow focus on minorities. . . Although 65% of people from ethnic minority groups live in [the most deprived areas of the country], the majority – over 16m – are white.' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007a: 3)

Two main factors are behind this change of mood. First, fears of 'home grown terrorism' have crystallised since 7/7, the attack of London's transport system by British-born Muslim young men; this was followed by a several widely reported foiled attacks or alleged plots of further attacks: on 21 July 2005, then in August 2006, and then in the Summer of 2007. The second factor shaping white unease is the so-called 'new immigration' from the eight eastern European countries[5] that joined the EU in January 2004, leading to several thousands of eastern European migrants – known as the A8 migrants – to seek work in Britain. Some ministers reportedly stated that the migration of eastern European migrants to Britain 'had proved "a shock to the system"' (Travis 2007). What is significant here is that these migrants travel to very different parts of the country, including rural areas that had until then little experience of international migration – I recently received the voting registration form from my town council which came with an information leaflet containing a Polish translation.

So this is the context surrounding the Face of Britain series and the research project that it documents; the context said to give particular urgency to the study. I'll return to the DNA mapping of Britain later. But now, I'd like to focus on what have been dubbed 'faces of multicultural Britain' – one that was produced in 2001, and those produced for the series in 2007.

Face of Britain 2001A

http://www.haverhill2000.com/haverhill/pages/finmain.html : this morphed photograph was produced by independent photographer Chris Dorley-Brown from the portraits of 1,900 residents of Haverhill (Suffolk), male and female, aged six months to eighty years old, allegedly including 'representatives of about 50 ethnic minorities, showing the cultural diversity of the town.' (Anonymous 2001)[6] (QUALIFY) The 1,900 photographs were digitally merged to create what has been perceived as the 'average 21st century Briton' (S. Millar 2001). 'Although it is taken from a snapshot of people in the town of Haverhill', said Dorley-Brown, 'it could really represent the face of the average person in Britain' (Anonymous 2001).

Face of Britain 2001B (**CLICK** still from film again): as you saw in the clip, this face of Britain today, created 'for the first time' by Dr Tony Little from Liverpool University, was based on hundreds of photographs and statistics from the 2001 Census.

[SLIDE] The Faces of Britain look like photographs of real persons when in fact they are cyborgs, human-technology hybrids composed from an array of photographs of 'real' people. In addition, their 'origins' remain shrouded in mystery as we never see the 'original' photos that they are based on. On the website where the 2001 Face of Britain features (http://www.haverhill2000.com/haverhill/pages/finmain.html) its genealogy begins with the 'first generation' of morphs resulting from the melding of two photographs. Concealing the 'real' faces of Haverhill, concealing the stitches of the technological surgery involved in melding hundreds of photographs, concealing the stitching and pointing of features, hiding the scars or deformities, concealing the wrinkles that constitutes the 'individuality of the people who took part in the project', this morph takes something that's moving (lives, bodies, the merging of photographs) and makes it still to produce this smoothed out youthful face. Chris Dorley-Brown's 'Face of Britain' was admired in many newspapers for its 'beautifully proportioned features' (Anonymous

2001; also Bale 2001), which, for its creator, are a testimony to his 'belief in the attractiveness of the human race' (cited in all newspapers). In the 2007 version, Tony Little notes that 'The composites end up looking more attractive than the individuals who go into them.' (McKie 2006: 165). Make a note that he is talking about other faces (the average faces of Britain), but the point is that the claim is that this is an inevitable feature of the technology itself; a conception of technological prowess, of technological agency that produces the results without human intervention. Cross ref. to Mongrel Britain in Fortier 2008.

