

# Hybridity and Ambivalence

## Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture

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CULTURAL DIFFERENCE continues to be one of the most explosive geopolitical issues – people are dealing with it constantly in everyday life and artists are in their various ways exploring its complexity, and yet we have no coherent or satisfactory framework for addressing the moral and social problems that have been spawned in its name. At the time when artists were carefully and imaginatively working with the complex symbols that circulate in everyday life, developing new ways to combine traditional and contemporary media, and teasing out the survival of cultural ideas in alien contexts, there was also a growing backlash against the concept of hybridity by social and cultural theorists. This backlash coincided with a resurgence in neo-nationalistic ideologies and the fragmentation of the nascent forms of multiculturalism in Western states. At this particular historical juncture, with the global phobia over terrorism and the flows of migrants, there is greater urgency in developing a new model and language for understanding the processes and effects of cultural difference. This pressing need has not been addressed in a satisfactory manner. Scholars and writers have not proposed a new philosophical framework that can assist people to make sense of their experience and organize their desire. What has emerged is a proliferation of competing discourses. The concept of hybridity will be used to help focus our understanding of these diverse responses to the question of cultural difference.

Hybridity has been a much abused term. It has been both trapped in the stigmatic associations of biological essentialism and elevated to promote a form of cultural nomadology. My concern is to intervene in these extreme positions and present an alternative theoretical model that can address the ambivalence towards fixity and mobility in contemporary culture. This dual

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perspective on place and movement is also evident in contemporary art practice. My argument on the significance of hybridity for cultural identity is informed by observations of diasporic and indigenous artists who are now active in the dominant institutions of art. Their practice and status question the dominant assumption on the relationship between traditional authenticity and contemporary culture and test the limits of artistic agency and institutional structures. From these new cultural practices in contemporary art there is a possibility to explore more broadly the impact of hybridity on the social and political landscape of modernity.

Hybridity is usually associated with the effects of multiple cultural attachments on identity or the process of cultural mixture. Both the effects and processes of mixture can also lead to a critical form of consciousness. These three levels of hybridity are interrelated. At the first level, hybridity refers to the visible manifestation of difference within identity as a consequence of the incorporation of foreign elements. Recognition of the second level involves a different level of understanding of hybridity. It refers to the process by which cultural differences are either naturalized or neutralized within the body of the host culture. The degree to which this process of cultural mixture or hybridization has been consciously utilized has varied over time (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). In the pre-modern period artists tended to incorporate these influences into a singular model and develop a unifying perspective. Since the period of early modernism, artists have thematized the processes of juxtaposition, collage, montage, bricolage and displacement. More recently, postcolonial theorists have adopted hybridity on a third level. It has been used as a perspective for representing the new critical and cultural practices that have emerged in diasporic life. For instance, Jen Ang has explained how the mixed origins and multiple attachments of a hybrid identity also produce a critical form of consciousness (2001: 194). This critical modality, which emerges from a specific type of biographic experience, has been applied more generally in the context of cultural engagement. It has found particular resonance among theorists and curators who have grappled with the practice of contemporary artists. In the past decade there have been concerted efforts to grasp the expression of both mobility and attachment in art. These tensions are articulated on two levels, in both the production of the artworks and within the identity of the artist.

### **Hybridity in Contemporary Artistic Practice**

The question of cultural identity and the politics of representation for non-Western cultural practices, which were thrust onto the stage of the international art world in the 1980s, have been reconfigured in recent years. The representation of cultural difference, which at first found expression in the margins, has not only occurred at all levels within the institutional structures of contemporary art, but has gone beyond the neo-primitivist and managerialist version of multiculturalism. Most recently there have been a number of exhibitions that have addressed the question of cultural identity

in order to find a new perspective for evaluating both the legacies of modernism and the patterns of global cultural exchange. From global art events like 'Documenta XI' in Kassel (2002), to local interventions like 'Border Panic' in Sydney (2002), we witness a common goal of challenging the national myths of place and belonging, a rejection of the binary between purity and mixture, and the incorporation of the political right to both mobility and attachment into a series of cultural and aesthetic propositions. 'ARS 01', curated by Maaretta Jaukkuri, put the thematic of hybridity at the centre of its curatorial framework.

In the planning of the exhibition special attention has been paid to the possibilities for mutual understanding between cultures that are now opening up in many different ways, beyond the discussion of exoticism. One main feature of these processes is hybridism, which arises in encounters between cultures and alters traditional, culture-bound visual languages. (2001: 21)

In this exhibition the concept of hybridity was used to redefine the presence of diasporic or indigenous artists. They were no longer defined in terms of an exotic alternative or as a belated supplement whose incorporation could serve to both expand and reaffirm the parameters of the mainstream. The story of indigenous survival and migrant diasporas, Jaukkuri argues, has become a crucial perspective in the critique of globalization and the re-writing of the history of modernism. The concept of hybridity was also understood as offering a critical perspective on the cultural practices and symbolic meanings that were generated by artists. In this exhibition hybridity served as a counterpoint to the idealist categories that confined creativity to either closed forms of tradition or universal forms of abstraction. Unlike essentialist theories that claim that cultural identity is rooted in a particular landscape and locked into atavistic values, the concept of hybridity was used to shift attention towards the acknowledgement of the process of mixture and the effects of mobility on contemporary culture.

The works in the 'ARS 01' exhibition exemplify the three levels that operate in the model of hybridity. By focusing on the works of four artists in this exhibition it will be possible to track the flow between the process of mixture, the effects of mobility and the formation of a critical consciousness. These works neither celebrate the cultural differences in their own identity nor valorize border cultures. They are hybrid in the way they examine the complex psychic responses to political structures and the diverse layers that are enfolded within historical symbols. Through Kentridge's and Durham's work I will examine how the concept of hybridity can both elucidate the production of knowledge about the other and frame the experiences of everyday life. Jungen's and Julien's work on hybridity will be used to consider the ways in which artists both critique the structures for representing the past and maintain the creative practice of cultural translation.

William Kentridge's animated film, *Shadow Procession* (1999), and

Jimmie Durham's *Arche de Triomphe for Personal Use* (1996), are explorations of the fantasies of colonial domination. In Kentridge's film, which is an evocation of the spiritual and physical degradation of oppressed people in the apartheid period of South Africa, hybridity operates through the process of transmutation. The film depicts the phantasmagoric transition of human to both commodity and mythic beast by constructing moving images that have been adapted from the indigenous techniques of 'cut-out' shadow theatre. This splicing of traditional and contemporary technologies represents one level of hybridity. It is in their combination that one not only sees the persistence of a specific way of interpreting the world but also a reconfiguration of the medium for representation. The film shows workmen stooping with a hump growing on their shoulders that begins to resemble the outline of a city. Women appear whose identity as domestic labourers is extended until their head suddenly flips open and reveals crude instrumental functions. Throughout the film a giant cat looms over all the human figures. These hybrid representations recall the classical modalities of the mythical imagination. In the place of centaurs and satyrs, the bestiality of the apartheid system is represented as a titanic battle that results in the abomination of the human form as it is mixed with object and animal. Throughout this battle Kentridge is also demonstrating that the nightmares of apartheid are not only in the mind of the colonizer. The displacement effect is, according to Ari Sitas, deliberately unresolved: 'We do not know where they are coming from or whether they are fleeing or in any case, where they are going, but in their movement we know they are determined to get there' (2001: 113). Kentridge demonstrates through these disturbing shifts from human being to mythical monster and crude tools that the political regime had penetrated the imaginary of all its victims. The horror of apartheid is symbolically registered through the specific construction of hybrid monsters, but the whole culture is also re-examined through the unique splicing of the technologies for representation. Hybridity operates at both levels.

