

**On the Borders of Everyday Life
Or, How to. Join? Team GB.**

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There is something inherently unnerving about the crossing of national borders, or to be crossed by them, when you think about it. And that's not something just residing in the performative alienation of the checkpoint ritual, whether literal, physical, or data-morphic, real as that may be, and, frequently is. It's something more ephemeral, but hard to shake once realized: namely, if the nation (and therefore one's belonging or exclusion from it) is the formation of an imagined community, that status is only as transitory or permanent as the stability of the imagination that underlies it. You can be imagined in (welcome!) or forgotten out, or caught in some intricate web of complicated disavowal-embracing, excluded-inclusion. Beneath every border to be crossed there are more borders to be crossed. In the same way that in the primitive cosmological myth of the world sitting on a turtle, which sits on another turtle, which is on another, in an infinite regression that 'goes all the way down', every border exists as defined by the border of two imaginations. And these two imaginations likewise have defined borders that are both crossed and defined by the ordering borders of two more imaginations; infinitely regressing to something which may be an egg, or perhaps an omelette, depending on whom you ask.

The unnerving nature of boundaries and belonging rests on a series of regresses, possessing the capacity to infinitely multiply and expand, or similarly to intensify and deepen. It's in this way that a piece like 'Team GB' is most compelling. To explore the positioning of the body of the Olympic athlete within the networks of cultural imagery and national iconography intersecting with modes of political power and domination can easily find itself trapped within its own simplistic border. This would be a border that allows itself the dangerous comfort of critiquing too easily drawn lines of exclusion. The problem is not that the more easily recognizable forms (borders of citizenship, race, gender, disability, and so forth) should not be heeded as an important terrain of critique. Indeed, they should. But in that attention to the macro-visible level of borders and exclusions, it is important to not lose track of the borders that lie beneath those borders. It is not just the more obvious questions or demands for continuing proof of eligibility to be classed in a category that sustains it, but also the infinite regress of imperceptible borders and questions that make that continued distinction possible.

This is what HB-GB explores effectively. Underneath each demand for a certain token of passage, a proof of some status or piece of relevant data of information, there are further claims and statuses necessary to ascertain that passage. And these overlap and multiply in ways that can easily seem overwhelming, sprawling, and excessive. The regulation of everyday life and statuses is not sustained simply by sorting out one's encounters and passages through those more obvious questions, demands of status, but of the constant performance of self and the management of all requisite data to support all correlating, multiplied boundary maintenance activities that infinitely regress beneath those as well, and go, indeed, all the way down. The body of the athlete, to be celebrated within the imagined community of Team GB is not one that is ascertained in that status once and for all, but one must constantly keep a vigilant watch in maintaining that status: 'you aren't associated with any questionable elements, are you?' Or, to fail to be able to produce, at anytime, the necessary information that sustains all the underlying borders.

Given HB (Heath Bunting)'s previous work, coming out of the net.art scene and engaging with the politics and practices of border crossing, all of this logically flows. Indeed, what are the technological networks involved in the creation of net.art but forms of interfaces (borders) that are supported by regresses of multiplying protocols, underpinned by coding that ultimately

comes down to binary information? Yes or no, 0100101110101101, in constantly iterated and expanded forms. HB's work registers a shift in the functioning of border crossings and the power sustaining the imaginations connected to them: we no longer live in an older imperial model of the nation, one that openly declared its intent to colonize and subjugate territory, to divide into subjects of the nation and those excluded. Instead a softer form of everyday colonization has replaced this, where difference is embraced, even if only to be managed. It is not that the border is crossed once and then you are presented with a certificate proclaiming 'Welcome to Team GB'. Nothing so simple. The border crossing has multiplied, much like the protocols that regulate the functioning of the net. The protocols of border crossing, in and through everyday life, function as control in a heterogeneous environment. As the borders that surround the nation are declared to be growing more porous, they also multiply and are made more imperceptible: we are constantly crossed by them.

The function of ideology, to use what may seem like an old-fashioned category to some, is first and foremost to cover over the very reality of being ideology. This is precisely why living in these 'post-ideological times' it becomes possible for 'ideas to have us' (rather than for people to have ideas) at even deeper and more fundamental levels. Politics and analysis becomes clouded by the macro-level apparent absence of ideology, which is debatable enough, and the functioning of 'post-ideological ideology' replicates itself all the way down the fractalized assumptions and border crossings that constitute our everyday lives. This is the same process by which intelligent networks (capitalism, border control regimes, the internet, etc.) function, by successfully disguising the functioning of the apparatus and internal crossings that make their operations function. What does that mean? Simply that when we encounter the internet, for instance, we do not experience it as a strange series of connections being made between distinct data sets over geographically dispersed computer networks. Rather we encounter the net as a continuous and seamless flow of information, spaces, and media. The multiplying and deepening layers of crossings, of information and protocols, almost never become apparent to us, and thus are not really thought about. Similarly, capitalist economics, national imaginaries, and perhaps almost all complex systems of social relations are experienced seamlessly, as continuous frames not constantly interrupted by the protocols of micro-border crossing and exchange, as these moments are folded within or under their necessary assumptions.