Given their alleged mix of people from different ethnic groups, these morphings could be seen as refuting cultural and racial roots and essences and as seeking to establish connections between human subjects outside of a racial economy of reproduction. In the case of Dorley-Brown's morph, the images are organized according to gender and age group, rather than into various racial categories. In this respect, Dorley-Brown's genealogy resists any form of phenotypic indexation: Dorley-Brown does not engage in disaggregating, categorizing or managing the circulation of the contemporary 'ethnic' or 'racial' subject. In the 2007 case, it's a bit different. One the one hand, the 'multicultural' is clearly signalled by the sequence of photographs of people of colour, even if we do not see the original photos used in the production of the morphs. In addition, we are informed that the morph is also the result of the 2001 census figures about ethnic identity. So this face is, to some extent, the result of disaggregation, categorisation and proportional distribution. In the first case, the assumption was that ethnic minorities were over-represented (people from 50 different ethnic groups rather than 50 individuals of ethnic minority background); in the second case, it is that they are adequately represented. In both cases, the applauded inclusiveness of these quests to find the average faces of Britain today is the technological answer to what many have seen as the challenge of national melding.

These faces ensure 'the difference of no difference in the human family' (Haraway 1997: 225). The violence here does not consist in founding the image within a hierarchy of difference based on ideas of racial, gender or sexual difference. The violence

'consists instead in the evacuation of histories of domination and resistance' (Castañeda 2002: 96). Consider how Neil Oliver declares that in the 19th century, Britain became the first and greatest industrial power in the world, the workshop of the world, totally sidestepping the fact that in the 19th century, it was also one of the biggest empires. This denial is 'accomplished through morphing as a specific kind of technological (and heterosexual) reproduction.' (Castañeda 2002: 96) **[SLIDE**] WORD ON THE HETEROSEXUAL – if the racial economy of reproduction is refuted here, mixing is a resolutely heterosexual category. I don't have time to elaborate on this here, but suffice it to say that the genealogy of the multicultural face of Britain is steeped in heterosexual love and a heterosexual economy of reproduction, and in the reassertion of heteronormativity as a condition to social membership. I CAN RETURN TO THAT IN DISCUSSION.

[SLIDE] With their childlike innocence, the Faces of multicultural Britain represent the safe, reassuring side of racial mixing. They constitute an appropriate fantasy of a nation that maintains its innocence through the erasure of memory. Decidedly located in the present, these are bodies without history: these are youthful faces with wrinkles, scars, and other blemishes ironed out, and the marks of personal lives erased, thus being offered up as a blank surface with no past and with only an imagined future rooted in a multicultural present. FoB is a 'national fantasy from the present representing a posthistorical… future' (Berlant 1997: 201). To paraphrase Claudia Castañeda (2002: 106) these youthful multicultural faces embody 'harmonious' multicultural relatedness. But the message here is that this is a 'harmonious multicultural relatedness' that living in *this* national space makes possible. These models of modern Britain re-root and re-route the multicultural as *truly British*. They are the nation's fantasized double whose function is to preserve the nation against extinction, reflecting the nation's inherent qualities of tolerance and the timeless tradition of mixing and assimilation that ensure its strength and

immortality by promising a new future. In the models of modern Britons, the nation appears as likeable to itself, as 'what it would like to be', at least for advocates of multiculturalism.

The striking thing about these figures is that their very form – the expressionless face – constitutes an exemplary anonymity and quietness that mirrors the formlessness of the universal, abstract, 'average' subject-citizen (Berlant 2001: 46) with its the generic significance, unlocatedness, a-historicality, undecidability. This 'average' citizen inhabits the fantasy world of New Labour's Britain, where 'mixing', like 'melding' and 'morphing', becomes a sanitized version of miscegenation that not only evacuates histories of domination and resistance, but that re-establishes Britishness-as-Whiteness, while it simultaneously fetichizes the colour of the 'ethnic' as desirable if 'white enough'. Dorley-Brown's face was described as 'youthful, attractive, *olive-skinned*, dark-eyed' (S. Millar 2001; my emphasis), while the *Economist*'s 'Average Man today' was described as having 'a visibly darker hair colour and a more olive skin tone' that Average Man 1961! Olive skin, situated between the white and black, is the skin that signals racial/genetic miscegenation *of the right kind*; remember how the Economist used its e-fit to reassure against the 'hysteria' about immigration. 'Olive skin' is the skin that passes; the one that can be 'at home' anywhere. As Lauren Berlant might put it, this is 'a future race of cyborgs, or mixed-race but still white-enough children.' (Berlant 1997: 207)