In a more ironic way, Durham makes a similar point. In his sculpture Durham has constructed a mini-archway. It is made of cheap wood and found objects. The imperial function of the archway is ridiculed by its domestication and diminution in value. In an accompanying text Durham adds this wry instruction:

It can be folded up and carried on a shoulder, set up as a tent. Whenever the owner feels that a personal victory has been scored he or she can set up the arch and march through it, perhaps whistling an appropriate tune. (2001: 68)

By reducing the monumental and public display of power into a personal item Durham is also referencing the countless strategies of inverting and displacing political authority through indigenous acts of cultural incorporation and mimicry. Like Kentridge, Durham is showing not only the interplay of different cultural forms and symbols, but also revealing how the

ideals of one social order are reconfigured as they are internalized by different people. However, Durham's ironic gesture does reside entirely in an affirmative gesture. The happy archway can also take on the more sinister appearance of a metal detector. This innocent monument designed to celebrate the micro-conquests of everyday life thus recalls the habituated vigilance that is now employed to defend internal borders. This suggests that the innovative effect of a hybrid imagination can have a double-edged meaning. Hybridity does not necessarily imply conciliatory and harmonious forms of cultural transformation, it can also sharpen the critique of the disruptive and exclusionary structures of global culture.

Critics who expect indigenous artists to confine their cultural imagination to the territorial boundaries and ancestral techniques of their homelands will be forever disappointed and disapproving of hybridity. Jimmie Durham, who is from the Cherokee nation, has openly challenged the view that his own authenticity is confined to traditional boundaries (1993). His critical and artistic imagination has roamed across various media and engaged issues that are pertinent to different locales across the world. This nomadic sensibility is not necessarily a rootless existence. For in Durham's case it is also a perpetual questioning of the condition of belonging and the politics of difference. From this perspective, hybridity is not just a metaphor for cultural negotiation, it is also a tool for examining the inequalities and exclusion that are established in the guise of cultural purity.

It is more useful to track the way the 'power of hegemonic forces is felt *within* hybridity which is none the less experienced as having its own independent cultural power' (Tomlinson, 1999: 146–7). Hence, in order to engage with the artworks of artists like Brian Jungen and Isaac Julien, it is necessary to think with different kinds of spatial models and recognize the possibility of a different kind of dreaming that comes from non-linear taxonomies. A more useful response to these artworks is not simply to label them as hybrid objects but to examine the dialectic between cultural fragmentation and critical reaffirmation. If hybridity is to refer to a cultural process rather than a fixed object, then it will require a different kind of working through of the zones of interaction, exchange and formation (Hall, 1996: 251).

Brian Jungen's sculptures, *Prototypes for New Understanding* (1999), provoked a sense of bemusement when I first approached them in the context of the 'ARS 01' exhibition. From a distance they appeared as conventional North West American ceremonial masks. They were displayed in typical ethnographic museum cabinets. The presence of stereotypical anthropological museum pieces in a contemporary gallery context was perplexing in itself. On closer inspection the sense of seeing something 'out of place' rebounded. The masks were entirely composed of tongues, soles, laces and straps from Nike shoes. Even the 'made in China' labels were visible.

These fragments of outsourced labour were re-assembled to both simulate the icons of a 'disappearing culture' and question the funereal

methodologies for representing the authenticity of indigenous cultures. Jungen's 'prototypes' utilized the red, white and black fragments from Nike shoes in a way that echoed the improvisational skills of indigenous peoples and the intrinsic hybridity of their cultural icons. Nike may seek to appeal to our conscience by publicizing their practice of recycling old shoes to retread the surface of basketball courts, but Jungen disassembled the new shoes to construct a replica of the old icons and thereby create a disturbing link between colonial melancholy and global corporatism. This link was also explored in a text that was offered as an introduction to the work. Jeff Derkson emphasized that Jungen's cross-weaving between the local and the global was deliberately staged to refute the claim that either polarity has a monopoly on authenticity and novelty:

In Jungen's configuration, the spatio-temporal management of globalism is cross-circuited by its own complex connectivity and conjuncture. The global – figured as the dominant and inevitable form of the future – is brought into the local, but in a local which is imagined as the past, bypassed by modernization, and part of a non-consumerist 'gift' economy. From the other side First Nation's culture is launched 'forward', straight into the homogenizing global flow of Nike and out of a bound authenticity that limits its spatial claims by collapsing it into the local and denying its present dialogic and dialectic cultural and social influences by holding it in the past. This is not a tactic of resistance seeking the outside of globalism's ideology or a reification of the local, rather it is a strong strategy which brings First Nation's culture into globalism on a symbolic level in order to rearticulate the spatial relations within the discourse of globalization. (2001: 101)

The deconstructing of symbolic references, the re-assembling and recycling of material that is made visible in Jungen's sculpture is also a metaphor for the linguistic and epistemological processes of hybridity. Isaac Julien's films offer another strong example of the aesthetic and political process of cultural mixture. In *Vagabondia* (2000), a double screen installation, he explores the complex legacies of colonialism by intertwining historical, architectural and linguistic elements into a complex narrative. The film is shot in the former home of Sir John Soane in London. The narration is in French Creole. The architectural space is loaded with the symbols of colonial wealth. Although the house is now a national museum it is not structured according to the classical and linear taxonomies of cultural development. In its collection one witnesses contradictory styles and diverse 'trophies'. There is no conventional order in which they are arranged. According to Julien it provides a 'space in which we perceive the Empire as a precursor for globalization' (2004: 150).

The visual narrative which is like an 'archaeological expedition' in the culture of the diaspora is counterpointed by the criss-crossing paths of the black conservator and the vagabond/trickster figure. These two main characters also provide two different kinds of dreaming. There is a man who enters the rooms and dances to the rhythm of swaying ships and drunken

nights. On a parallel screen there is a woman who is the conservator. She folds the corners and locks the cabinets of the museum. Throughout the film the woman's gaze gently faces the camera while the dancer's eyes avert any exchange. She has a caressing voice and speaks in Creole. The film places these two figures inside the museum, creating a further level of dissonance between the structures of representation and the cultural life of the artefacts. The dancer evokes the memory of a black sailor who formerly busked outside the house, and the woman's voice affirms the survival of a language that was formed by colonial contact.

