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Hybridity in Cultural Globalization

Hybridity has become a master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism, and one of the most widely used and criticized concepts in postcolonial theory. This article begins with a thorough review of the interdisciplinary scholarship on hybridity. Then it revisits the trope of hybridity in the context of a series of articles on cultural globalization published in the Washington Post in 1998. This series on "American Popular Culture Abroad" appropriates hybridity to describe the global reception of U.S. American popular culture. Due to the controversy surrounding hybridity, the discourse woven into these articles invites a critical deconstruction. A discussion of the implications of hybridity's conceptual ambiguity follows. Finally, this article makes the case that hybridity is a conceptual inevitability, and proposes an intercontextual theory of hybridity, which comprehends global cultural dynamics by articulating hybridity and hegemony, providing an initial theoretical platform for a critical cultural transnationalism.

As "one of the most widely employed and disputed terms in postcolonial theory" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 118), hybridity has become a master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism. While some see hybridity as a site of democratic struggle and resistance against empire, others have attacked it as a neocolonial discourse complicit with transnational capitalism, cloaked in the hip garb of cultural theory. Hybridity has also been the target of attacks alleging that the concept reflects the life of its theorists more than the sites and communities these theorists write about. The intense controversy swirling around hybridity is symptomatic of the no less heated debate over the political potential and epistemological usefulness of postcolonial theory at large. This lingering dispute has pitted proponents of postcolonial theory's emancipatory claims against those who believe, as Spivak (1999) succinctly puts it, that discussions of postcolonial theory "often dissimulate the implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of *neo*colonialism" (p. 361). There is an abundant literature on both the contestation and the affirmation of postcolonial theory,

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as well as on the ambiguity of the term "postcolonialism" itself (see Ahmad, 1992, 1995; Appiah, 1991; Bahri, 1995; Dirlik, 1994; Hall, 1996; Mclintock, 1992; Mishra & Hodge, 1991; Miyoshi, 1993; Shohat, 1992; Spivak, 1999). In communication studies, see the exchange between Shome (1998) and Kavoori (1998) in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*.

It is only recently that hybridity has gained visibility in international media and communication studies. Several studies have employed hybridity to describe mixed genres and identities (Kolar-Panov, 1996; Tufte, 1995), however, sustained treatments that theorize cultural hybridity as a communicative space or practice (Kraidy, 1999; Naficy, 1994) and thus place hybridity at the heart of communication theory as a field, remain rare. To some extent, this rarity mirrors the paucity of communication scholarship directly engaging postcolonial theory (Hegde, 1998; Kavoori, 1998; Shome, 1996, 1998), although one can find a few articles based on postcolonial thought (Parameswaran, 1997, 1999). Nevertheless, regular discussions of hybridity at recent conventions of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the International Communication Association (ICA), and the National Communication Association (NCA), point to an emerging saliency of hybridity in communication scholarship.

This trend underscores the need for a critical theorizing of hybridity in the context of communication theory. As a widely used concept, the recent importation of hybridity to areas such as intercultural and international communication, risks using the concept as a merely descriptive device, i.e. describing the local reception of global media texts as a site of cultural mixture. A merely descriptive use of hybridity creates two quandaries, one ontological and the other political. Ontologically, whereas a descriptive approach sees hybridity as a clear product of, say, global and local interactions, I believe that hybridity needs to be understood as a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangements. Understanding hybridity as a practice marks the recognition that transcultural relations are complex, processual, and dynamic. In addition to failing to grasp the ontological complexity of cultural interactions, a merely descriptive use of hybridity also poses the risk of undermining the political potential that hybridity might or might not have. Politically, a critical hybridity theory considers hybridity as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential power. References to cultural mixture as resistance to domination have appeared in writings critical of cultural imperialism as an international communication paradigm. However, some scholars have warned that hybridity and domination are not mutually exclusive.[1] Con-

comitantly, if hybridity consists merely of observing, cataloguing, and celebrating multicultural mixture, the inequality that often characterizes these mixtures is glossed over. Ontological and political requisites thus require a critical theorizing of hybridity in articulation with communication theory.