[SLIDE] Faces of Britain Part II

I'd like to now turn to the television series *Face of Britain* (Hall et al. 2007) and to how genetic information was used in the creation of the British body, in a move from generic man to genetic man. As indicated in the trailer I showed, the three-part series was based on a £2.3 million (~ 2.8 million Euros and 4.3 million USD) study at the University of Oxford, funded by the Wellcome Trust and led by cancer and population geneticist

Professor Sir Walter Bodmer. Drawing on results from the Human Genome Project, the study aimed at deciphering the genetic structure of the people from the UK, primarily to track down genes associated with diseases.

The methodological rationale of the study is controlled sampling in order to avoid too much mixture of genetic signatures. So Bodmer and his collaborating 'gene hunters' [sic] collected (are still collecting I believe) blood samples from between 100 and 150 people from about 30 different rural regions throughout the UK – for a total of up to 3500 samples. Researchers are looking for people whose parents and grandparents were all born in the same locality, to ensure that the sample is representative of the area throughout the ages. The choice of volunteers whose families have ostensibly resided in the same locality for three generations imagines the rural dwellers as sedentary, a trait that Sir Walter declares will soon disappear in today's hyper-mobile world (see Bodmer 2006: 11). Indeed, the researchers purposely ignore all forms of migration and mobility, including 'the movements of various [ancient] tribes around Britain' (McKie 2006: 21). The study further ignores recent waves of migration – excluding people like Sir Walter himself, a refugee from Nazi Germany – because recent migrants represent only a small proportion of the population and, as Sir Walter writes, 'their history relates to their country of origin, not to the British Isles.' (Bodmer 2006: 11) The assumption of the purity and immobility of rural residents stands against the assumed hyper-mobility and mixity of the urban. The English myth of the rural idyll is mobilised here, and shored up as the site where the pure national character can be found. As Michael Bunce writes, the rural idyll is the locus of 'the good civilisation; the locus of human fulfilment and true community, of harmony between nature and humankind, of the virtue of simpler [lives and] epochs' (Bunce 1994: 34). As such, the country idyll functions 'to "naturalize" cultural or social constructions of nation and to locate individuals in particular positions in relation to them' (Palmer 2002: 26 CHECK PAGE). When a DNA map is juxtaposed

to the mapping of rural Britain, the British are confirmed not merely as a population, but as a people, with its genetic, read racialised, specificities. For a post-industrial, urbanised country like Britain to use the rural as the locus of original people is significant, as Sarah Neal has pointed out, because 'it is based on a de-racialized nostalgia for a pre-multicultural Britain.' (Neal 2002: PAGE) One where mobility is antithetical to national membership: though the more recent migrants are *in* Britain, they are not *of* Britain, as their genetic histories would take us outside the national borders.

It has been said that the paradox of DNA is that it both unites and separates (e.g. Chinn 2000). *The Face of Britain* separates the British genome from the human genome – which it is of course still connected to. It also traces connections between ancestors and contemporaries that reveal regional variations in genetic make-up *within* the national borders. But such variations are displaced here in favour of a return to sameness and to One People. *Face of Britain* remains a distinctly British nationalist project that confirms and *figures* 'the British people' as distinct from Others who are both outside *and* inside; the promise that the Channel 4 series offers is to reveal 'who we really are' (WAGtv clip on WAGtv website) and to trace British people's links to Britain's ancient forebears: the ancient Celts, the Anglo-Saxon farmers, the Viking warriors and the Norman invaders. This is not merely a story of origins, but a story of *indigenisation*. Tracing *some* genetic traits back to the first occupiers of this land, 'the men and women who established these bloodlines *in the first place*' (McKie 2006: 20; my emphasis) serves to naturalise the nation's 'original folk' and founds claims of national indigenousness and national membership.