The trickster figure is inspired by two sources. Julien claims that he was referencing the trances that Jean Rouch captured in his film *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955). Rouch's surreal documentary captured the bizarre performances of a mixture of immigrant and local labourers on the outskirts of Lagos. These men would gather on weekends and play out a frenzied concatenation of ritual trances that mimicked the colonial induction service of the governor-general. Rouch saw these events as an inversion of the colonial order. Julien also found fascinating the 1815 cartoon of 'two black London beggars notorious for their costumes' (2004: 151). One is depicted wearing a grand hat that resembled a ship. The trickster figure in *Vagabondia* recalls both the trance-like state of colonial cultural adaptations and the nautical experience of swaying melancholy. Mixture seems to come together in a drunken haze and loose kneed swagger. Beside the wild and gangling gestures of the trickster we are also witness to the restrained and knowingly deliberate steps of the conservator. The narrator's voice is that of Rosemary Julien, mother of Isaac Julien. The steady tonalities in her narration are lifted by a seductive musical score. Paul Gladstone-Reid, the composer of the soundtrack, fused gentle and ghostly sounds from African and Oriental sources. He sought 'to evoke the ghosts of past energies who have graced the portals of the decadently grand house of Sir John Soane, although the presence of the African and Oriental contingent may have served only to subvert the context' (Julien, 2004: 153).

Between these architectural, gestural and sonic narratives there is a tender evocation of both the violent appropriation and the implied desires that exist in the folds of postcolonial history. The untranslated Creole narration also serves as a reminder of the gaps in the colonial consciousness. While the colonized had to learn the words and ways of the colonizer, this learning process was not always reciprocated. In the language of Creole there are traces, innovations and combinations that testify to the complex contacts between the colonizer and the colonized. The statues in Sir John Soane's collection remain silent. Nobody speaks back in the language of the black conservator.

These small gestures, undoing Nike shoes to make masks, making a film that is destined only for galleries and museums, are in themselves minor acts in relation to the machinations of global culture. However, they do pose powerful questions about the effects of difference within cultural objects, the process of incorporating foreign symbols or utilizing different media and

the articulation of a critique against domination. Much of the debate around these kinds of artistic practices has tended to take an absolute position, with critics either celebrating the mobility of culture or mourning the loss of authenticity. The melancholic disposition that clouds the classical anthropological imagination confines its engagement to the salvation of damaged or weakened cultures. This has not only confined our appreciation of aesthetic innovation but also obscured the understanding of the different modes of cultural survival in the context of both colonialism and globalization.

These examples of hybrid art could not be classified within the conventional art historical categories. They work within a context that neither corresponds to the boundaries of a national school nor conforms to the strict principles of formalist movements. In mainstream art criticism there is both a lag in the conceptual development of the vocabulary for representing the global context of art, and a reluctance to engage with the political forces that shape the flows of exchanges. On the one hand, there has been a conflation between the avant-garde's universalism and the rhetoric of globalization, while on the other hand, there is the new dogma that there is no longer a need to understand the role of context in the meaning of art. For instance, Thomas McEvelly observed that the begrudging critical response to Okwui Enwezor's curatorial propositions in his groundbreaking 'Documenta XI' was symptomatic of a deeper wish that all the unresolved political and intellectual issues that have 'dogged' the art world since the 1980s would have just vanished by now (2002: 82).

While large-scale exhibitions like 'Documenta XI' contribute to the debates on the legacies of colonialism and the polarizing effects of globalization, a fundamental question still haunts the context of art: 'What is the place of art in contemporary culture?' Art history has provided a rich body of texts that answered this question within the parameters of national identity and formal art movements. However, in the epoch of globalization, this methodology would limit the sphere of interpretation. The question of the place and function of art has to be asked in a different way. How can the question of the context of art be posed in a way that tracks the interaction of the local with the global? Do the examples drawn from these hybrid art practices offer any insight into the broader social changes in everyday life?

One of the difficulties in defining the sense of place in the context of art is the strategic use of boundaries in new kinds of artistic practice. The juxtaposition of different signs and the contrast of alternative perspectives are not only recurring features in the composition of artworks but also strategies that artists utilize in order to provoke new forms of cross-cultural communication. In this context, where does the work of art end and the function of culture begin? A generation ago it was proposed that the work of art completes itself in the mind of the viewer. Today, this proposition can be reformulated. The work of art exists in the unfinished task of translation. In this paradoxical conjunction of the material manifestation of an object

and the endless process of interpretation, the bridging function of hybridity becomes more visible. It requires that we can witness the simultaneous use of all three levels of hybridity. Hybridity, in this sense, goes beyond the description of the differences within art and between cultures as it engages the need to make sense of their mutual relation. Hybridity challenges the binary that separated the containment of meaning within an artwork and the establishment of a framework for making meaning within culture, by suggesting that both art and culture are in a reflexive process that is co-constitutive. If culture can be seen as a translation machine, then art is like a compass where every act of representation doubles as a tool for navigation.

### **Anti-hybridity Theory and the Political Backlash**

Hybridity has been used to expand the aesthetic categories of creativity (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Mercer, 1994), but also to provoke discussion of the relationship between the new cultural elites of globalization, and the commodification of cultural difference in the free market of globalization (Ahmad, 1992; Araeen, 2000; Friedman, 1999; Žižek, 1997). This opposition has crippled our understanding of cultural transformation. The presumption of guilt or innocence has blocked a closer scrutiny of the levels of responsibility between theory and politics, obscured the more specific links between novelty and the logic of capital, as it conflates the symptoms of increasingly polarized societies with the philosophical triumph of perspectivalism over universalism. It is now necessary to determine whether hybridity can elaborate the dialectics of cultural transformation or cloak the subordinate position in repressive binaries that ultimately allow purity to triumph. Between the utopian promises of a new cultural harmony and the apocalyptic declaration of an unending colonization of the imagination, there needs to be a third position from which it is possible to grasp both the uneven formations of identity and the creativity in contemporary society.

The practice of contemporary artists like Jimmie Durham demonstrates that the creativity of hybridity cannot be reduced to the same level of the 'advertising of MTV', or dismissed as a hollow illustration of an academic abstraction (Friedman, 1999: 239). Kentridge and Jungen's practice also confronts the methods by which traditional media for cultural representation are spliced together with new forms. Along with Julien's representation of the ambivalent expressions of desire in the architectural legacies of colonialism we can see that there is a need to develop a critical discourse that can address such complex forms of cultural exchange.

It is critical to note that consciousness of hybridity is not confined to artists who operate within the global art circuit. At one level, these artists are making visible strategies that already exist in everyday life. This demonstrates that while traditional and peripheral cultures are often damaged by the force of globalization, or held in a secondary position due to the belatedness of information flows, this does not extinguish the operation of creativity and innovation. The metropolitan centres of the West have for too long

lived with the illusion that progress is driven by forces that are concentrated within their own boundaries. There is a profound arrogance in this self-belief and in the accompanying presumption that members of indigenous societies, whose knowledge systems have been violently dismantled by colonialism, are now lacking the capacity to confront the challenges of contemporary life.

