Postmodern Hybridity and Performing Identity in Gish Jen and Rebecca Walker

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Abstract

In this essay, I shall first discuss the literary writings of early Chinese immigrants (who were “ambassadors of good will”), second-generation Chinese American writers (some as assimilationists), Chinese American writers in the 1960s (some as cultural nationalists), and early bi-racial writers—all of whom situate racial identity within a binary context. Then, using Gish Jen’s Mona in the Promised Land and Rebecca Walker’s Black White and Jewish, I shall explore a new mode of subjectivity in today’s postmodern-capitalist regime, an identity that is no longer situated in the in-between of binary oppositions but involves an incessant movement of differences. I argue that the never-ending performance of identities enables the performers of the two texts to disregard their split, ease their anxiety about the diminishing Other, and reduce the other to one—imaginary, authentic, and totally rhetorical. On that basis, I shall examine how these identity performers in both texts are all assumed in the Capitalist Other and how identity performance and postmodern hybridity are both concomitant with today’s Global-Capitalist regime. Finally, I propose a
possible political identity. It is one that is neither grounded on binary framework nor based on an endless movement of performance. Rather, it lies in acknowledging the extent of one’s obedience to the Other, the recognition of the lack in self, others, and the Other, and the ability to embrace a Lacanian “partial enjoyment.” Today, accepting the partiality of enjoyment is a way to form a symbolic bond in that we need to recognize that we all have made our sacrifice in enjoyment and none will have it all.

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