The story of the television series – as well as of the book accompanying the series (McKie 2006) – kept the details of the intricacies of human genetics to a minimum, in favour of 'the story of the face of Britain' (McKie 2006: 20). Still, the founding premise

of *Face of Britain* is that DNA is the bearer of *true* information that is hidden behind the surface. The

> prime concern in *The Face of Britain* is to show how scientists are teasing out a much more mysterious genetic inheritance that goes back to the beginnings of recorded history and into the depths of our prehistoric past. *The Face Britain* shows how science is linking people with the settlers who first came to this land thousands of years ago. (McKie 2006: 21) Furthermore,

Sarah Chinn (2000: 143) points out that 'the discourse of DNA imagines the body's most basic truth as existing in a realm invisible to the majority of [us].'

> DNA is envisaged as answering a welter of knotted questions about ontology (Who are we?), etiology (Where did we come from?), taxonomy (Where in nature to we fit?), epistemology (How can we know the world?), teleology (What is our purpose?) and, broadly speaking, eschatology (What will become of us?) (Chinn 2000: 144).

A striking feature in the television series is that it consistently seeks to make visible that invisible and 'mysterious genetic inheritance' (McKie 2006: 21) that present day Britons are made of. The face of the British people is repeatedly reconstituted, either through the facial recreation of ancient skulls or through morphing technology. For example, forensic anthropologist Caroline Wilkinson rebuilt the Bleadon Man, an ancient Celt whose skeletal remains were found in Bleadon, Somerset (West Country) in 1998. She reconstructs the face with clay, from a plaster copy of the skull. **SLIDE**

Tony Little, for his part, produced the averages faces of Britain by morphing digital photographs of groups of individuals from different areas. **SLIDE** From their images, he selected common feature points – around the eyes, mouth, head and ears for example – and from these he created an average for each feature. **SLIDE** And this is what the average faces of Britain look like. The caption reads:

> These are the average faces of Britain according to Tony Little, with women on the top line, and men on the bottom. They are made up from people from the following places, going left to right: Cornwall, East

Anglia, Exeter, Newcastle, Pembroke, Sussex. (caption in McKie 2006: 166)

In *Face of Britain*, facial reconstruction serves to answer the additional ontological question of 'What we have become' by filling the gaps between past and present, and tracing family resemblances between the present and ancestral phenotypes. It fills the taxonomic question about where we fit on the basis of what we know about where we come from.

Michel Foucault has famously written about the importance of 'open[ing] up a few corpses' in the movement of the medical gaze that went 'from the symptomatic surface to the tissual surface; . . . plunging from the manifest to the hidden' (cited in Chinn 2000: 10). With DNA, the gaze moves from tissual surface (blood, strand of hair, saliva) to hidden genetic information. The interpretation of the DNA information then propels a reversal of the movement from the hidden to the surface which *acquires* symptomatic value. With its DNA mapping of the country, *Face of Britain* is the apotheosis of 'the dream of corporeal transparency' (Chinn 2000: 146). A dream that is met by the photographs of the average Faces of Britain. The facial reconstructions produced for *Face of Britain* are read as transparent; as symptomatic of the hidden genetic make-up of the 'average Britons'.

The combination of morphing technology with genetic information calls forth a new way of looking at 'the average man' as de-individualised and connected. The individual is represented as a type (cf Lury 1998). These photographs are about bridging time that has passed (Kuhn 2002: 50; Sontag 1977: 48) by reading back into them and then fast forwarding to the present through a practice of looking that combines dissection and introspection: concentrating on minute differences[7] and tracing them back to one's genetic lineage: this nose is Celtic, this brow is Saxon. We are invited to read back into the photograph, to look for ancestors *inside* it, to seek out a tell tale detail that might

divulge the presence of more than what can be seen: signs of authentic Cornish, Welsh, East-Anglian blood.