Nestor García Canclini rejects the validity of both the concentric and linear models of cultural development that privilege the metropolitan centres of the West. In his work on the border culture of Tijuana and San Diego, he has observed that street vendors and fine artists alike tend to draw from a complex mixture of cultural iconography and utilize a diverse range of visual technologies in order to articulate their own underlying condition of hybridity (Canclini, 1995). Some of the most innovative examples of cultural mixture are occurring on the streets of Third World cities. This suggests that cross-cultural dialogue does not require that all speakers have equivalent political and economic resources. Rather than expecting that the victims of colonialism must reclaim their 'original' history and glue back together their authentic culture *before* they can be admitted into the present, it might be valuable to recognize the horizontal forms of exchange that are already occurring. As Gayatri Spivak suggests, an alternative modality of coexistence and mutual understanding may occur if the dominant partner is prepared to cede a degree of openness to learning from the other and dispenses with the vertical presumptions of cultural evolution that would condemn pre-capitalist systems to an unending game of 'catch-up'. The challenge is not whether the formerly colonized can make rapid advances forward, but whether the dominant can address the ethical register of other cultural systems (2003: 33).

This process of decolonizing the imagination and developing more inclusive modalities for relating different cultural systems would require a more vigorous understanding of hybridity. It is now beyond dispute that the concept of hybridity has broken out of its agricultural etymology and surpassed its historical association with the pseudo-science of eugenicism. While the agricultural ideas of maximizing yield, the biological anxieties of impotence and the figuration of the hybrid as monstrous have never disappeared from the popular imaginary, there is now a general recognition within the theoretical debates on cultural identity that all identities and cultures are formed through negotiation with difference. The debate should therefore move from a dispute over whether purity has priority over hybridity to an examination as to whether hybridity can either provide a critical perspective on aesthetic, moral and political questions, or simply describe the general condition of mixture in cultural identity. The criticality or banality of these terms has been hotly contested because they are at the centre of competing strategies for defining the link between culture and politics.

The contest over the conceptual and political frame of hybridity is underscored by an unresolved anxiety over authenticity. The contemporary theoretical debates have not resolved whether authenticity is bound to the

'roots' of traditional forms of attachment, intimacy and proximity, or whether the multiple 'routes' of modernity are the only pathways to freedom, criticality and innovation. Does authenticity demand stillness? Does innovation require restlessness? To what degree do the physicality of place and the experience of the journey play a critical role in the achievement of these states? Is it possible to have authentic attachments to a place and develop a form of cultural identity that is influenced by movement? Is a critical and innovative perspective available from the confines of the home? These questions have been at the centre of the critical evaluation of the agency that is attributed to artists and theorists who define their subjectivity and practice as hybrid.

While essentialist positions on culture and identity seem to have been discredited theoretically, there is still no consensus on the broader implications of cultural mixture. Among many scholars there is still a profound reluctance to link hybridity to anything other than a banal rejoinder to the essentialist position on identity formation. The anthropologist Jonathon Friedman (1999: 232) has disputed both the mobility of cultures and the capacity of diasporic agents to create hybrid cultures. The literary theorist Ania Loomba has challenged the celebration of hybrid subjectivity in post-colonial theory for being 'curiously universal and homogenous' (1998: 178). The artist and critic Rasheed Araeen has also argued that an artist's critical practice is unrelated to their experience of displacement (2000: 5). It is not my purpose to respond to all these criticisms. However, by focusing on Friedman's argument there is an opportunity not only to unpack the link between hybridity and corporate globalism but also to examine the consequences of the deadlock over the processes and effects of cultural difference.

### **The Limits of Culture**

To understand the resistance to hybridity requires a closer look at the classical conception of culture. According to this model, culture was the means by which a society defined criteria for coordinating symbolic practices that affirmed a coherent identity and differentiated its way of life from that of others. The ideas and values that were perceived as unique to a specific community were also mapped within territorial boundaries. Symbolic practices were supposedly confined to the physical and territorial boundaries of a given place. The classical model of culture therefore stressed two interrelated features: that identity was premised on differentiation from others and the capacity to map out its mindset onto a specific place.

Jonathon Friedman is an anthropologist who adopts this classical conception of culture. He has argued that the location of culture only occurs within traditional or national boundaries. This immediately poses the issues of mobility and mixture as a problem. For if culture can only find sustenance when it is rooted in a specific place, then what is the fate of those cultures that must coexist in a common space and what is the cultural

identity of people who are on the move? According to Friedman, when an individual is disconnected from place this has the dire consequence of him or her being severed from the whole set of identifications. Cultures that have been disembedded from a specific sense of place are similarly unmoored. This negative assessment of the impact of mixture and mobility is consistent with the assumptions of the classical model of culture. If culture and cultural identity are defined by an exquisite and inextricable relationship between place and practice, then to drift beyond one's place is to risk cultural exclusion and the attempt to transfer elements of one culture to another place is doomed.

The application of this classical conception of culture has led to a number of negative conclusions on hybridity. Friedman has interpreted hybrid cultures and identities not only as lacking authenticity, but also sees them as the exemplars of the new culture of global corporatism and rootless cosmopolitan subjectivity. Hybridity is therefore not only represented as lacking in culture but also as part of a force that is attacking traditional and national cultures. In a final sweeping claim Friedman states that the theoretical representation of hybridity as a form of 'cultural globalization is the correlative to the argument for economic globalization' (1999: 234). Friedman plays hard and fast in the game of politicizing academic debates. Before one accepts this linkage, it would still be necessary to establish evidence of how work conducted in one sphere serves the interests, reproduces the worldview and promotes the same values of the other. There is an even deeper question that is being avoided by focusing on the complicity of hybridity: what is the residual force of the claims for cultural purity in contemporary politics?

There is a fundamental contradiction in the way scholars like Friedman have adopted the classical model of culture for the purpose of anthropological investigation and in defence of national cultural formations. First of all there is a reliance on cultural values of distinction and taste that presuppose a hierarchical differentiation between high culture as the embodiment of cultivation and reason, and low culture as a sort of compost bin for all other forms of populist activities. This vertical hierarchy is anathema for anthropologists because it is also the basis by which Western culture was privileged over and above all other cultures. Anthropologists like Friedman have sought to challenge such ethnocentric assumptions, but in his disdain towards the populist forms of hybridity he has also reproduced some of the elitist values that are embedded in classical culture.

Even when anthropologists have adopted a horizontal model of culture and levelled all the criteria for ranking cultural values, this has left the problem of cross-cultural judgement untouched. How do we judge between competing claims of cultural authority when both forms seek to exist in the same place? The answers offered by relativism would be impotent. Friedman's response is equally disabling because it questions the very authority of a minority culture to assume the right to speak as a cultural entity. Friedman's position on diasporic and hybrid culture returns us to the

problem of the degree to which a cultural formation needs to be embedded in a specific place and maintain continuous practices in order to develop a coherent and distinctive worldview. Fragments and mutations that have split from the original are, in his view, inadequate forms to provide the basis for a new cultural identity. This test, if applied universally, would in fact disqualify most national claims to cultural autonomy and coherence. Who today can claim to represent a whole and unique cultural identity? While Friedman claims that immigrant societies in places like the United States and in Europe are becoming less multicultural because immigrant communities are losing their distinctive grasp on linguistic and social practices, this does not lead us to the conclusion that these societies are becoming more homogeneous and assimilated. Loss of certain boundaries has not meant the disappearance of cultural differences, but rather the appearance of new forms of mixture and more complex patterns of differentiation. The challenge is to distinguish between compliant and critical hybridity.