What HB's work does here is to make visible the networked layers of assumptions, statuses, and questions that comprise the hidden abode for the production of subjectivities necessary to be eligible to join Team GB. This is to render apparent the protocols and passages in the imagining of the national self, not simply at the more obvious level of distinction, but in the dispersed and continuous performance of self required in everyday life. These are not just borders to be crossed and monitored based on legal status, but also borders to regulate the performance of self and being; how one manages relationships, affects, character, expectations, communication, and a myriad of other characteristics of importance to take note of. The protocols that regulate these borders attempt to overlay the borders of the nation with the borders of the self, to produce forms of life amenable to the constant monitoring of the self, for the good of the nation. To fail to produce the necessary information, expectations, or state of being can thus trigger a crisis, as each threshold connects to a series of other criteria, which connect to others. This is why conservative politics is so concerned both with the borders of the nation and questions of character and 'family values' (borders of the self articulated in connection with the borders of others in self-reproducing forms). A breach one that multiplies contains the risk of spiralling into the critical failure of the subject, whether the individual or nation. This is mirrored strangely in the protocols of net culture and art, for instance in the note of the temporary deletion of Heath Bunting from Wikipedia last year on the basis of absence of reliable secondary sources. Read: a failure of borders and protocols relating to relations with others.

08:29, 19 September 2009 Black Kite (talk | contribs) deleted “Heath Bunting” (A7: No indication that the article may meet guidelines for inclusion: Expired PROD, concern was: Not notable. No reliable secondary sources.)

But then the question is, does this function as a form of critique? And if so, what kind of critique is it? How does it work? We can start from the most obvious, that the network of protocols and statuses embedded in a process of becoming part of the nation, of the body of the athlete coming to embody the imagination of the nation, is overwhelming and excessive. It's more than is easily comprehensible by a single individual, and even when depicted in models of flows and charted, more than can easily be viewed on even a generously sized computer monitor or handled by regular printers. It can be viewed, but at the expense of detail. If you observe from a distance sufficient to grasp the entire sprawling configuration of lines, connections, and overlaps, all of information that forms the bifurcations and points of convergence are lost. One is left with a sense of overwhelming flow of information, layers of information arranged aesthetically but not fetishized. And at this level the only words that remain legible is the title. Conversely, if you observe from a close distance where it is possible to read the tidy little boxes of informational descriptors, the larger picture is lost, leaving you with lines jutting off from view.

This is exactly the problem encountered by net culture and critique. If during the 1990s there was an upsurge of utopian political energy connected to the net (the promise of connection, speed, digital democracy, etc.), this found itself coming to an end after not so long. The promise of connection and proliferation, of the new possibilities made possible by technology, also enacts a proliferation that is beyond the capacity of the body to handle: more information than usable, more promise than can be followed up on. The bubble of financial overvaluation of the new economy connected to the overvaluation of the political possibilities of that technology. And both of them collapsed, although not in the same way, or for all involved. How can we connect, or hold together, the value of a technology with a politics made possible by the particular configuration of technical assemblage and subjective composition? The creation of value for capital through creative recombination (for instance in the form of increasingly complex interconnected networks of derivatives trading) likewise would reach a kind of critical limit itself in the following decade. The sheer proliferation generates complexity upon complexity, but still somehow tied together by a shared problematic: how to hold together the micro level interactions and engagement without neglecting the structural questions, whether of political economy or state structure?

After all, what is a Cultural Olympiad? What does it mean to place the role of culture at the heart of the Olympics, to leave a lasting legacy of improving cultural life in a certain area? If the body of the Olympic athlete functions to embody symbolically the nation of sporting competition, what is a Cultural Olympiad if not awarding the achievement of competing metropolises in the ever celebrated quest for capitalist development through culture-based capitalist valorization? It is a moment of recognition of a city's importance as a relay of ideas, populations, and cultural forms, but one that becomes a basis for further re-organization and development of the metropolitan space through Olympian feats of gentrification. Not even an economic crisis can hold back the Olympics! And since this is a model of value creation founded on a labour of circulation, it has the added bonus that critiquing its operations can just as easily take place in furthering its operation through continuing the circulation process, even adding new elements and affects to it.

With HB we arrive at the limits of critique. Or, let's put it another way. What if we have indeed entered an age of real subsumption, what does this tell us about the status of critique immanent

to the formation and positioning of the body of the athletic subject with an Olympic web of discourse and practice? If this is the case, if the social has genuinely become subsumed by the continued valorization and restructuring of capitalist production, then what we would see is indeed vast networks of control emanating through protocols and borders. But these would be not just the macro-social borders that have become used to, and used to rejecting (or working around and under), but the turning of these borders and control patterns around, their multiplication, intensification, and deepening. And this is precisely what HB's work point towards, both the intensity and density of these formations, but also the sheer magnitude and difficulty of grasping this. But this reaches a problem too, if we live in a situation, or better yet, if we have grown up in a context where the subsumption of the social by capital, if its continued modulation by power is taken for granted, is naturalized. Then observing this or performing it is not likely at all to have any critical effect, or likely to produce any critical affect for that matter. The critique that finds the breath for screaming 'everything is trapped in a vast web of power' quickly finds itself out of breath when that is already assumed, and without an assumed outside to draw from.

And maybe this realization gives us of a case of the heebie-jeebies, to use an old-fashioned American slang term for anxiety, apprehension, or illness. Indeed, for perhaps our sense of self and the borders that sustain it are constructed from being able to draw these lines. Or maybe this is just a case of discomfort that a multicultural-based regulation of the national imaginary does not do away with borders and their anxieties, but rather multiplies and proliferates them. The layers of micro-borders to be crossed by the Olympic athlete, to attain the feat of being welcomed as member of Team GB, are not unique to it. It is not just the avatars of the national imaginary who are constantly cajoled in their performance of self. Rather, in an age of extensive surveillance and intensive spectacular sociability, we are all expected to engage in Olympic feats of the constant labour of self-presentation, lest a rupture of identification spirals all the way down through the borders of everyday life we find ourselves double-crossed by.

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