'Look in the mirror', the series subtitle tells us, 'thousands of years of history is [sic] looking back at you.' In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the mirror stage has been defined as representing a permanent structure of subjectivity, and a phase in which the subject is permanently caught and captivated by his own image. The mirror stage is the first time when a human being 'has the experience of seeing himself, of reflecting on himself and conceiving of himself as other than he is' (Lacan 1954/1988: 79) – that is, as other than the fragmented, disconnected, uncoordinated infant body that the human is at that stage. Grounded as they are in the DNA mapping of Britain, the average faces of Britain reflect back to the nation an image which allows it 'to locate what pertains to the ego and what does not.' (Lacan 1954/1988: 79) The average faces of Britain are presented to us with a sense of jubilation that Lacan associates with that moment of identification with the image reflected in the mirror – that moment when 'identity' provides an imaginary mastery over the body; here, an imaginary national wholeness. The DNA mapping of Britain, in this regard, it not only the fulfillment of the promise of transparency that DNA is seen as offering, but is it also the achievement of wholeness in the face of what is perceived as a threateningly fragmenting present. The visual identity that is reflected back to the nation from the morph/mirror supplies imaginary 'wholeness' to the experience of a nation variation. Look in the mirror, and you will be made whole again, aligned with your origins.

The photographs of the 'average faces of Britain', however, work differently than those of the 'faces of multicultural Britain'. In the latter, we are invited to read back into the photograph, to look for signs of non-indigenous others inside it: the olive skin, the darker hair. If the 'average faces of Britain' testify to a long history of presence in this land, the 'face of multicultural Britain' is, like Chris Dorley-Brown's morph, decidedly

cast in the present. While the 'average faces' answer ontological and etiological questions, the 'face of multicultural Britain', for its part, raises eschatological questions: 'What will become of us?'

According to Robin McKie, the backgrounds of people from more recent migration to Britain, whose 'genetic histories . . . lie in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, China and South East Asia', are 'recent and relatively easy to elucidate' (McKie 2006: 21). Different understanding of corporeal transparency are at work here. The faces of recent migrants are transparent but on the surface – you see what you get. This is transparency in the sense of being obvious. As for the white Britons, the transparency is that of the unmarked, the disappearing. The assumption is that whiteness is unmarked, indecipherable, and that white Britons could be anything, from anywhere. In the current context of white unease as white-bodied 'others' are dispersing to Britain's rural outskirts, this is a double-edged transparency: if it can mean the privileges of mobility and entitlement that are associated with whiteness, whiteness now also signifies fragmentation, disappearance, and neglect (as in 'the poor white British-born'). The genetic survey of Britain, which is also referred to as the 'genetic Domesday Book', is promising to reveal the incontestable origins of white Britons that still flow in the people's veins today.

But I do not want to underplay the disruption and indeed the ambivalence about the nation and its people that runs through this series. The last five minutes are incredibly telling of what Homi Bhabha has famously referred to as the split that is at the heart of the nation as narration. For Bhabha, the narrative of the nation inevitably enters a contested conceptual terrain because its people must always be thought of in 'double-time' (1990/1994: 145).

> The 'people' are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past* [the 'average faces of Britain]; [but] the people

> are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (1990/1994: 145; emphasis original)

Neil Oliver's concluding words precisely iterate the living principle of the national present not simply as the product of historical self-generation, but as constantly regenerating. 'In truth', he concludes, 'the populations of these islands are constantly being regenerated by the arrival of new people, all of them contributing to the ever *changing* face of Britain.'

With the camera zooming in on faces that are racially marked as minoritized – brown, black, Oriental – to signal the multicultural character of Britain (London; the world?) today, the film is suggesting that the nation is splitting, fragmenting from within. These last images, these final words interrupt the national narrative of rooted and indigenous self-generation; but they also reveal the inherent internal contradiction of the modern liberal nation (cf. Bhabha 1990/1994: 148). In addition, the last five minutes ride on that tension identified by Edward Said as characterising colonial discourse – which is central to the shaping of the modern nation – 'between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasis – and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history – change, difference [, mobility]' (Bhabha 1987/1994: 86). But this contradiction is smoothed over, is displaced – the anxiety cannot be accommodated within the requirements of national certainty – as we are reminded that 'the opportunities for looking back in this way are rapidly disappearing' (Hall et al. 2007). I think that there is a definite sense of excitement and triumph when we are shown, 'for the first time' as Neil Oliver tells us, the face of multicultural Britain. So here, *Face of Britain* concludes with the promise (again?) of mastery over the national body – with this image of the way we are today and what we might become, the nation is given an imaginary mastery over the national body, 'one which is premature in relation to a real mastery.' (Lacan 1954/1988: 79) This is a moment of anticipation, as if we are taken back to square one, back to new origins

rather than to continual renewal. In this sense, the genetic Domesday Book is a 'national fantasy from the present representing a posthistorical… future' (Berlant 1997: 201).