Friedman's opposition between cultural discourses that supposedly promote the dynamics of the global market and the traditional forms of culture can have the unintended effect of giving succour to nostalgic fantasies of communitarianism and fuelling fundamentalist ideologies. By stressing that difference presupposes inequality and defining the dynamics of mixture according to the logic of appropriation it provides ballast for the extremist fears that hybridity inevitably dilutes the strength and contaminates the purity of local culture. This argument leaves little room for manoeuvre in the cultural responses to globalization. The defensive reaction of border protection and cultural purity in communitarian and fundamentalist ideologies thus converges with Friedman's assault on the promiscuity and vacuity of hybridity. Friedman's linkage of hybridity with globalization has blinded him to the other causes of violence and oppression in the modern world. Traditional cultural values are under assault not just from the globalizing force of economic liberalism but also the associated reactions of neo-nationalism and cultural fundamentalism. While it is important to critique the commodification of cultural difference, we should not forget that some of the greatest disasters of the 20th century were orchestrated in the name of nation, ethnicity and religion. As Tourraine has noted, we should be mindful of the fact that the logic of capital and the myth of the nation share the same dream of cultural unity (2000: 166).

While I believe that equating the critical role of difference in hybridity with the competitive function of difference in capitalism is a gross oversimplification, it is necessary to examine the ways that hybridity can be promoted as a specific kind of cultural formation, and consider whether this can be distinguished from national and traditional cultural spaces. It is not enough to simply dismiss hybridity as the new cultural lap-dog of globalization without establishing a correspondence of interests between the cultural formation of hybridity and the new cultural institutions of globalization. In Friedman's case hybridity is not seen as being part of a new form of cultural practice and critical consciousness, but as an extension of an

earlier trajectory of cultural coercion and domination. However, even the historical alignment between hybridity and power is contradictory. Hybridity is represented, on the one hand, as an extension of the violent and exploitative face of dominant culture. On the other hand, he rejects it as the aberrant manifestation that has been appropriated by the new global elites. Such loose dismissals and exaggerated elevations of hybrid subjectivities and hybrid critical practices would offer little purchase on contemporary culture. The difference between Friedman's argument and Kentridge's and Durham's artistic practice, is that the former condemns hybridity for being a cultural abomination, while the latter utilize hybridity for reworking the contradictory trajectories within culture.

The examples of hybrid practices by contemporary artists and the changes within the institutions of art point to the limitation within the classical models of culture. In this model all external agents must divest their differences before they can enter. Hence, the inclusion of artists and curators from non-Western backgrounds and the incorporation of the concept of hybridity within the dominant institutions of contemporary art is reduced to another sign of appropriation. This model allows no space for the negotiation of cultural difference. It repeats the oppositional mentality of rival forces that are set upon either maintaining the status quo or staging a violent revolution. The critical task is not confined to this locked binarism. There is also a third position that can measure the form and trajectories of changes that occur when cultural difference is articulated within the dominant institutions. This challenge is far more demanding than simply dismissing the saliency of cultural difference when it is articulated through the concept of hybridity. For instance, why is Rasheed Araeen so strident in his effort to neutralize any difference offered by a new generation of artists and curators? This dismissal of the difference that hybridity can make reflects a deeper insecurity over the ideological measures for registering political agency that can occur within the mainstream institutions of art (Papastergiadis, 2003). To doubt the mobility of culture, and discard experience from criticality, is to reinstate the concept of authenticity in a classical view of cultural embeddedness and Western idealism. This effectively admits that cultural mixture may be the consequence of mobility but not part of the formative dynamic of contemporary culture. When Friedman condemns hybridity for masking economic oppression and Araeen dismisses it for failing to overhaul institutional structures, neither offers any new insight into how cultural mixture is related to social change. The totalizing methods of their arguments risk introducing economic determinism through the back door of cultural idealism. Cultural mixture is reduced to being merely the result of the external force of economic domination and political will. The driving force of cultural mixture is therefore left outside of the field of social change. However, the critical task that confronts cultural theorists is not to expose hybridity as a mask that hides the oppressive forces of globalization but to track the dynamism between the process and effects of cultural mixture.

Hybridity presents itself as a problem for both the classical and the relativist models of culture. The classical model sought to develop a precise definition of culture by stressing the way elements were organized in a coherent and unified manner. The relativist model is more flexible and hands over the task of cultural definition to every organization irrespective of its specific structure and content. Critics have rejected the classical model because its pursuit of precision was achieved at the expense of a wide spectrum of cultural forms. However, the relativist model is also flawed because in its expression of tolerance there is no framework for discrimination. This is a long-standing conundrum – how to offer judgement when there are competing cultural claims. Is there a way of achieving precision without the violence of exclusion, and do open forms of inclusion imply the abrogation of a fixed framework of judgement?

Theorists who have upheld the classical conception stress the absolute role of place. They rightly reject the utopian dimensions of cultural hybridity because of the exaggerated claims of the benefits of mobility and the autonomy of the diasporic agent. However, I argue that the premise of the absolute centrality of place in contemporary culture has blurred the understanding of complex spatial attachments that are created by new forms of communication and deprecated the creative force that flows from the ambivalent attachments of diasporic agents. This is not to presume that culture can be transferred – like commodities or abstract concepts – from one place to another, but to question its dependence on an absolute and fixed sense of place. In other words, I would like to go beyond the binaries that confine culture to either a ‘way of seeing the world’, that is as a capacity that can be internalized and transported by an agent, or a practice that only exists as it is performed in a specific time and place. Hybridity could offer a broader modality that exceeds the limitations of the materialist and perspectival views on cultural transformation.

According to the classical conception of culture, to leave home is not only to lose the quotidian contacts with family and friends, but also holds the threat of being severed from the cosmological forces that link an agent to ancestral memories and binds them to a place in the centre of the world. This perspective stresses the dangers of mobility and it is no coincidence that the cultural discourses of modernism have been founded on this primal narrative of exile and alienation. The majority of the canonical texts of modernity have been told through the eyes of migrants and exiles. The fragmentation of earlier cultural codes and their distinctive perspective on the experience of novelty has shaped the culture of modernity. However, the impact of displacement is always double. It cuts both ways, creating an absence in the homeland and a presence in the place of arrival. The ambivalence of this rupture is often neutralized by either stressing the benefits of mobility or minimizing the risk of losing authenticity. We now need a discourse that can address this state of cultural ambivalence and help people find a new sense of place in the world and thereby short-circuit the appeal of both the neo-nationalists and corporate globalism.

The backlash against the concept of hybridity seems to be provoked by the corporatist rhetoric of rootless mobility and the idealist illusions of unbounded creativity. However, it has also failed to address the complex links and multiple journeys that are a common feature of contemporary life. This shortcoming is particularly evident in the limited examination of the combined, but not necessarily parallel forces, of cultural commodification and the new technologies of communication. If the mediated practices of communication and interaction were fundamental features of culture in contemporary society, then we would need to question the absolute function of place and the primacy of face-to-face interaction. Are all these contemporary modes of interaction and communication inauthentic? Is culture still confined to a specific territory? Or conversely, can one be close to a community but physically distant from it?

### **Towards a Hybrid Universalism**

Looking at it with hybrid eyes, contemporary culture would resemble a 'moving collage'. Unlike the classical model, which presumes that a cultural agent can only speak from their own terra firma, or an idealist position that restricts cross-cultural dialogue to that wonderful moment in the future when all cultures have advanced to the same level, a critical hybridity would be open to the range of voices that arise from the cultural fragments of the present. In the classical model, culture was defined as a totalizing framework that enabled subjects both to make sense of their place in the world and to grasp the uniqueness of the place in which culture was embedded. I am suspicious of the view that confines culture to a singular and fixed place. There is no doubt that the ideology of the nation-state was founded on such a centralizing construction, but, as Hobsbawm and others have argued, these forms of tradition and attachment were not atavistic expressions of connection to place, but 'inventions' that were designed to serve specific socio-political functions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). This insight does not justify the relativist conclusion that traditional culture had no 'deep' forms of attachment to place and that all cultural forms are interchangeable. It does, however, compel deeper awareness of the dialectic between continuity and mixture. The recent acceleration of cross-cultural flows and processes of cultural mixture has produced new forms of identity. The intensification and diversification of the flows in cultural traffic have put into question many of the earlier models for understanding the boundaries of culture and the configurations of identity. It is the failure to recognize this that makes 'the classical model of culture not only descriptively unserviceable, but also normatively dangerous and untenable' (Welsch, 1999: 195).

The classical geopolitical frameworks are buckling under the combined pressure of internal fragmentation and external crossings. New anxieties are being forged by the competing desires to divide within or extend across traditional boundaries. In the past, people made sense of their place in the world by defining themselves as being central to a specific

locale. With the advent of nationalism in the late 19th century this framework was radically extended and reconfigured within new social structures and territorial boundaries. The acceleration and diversification of migration patterns in the late 20th century challenged many of the nationalist ideals. As migrants entered the metropolitan spaces they became agents of cultural and social changes that would reverberate along many different dimensions. Their movement was an indication that borders were not fixed and exclusive. By maintaining aspects of their original culture, or through the process of adapting to the dominant culture, they presented a break with the earlier order and produced new cultural forms. While living in a foreign place disrupted the foundations of cultural authority, it also provoked a rethinking as to the inherent superiority of different value systems, and of potential forms for their coexistence. Migration irretrievably altered the idea of home and nation. It both intensified and weakened bonds, but, after the experience of displacement and its attendant demands of cross-cultural comparison and evaluation, or through the vertiginous immersion in the flux of modernity, the image of home was fundamentally altered.

The contradictory cultural forces of globalization have thus both contracted and expanded the frameworks with which people can make sense of their place in the world. Traditional notions of the local often fail to capture the specific details of community life and the national structures are not flexible enough to accommodate the breadth and diversity of cultural affiliations. It is not only that the boundaries of attachments have progressively expanded, but also that the nodal points of connections are increasingly complex and diverse. Despite the ubiquity of this experience the geopolitical structures that govern everyday life are still trapped within national frameworks. Artists and scholars have in recent times recognized that cultural identities are at the cross-roads of local and global forces. Their efforts at trying to both rework the available categories and imagine new structures represent a deeper shift in the need to make sense of our place in the world. Examples of hybrid artistic practice and the theoretical disputes over the consequences of hybridity are not just another hollow academic exercise but part of the struggle of making meaning.

A recent attempt at developing a framework for addressing the cultural contradictions of globalization was the symposium on ‘creolite’ staged by ‘Documenta XI’ on the Caribbean Island of St Lucia. Okwui Enwezor and his curatorial team invited some of the leading writers, scholars and artists to discuss the need for a new conceptual vocabulary that could address both the specific historical formations and the global forces that are shaping cultural identity. The aim of the symposium was not purely a defensive reaction against the structures of neo-nationalism and the homogenizing pressures of globalization, but also an affirmative gesture that sought to create a dialogue between intellectual and aesthetic models which might lead to a new interpretive perspective and construct a new space for the production of social and historical knowledge. This was an ambitious project and it began with the bold assumption that terms like ‘hybridity’ and

'*métissage*' were no longer 'adequate as vectors through which to understand and articulate the critical issues of difference and asymmetry of contemporary culture today' (Enwezor et al., 2004: 13). The symposium sought to examine whether the term 'creolite', drawn from three Martinican intellectuals Jean Bernabe, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant, could be put forward as a concept that could not only describe the consequences of cultural transformation but also provide a new relational perspective, which the Martinicans described as an 'ethics of vigilance, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world' (Enwezor et al., 2004: 13).

Despite its worthy goals the symposium on creolite did not end with a new consensus over the critical vocabulary or the outline of an all-encompassing framework for representing the broad processes of transculturalism. In one of the most lucid and comprehensive responses Stuart Hall examined the terms 'creolite', 'diaspora' and 'hybridity'. He expressed caution against over-extending concepts of creolization and to a lesser extent he was cautious over the universal applicability of diaspora, because they both refer to specific historical circumstances in which communities were formed (2004: 193). Hall's distinction between these terms hangs on the difference between the excessive conditions of violence and massive disparities of power that shaped creolization, and the degree of choice that framed both the historical consciousness and the conditions of reception in the diaspora. In Hall's typology, hybridity has the most general application because it is neither bound to the 'specific historical circumstances' of colonialism nor linked to the migration patterns of a particular community. Of the many theoretical definitions of hybridity, Hall acknowledges that he was influenced by the essays written by Homi Bhabha in the 1980s (see Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha's main concern was to find a way for representing the impact of a minority within a dominant culture. He was attempting to overcome the assumption that a minority position was entirely damaged by its displacement or inevitably consumed within the new structures. Bhabha was not the first to use the concept of hybridity to refer to the dynamics of cultural transformation. In the earlier theories of semiotics and culture developed by Bakhtin and Lotman, the concept of hybridity was also developed to represent the transformative processes of language, culture and knowledge (Papastergiadis, 2000). They found evidence of this dynamic at all levels of cultural production and intellectual engagement. They concluded that innovation and improvisation intensify along the border zones of cultural contact. More recently, Thomas McEvelly has argued that the commonality in the methodology of the modernist avant-garde and thought in ancient Greek and Egyptian art (1991), and what Michel Serres (1982) calls the problem-solving capacity of scientific knowledge can be defined as hybridity.