In conclusion

The figures discussed in this chapter, and the different histories they conjure up, erase, or promise, dramatically highlight the very ambivalence of the nation's idea or knowledge of itself. Still, whatever the pleasures or fears the images are seen as provoking, they are re-routed and contained within a fantasy frame that supports the belief in the primacy and unifying force of the *nation* (the national 'we'). From generic 'man' to 'genetic' man, we move from the diversity as the containment of difference to diversity as connected variation. But overall, these figurations seek to capture, and reassure us against, some of the deep anxieties and issues that have been mobilised in the public domain in recent years and that have been addressed under the aegis of 'the multicultural question'.

A number of questions underpin my project, and arise from my own critique of multiculturalism as nothing more than culturalist reductionism. That is, my critique of the way that multiculturalism has been deployed as a strategy of government and governance that is founded on culturalist ideas of difference. Hence I am not against multiculturalism, but I am searching for a 'radical critical' version of the multicultural project that reinvisions world history and contemporary social life from a decolonizing, antiracist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and anti-classist perspective (cf. Shohat and Stam 2003: 7) – in short, anti discriminatory perspective that is deeply rooted in justice and equality.

So here are some of the questions that underpin my work on multiculturalism and that I'd like to conclude with here, as a set of considerations for the conference (if I may be so presumptuous). How is multiculturalism/the multicultural figured? Who speaks the multicultural 'we' and under what conditions? What kinds of connections and identifications are required of and between inhabitants in a multicultural space, on what

grounds, and what are the limits? How might one characterize the representation of the nation's colonized (or colonizing) past and history? What is the relevance of anti-colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial discourses?

With regards to 'the arts' and cultural productions, my work examines how cultural productions are mobilised and taken up in the public domain, and how they intersect or develop in relation to scientific discourses and technologies. How and when does 'art' become 'technology' and what are the implications? How is history imagined, narrated, mobilized and performed in cultural productions? What is the relationship between various art traditions – cinematic tradition, literary tradition, performance/theatrical traditions, etc. – in different national settings?

Finally, what can the various cultural practices of diasporic artists tell us about new spaces of belonging, identity formations, diasporic spaces? How can they help us dissolve the genealogical and nativist logic of 'heritage', as well as assumptions about naturalized 'ethnic', folk, native, or 'traditional' artistic practices?

CONCLUDE

---

[1] In revised version, must look at Celia Lury 1998, chapter 3, as well as other lit on DNA, genetic – Strathern, Franklin (cited in Lury), etc. Also, Baudrillard 1994 apparently writes about the move from generic to genetic man. See also Stacey.

[2] in Manchester Evening News 2 February 2007 http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/235/235030_this_is_the_face_of_multiracial_britain.html [accessed 24/07/08]

[3] List examples from Kelly, Phillips, and ?Economist?, and then cross-ref. to my Cit. Stu. article for more details.

[4] in Manchester Evening News 2 February 2007 http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/235/235030_this_is_the_face_of_multiracial_britain.html [accessed 24/07/08]

[5] The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

[6] This in the conclusion most newspapers drew (with the exception of Emma Hartley from *The Independent*) from Dorley-Brown's estimation, stated at the press conference, that his sample might have included 50 individuals from ethnic minorities (personal conversation with Dorley-Brown, February 2002).

[7] perfected by anti-Semitism (Seshadri-Crooks 2000: 2; also Gilman 1991; Jacobson see text in Back and Solomos),