These definitions of hybridity project it beyond the diasporic and colonial context and utilize it at the most general level of creative and scientific practice. Hybridity is now also used as a methodological concept. The crucial feature in this method is the re-direction of an object's trajectory

into a ‘third space’, or the reconfiguration of previous arrangements by the incorporation of a ‘third figure’. These switches and shifts always involve movement and re-alignment. By taking matter out of one place and putting it in another, there is both the disruption and reordering of the conventional codes and structures. Displacement can lead to either confusion or insight. Hybridity not only refers to the ambivalent consequences of mixture but also the shift in the mode of consciousness. By mixing things that were previously kept apart there is both a stimulus for the emergence of something new, and also a shift in position that can offer a perspective for seeing newness as it emerges.

The critical task that is facing us now is to build new cultural and political frameworks that connect the hybridity in a local identity to a transnational discourse on universal social justice. We need to reaffirm the political frameworks that promote diversity over uniformity, inclusivity over exclusivity, merit over privilege, dialogue over dogma. However, the very fact that these principles now sound banal and ‘exhausted’ also demands investigation. Why do these worthy goals sound commonplace, while evidence of their reality is still so hard to see? Why do these valuable principles seem tired even before they have been put to work? Reflecting on the emergence of black art in Britain during the 1980s, Kobena Mercer warned against the ‘burden of representation’ that faced artists who were not only asked to stand in the place of ‘their’ culture but also speak for an essentialist and fixed notion of culture (1990: 63). After a decade of artists jostling for space within the dominant institutions and the emergence of a vibrant debate on diasporic cultural formations Mercer was to shift his warning away from the pitfalls of an essentialist heritage and towards the allure of the market that appropriates cultural difference under the sign of cultural novelty. The position of black artists as symbols of cultural diversity and their success within the market had changed dramatically in a short space of time but, as Mercer predicted, at the cost of historical and cultural consciousness:

The pendulum swung to the opposite extreme, such that difference was unmentionable. What arose was a trade-off whereby the ‘excess visibility’ associated with both multicultural exhibitionism, and its sublation into corporate internationalism, was offset by a mute or evasive positioning on the part of the younger artists who no longer felt ‘responsible’ for a blackness which was itself increasingly hyper-visible in the global market of multicultural commodity fetishism. (1999: 57)

What got lost between the swing between fixed essences and visibility? It appears that there was neither structural transformation nor discursive shift to accommodate the critical hybridity of black artists in Britain. According to Mercer the political implications of incorporating black artists into the dominant British art institutions were achieved by a form of silencing and neutralizing hybridity.

The discourse on hybridity in the art world has tended both to exaggerate the transgressive power of creative acts and elevate the autonomy of the artist. By stressing the individualism of the artist there was a convenient celebration of mobility and diversity. Every new artist from whatever corner of the world was used as evidence of the greater flows in cultural exchange and the inclusivity of the art world. This image of diversity created, in Stuart Hall's words, a very ambivalent kind of globalization. There is now no shortage of artists like Kentridge and Durham, Julien and Junger, who actively participate in the context of the dominant art institutions. Does their presence illustrate the accomplishment of a new global culture that pulls images, ideas and people out of one context, cuts out the critical edges and then absorbs the remaining information to produce a new standardized version of a cultural delicatessen? In Brazil they have a metaphor for this kind of cultural domination: 'The lion is comprised of ingested sheep' (Santiago, 2001: 36) – does their presence present a starting point for a re-thinking of not only the origins of a specific cultural identity but also the shape of a new common humanity? In cultural terms, can the sheep within the belly of the lion challenge our notion of the beast?

Hybrid art practice is, in my view, a crucial starting point for the urgent task of rebuilding a new kind of universalism. This would involve a closer examination of the levels of agency and the structures in which this practice operates. In the past, artists and scholars sought to enlighten the minds of the public and reshape the structures of society. In this way they served as legislators. Today, as Bauman (1987) noted, the position has shifted to the role of interpreter. Artists and scholars do not just analyse, define and propose, they must also develop collaborative strategies through which knowledge is produced and disseminated in a collective manner. Artists increasingly understand their agency in terms of this interpretive and collaborative modality. However, while the legislative intellectual as a model for cultural agency is in crisis, at an institutional level there is the persisting expectation that artists can represent the nation, and, in exceptional cases, even transcend all specific cultural constraints. The context in which artists and scholars seek to actualize their ideas is caught between the residual structures of the state and the barely emergent formations of a new cultural globalism.

The critical challenge of hybridity is not an unending celebration and display of difference but rather a critique of the conditions that constrain the complexities and exclude the totality of cultural exchange. While the context of cultural exchange appears to have been expanded and reconfigured, we should not be duped by the hype that now 'everything comes' and 'everything goes' in the new marketplace of globalization. There are restrictions. Filters and barriers operate in more ways than ever. Bauman's dismissal of multiculturalism 'as intellectual gloss on the human condition shaped under the twin impacts of power-through-disengagement and regulation-through-excess' (2001: 133) gives too much credence to the rhetoric of rupture and only pays lip service to the complex flows in contemporary

life. Not everything is picked up from everywhere, and the range of commodities and values that circulates within the dominant structures does not represent the totality of the global cultural condition. However, Bauman is correct to observe that there is a crisis in the frameworks that can guide judgement when different cultural values collide. Tolerance of cultural difference is at best a crude balance when there is no conflict or competition but, as he suggests, this does not equip a person to act in a time of crisis. Tolerance of difference can also lead to an indifference to the political inequalities and social injustices that push cultures further and further apart. Indifference in the face of opposing or even diverging claims can only fuel grievance and compound hostility. To address this issue of reconciliation or resolution there needs to be a political process that can reflect the equal rights of different cultural perspectives and the shared obligation to develop a dialogue within which an ethical understanding of common needs is developed.

In the antagonistic framework of institutional politics, hybridity is usually confined to a negative position. Hybridity demands a re-evaluation of the modes of cultural and political affiliation. It highlights the opportunities and risks of multiple attachments. If the ambiguities and contradictions of hybridity are immediately categorized as problems that demand instant clarification and definitive resolution, then this will diminish the space for understanding. Hybridity has been too easily neutralized by political discourses that seek either to exaggerate its creative potential or to simplify its conceptual range. When hybridity exposes us to uncertainty, this does not necessarily reveal new forms of duplicity or demonstrate a lack of commitment to core principles.

To acknowledge the constitutive force of hybridity would demand that scholars confront the unconscious and ambivalent forces that artists invariably face when they delve deeper into their creative practice. At this level, we would have to consider the uncomfortable suspension of moral markers in order to witness the compelling forces that drive some elements of attraction and repulsion in the cultural field. Within this zone, we can see that mixtures occur that defy the conventional codes of normative behaviour and cultural propriety. Hybridity cannot therefore be fully explained if the model of interpretation does not allow for both transgressive and relational modes of practice. When driven by this husky desire, hybridity can exceed the boundaries of moral codes and political processes, but this does not mean that it ultimately has no ethical value or social responsibility. This associational and disruptive modality that defies convention will invariably swerve back to form a new worldview.

The hegemonic social structures that have invested in the states of coherence, unity and exclusivity are inevitably committed to eliminating, silencing and disavowing the unpredictable effects of hybridity. However, a social system that effectively excludes the hybrid also tends towards atrophy and entropy. Perhaps because the origin of the concept of hybridity is drenched in the shame-soaked ideology of miscegenation and cut through

with stigmatic associations to eugenicist theories, the attempts to popularize the concept have tended to overcompensate for this dubious past by stressing its benefits and virtues. Theorists have been at pains to stress the cultural benefits of being an anti-essentialist – the expansive aesthetic of a kaleidoscopic consciousness, the social security that can be guaranteed by pluralism, the historical surplus that lurks within hybrid genealogies, the ethical propensities that are found in inclusive and non-hierarchical relations with the other – and even extolled the unique ingenuity of hybrid entrepreneurs. The ambivalence of hybridity has almost been crushed by this strenuous effort to promote its positive value. But the real fear should not be the risk of reverting to an earlier monstrous type but the loss of complexity. Hybridity is not a new form of virtue and purity. Hybrids are not saints. If hybrids are shorn of their ambivalence then this will not only create a false sense of harmony but also preserve the original fear of difference. The identity of hybrids is structured by ambivalence. We should not fear reverting to a situation of ‘warring tribes’, just as it is untenable to hope that it is possible for us to transcend all forms of violence.

The vivacious energy of hybridity leads it towards risky encounters. The identity and trajectory of hybridity are driven by the simultaneous desire for both separation and connection. In the spirit of the moving collage, it gathers form through a mixture of theft and gift, creation and destruction. The place of hybridity should not be justified in relation to the competitive drive towards maximizing production and the progressivist ideologies of Western modernization, but rather in its capacity to invent a modality for living with difference. Unlike those who scornfully dismiss hybridity and mournfully predict the end of multiculturalism, I believe that the lessons of hybrid and multicultural experiences have barely begun to be learnt.

Hybridity thinking compels us to address the complicities and interdependencies in cultural exchange and identity. The mode of thinking that I am proposing does not proceed by making clear-cut and absolute distinctions. It acknowledges that hybridity is dependent on the very things it strives to overcome. Boundaries are a necessary part of the modern world. Any form of identity and hybridity would be meaningless without them. The critical task is not to strive for a utopian space beyond boundaries, but to re-engage the sphere of possibilities that are permitted or excluded by boundaries. Hybridity thinking has been criticized for focusing too heavily on cultural interventions by diasporic agents and thereby failing to attend to the political inequalities of globalization (Brah and Coombs, 2000; Hutnyk, forthcoming; Parry, 1987; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Young, 1995). Yet these criticisms have not only conflated the critical modality with the commodification of hybrid objects and the co-option of depoliticized hybrid agents, but in themselves they also failed to address the very issue of how power and resistance operate throughout the contemporary cultural networks. This criticism presumes that hybridity focuses too much attention on the cultural and thereby provides an alibi for ignoring the links to economic and political inequalities.

I argue that the problem is not that the cultural discourse on hybridity provides a screen for injustice, but rather that the classical concept of culture inadvertently provides an alibi for neo-fundamentalism and avoids the more complex task of understanding the dynamic of difference in contemporary society. There are genuine problems that come with the boundless, incomplete and contradictory meanings of hybridity. However, the fact that we are not all hybrids in the same way does not justify either a new hierarchy of hybridity or the negative claim that the saliency of hybridity is not significant in any way. Without careful attention to the specific ways in which hybridity is constituted, there is the possibility that the hegemonic political and economic forces can exploit the ambiguities of a muted version of hybridity to produce what Canclini calls a ‘tranquillizing hybridization’ (1995: 48). The critical path in cultural theory needs to steer clear of the new moralistic competition for supreme victimhood, and the resurrection of an outdated form of economic determinism. Finding such a critical path is more difficult than unleashing a backlash against hybridity.

A critical understanding of hybridity is also dependent on a more nuanced construction of the relationship between the process of ambivalence and the forms of resistance in contemporary culture. In the broader view of cultural transformation, resistance is not a transitional phase, and there is no final destination called emancipation. There are degrees of dependency and levels of autonomy. Nothing exists in an absolute state. The concept of the ‘third space’ that is linked to hybridity facilitates an extension of the paradigms for understanding cultural transformation. It does not refer to a sequential advance from the rigid polarities of a binary opposition. The third space does not point to an ideal stage of accomplishment, but rather to the process of critical interaction that occurs within and against the structure of a binary. Hybridity thinking is never beyond the classical structures of identity and culture, but the re-negotiations and insertions within and between these identities can transform an understanding of the dynamics of these categories.

This brings us to the crux of the aporia between hybridity and ethics. Jan Nederveen Pieterse was right when he stressed that hybridity thinking is dependent on the hegemonic forms of border thinking. In an optimistic conclusion to his rejoinder in the recent backlash against hybridity thinking, he suggests that this dependency can develop its own critique.

Acknowledging the contingency of boundaries and the significance and limitations of hybridity as a theme and approach means engaging hybridity politics. This is where critical hybridity comes in, which involves a new awareness of and new take on the dynamics of group formation and social inequality. This critical awareness is furthered by acknowledging rather than by suppressing hybridity. (2001: 239)

Hybridity thinking is driven by the dual desire of connection and separation. To create something new involves – ripping it out of one context,

pushing against existing boundaries, rearranging the order of things. These disruptive acts of mixture can lead to new forms of awareness and construct new networks of agency, however, there are no guarantees that mixture will always entail equality. Hybridity, mobility and difference show us the other side of things, takes us to foreign destinations, provide a new perspective – this in itself is not liberatory. It is just different. When war breaks out in a place like Bosnia hybridity is not enough. History has shown that neither the material presence of hybrid symbols nor the perspective of cultural relativism is sufficient to offer a solution when there is conflict. When violence erupts, the historical signs of hybridity offer little resistance. However, the resolution of conflict also requires more than brute force, it demands a creative modality for living with difference.

Why are artists drawn to such conflict zones? In a subtle way Kentridge and Durham, as well as Jungen and Julien, are all working with the contradictions of hybridity. Where logic would demand an unequivocal answer they suggest a pause, and then direct attention to the way that opposing views can be held together to form a third. Similarly, we can see how logic of social justice would demand that the rights of difference should be subordinate to equality. But the two terms should not be thrust upon us in the form of a competition. They are in fact co-constitutive. Without one the other is meaningless. For artists, the tension between difference and equality is productive. They do not demand the absolute resolution of one over and against the other. They recognize that holding on to this ambivalence produces what the three Martinican intellectuals, Jean Bernabe, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant called a '*nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity*' (cited in Enwezor, 2003: 51). In an age where global power defines itself through the convergence of cultural signs and consolidates legitimacy through the standardization of codes of practice, they stressed that cross-cultural dialogue can only proceed in the dialectic that simultaneously addresses the modalities for representing the persistent and mutating forms of identity as well as the struggle to transform the universalist frameworks for social justice.

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