In this article, I am interested in the theoretical strands of international communication and culture that have moved beyond the paradigm of cultural imperialism. Some of the criticisms against cultural imperialism—conceptual ambiguity, epistemological uncertainty (see Fejes, 1981; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997; Straubhaar, 1991)—have some validity. However, the dismissal of cultural imperialism did not serve as an opportunity to build a new critical theory of transnational communication and culture. As a result, research on cultural globalization oftentimes appears to be at best descriptive, at worst a noncritical celebration of transnational culture as global multiculturalism. Since stories on cultural globalization (mainly the global impact of U.S. popular culture) appear on a regular basis in mainstream media in the United States, constructions of cultural globalization in the elite press invite analytical engagement. To that end, this article revisits cultural globalization in the context of a series entitled, "American Popular Culture Abroad," published in the *Washington Post* in October 1998. This article will attempt to address a gap in recent postcolonial theory and criticism. This gap is the paucity of postcolonial analysis of contemporary Western media representation of the non-West, in spite of "the disproportionate influence of the West as a cultural forum" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 21). The *Washington Post* articles take the architecture of representation a step beyond the usual concerns of postcolonial criticism: not only are they Western representations of non-Western sites, but they are representations of how non-Western contexts encode Western representations.

The article opens with a review of the interdisciplinary literature on hybridity and a summary of the critiques leveled at the concept of hybridity. A deconstruction of the discourse of hybridity in the *Washington Post* articles follows. My objective is to answer the following questions: How does the production of hybridity in the *Washington Post* series frame cultural globalization? Do the stories account for the ways in which the global political and economic power structures influence hybrid formations? Or does the *Washington Post*'s production of hybridity justify imbalanced cultural relations, consisting of what Spivak (1999) called "hybridist postnational talk, celebrating globalization as Americanization" (p. 361)? The analysis concludes with an exploration of hybridity's ability to adequately describe and understand global cultural relations without being reified as corporate multiculturalism.

Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Communication

Early debates on hybridity emerged in the 18th century in the context of interracial contact resulting from overseas conquest and population displacement in Britain, France, and the United States. Grounded in comparative anatomy and craniometry, these early speculations on the hybrid were chiefly concerned with the perceived contamination of White Europeans by the races they colonized. There were differences of opinion on the vitality of hybrids, oscillating between "hybrid vigor" and "hybrid sterility," but all commonly invoked biology to justify ideologies of White racial superiority and to warn of the danger of interracial breeding described as "miscegenation" and "amalgamation." A typical argument in that debate can be found in Knox (1850) who argued that hybridity was "a degradation of humanity and . . . was rejected by nature" (p. 497, quoted in Young, 1995, p. 15). This early hybridity discourse was symptomatic of the Enlightenment's failure to come to terms with its racist underside (see Young, 1995).

Hybridity took on new meaning in the wake of the decolonization movements that emerged in the non-West beginning in the 19th century, and saw their heyday in the post-World War II decades. In Latin America, for instance, after protracted struggles over nationhood in which some elites attempted to impose a white European national identity, nation-states adopted *mestizaje* as their official ideology in their bids to forge national identities distinct from mere provincial status in the Spanish Empire. The ideology of *mestizaje* was an attempt to mitigate tensions between the indigenous populations and the descendents of Spanish colonists, by positing the new nations as hybrids of both worlds (see, for instance, Archetti, 1999; Hale, 1999; Martín-Barbero, 1993; Mignolo, 2000). However, *mestizaj*e, as formulated in the Latin American context, is a deeply racialized concept, which concealed residual imperial relations to the same extent as it celebrated the racial diversity of the new nations.

Hybridity later emerged as an important dimension of postcolonial cultures in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the diaspora in the West. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy examines the transatlantic flows of people, ideas, and culture that began with the slave trade, arguing that "the invigorating flux of . . . mongrel cultural forms" (p. 3) has been significant for cultural renewal in Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and America. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) displaces hybridity from its racialized connotation to the semiotic field of culture. He explores hybridity in the context of the postcolonial novel, celebrating it as the resilience of the subaltern and as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity, by natives who are striking back at imperial domination. He emphasizes hybridity's ability to subvert and reappro-

priate dominant discourses. Thus, Bhabha affirms that, "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (1994, p. 2). Bhabha proceeds to argue that what he refers to as "cultures of *postcolonial contra-modernity*" are in fact "resistant to . . . oppressive assimilationist technologies . . . but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate,' and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity" (p. 6). One of the chief manifestations of this reinscription is found in Bhabha's analysis of mimicry as a hybridizing process. In his landmark essay, "Of Mimicry and Man," (1994), Bhabha argues that "the ambivalence of mimicry—almost but not quite—suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal" (p. 91). Bhabha's version of hybridity, imbued with political potential, has attracted virulent attacks from materialist critics. Bhabha's work has been equally influential and contested. Moore-Gilbert (1997) devotes a full chapter to Bhabha, arguing that one of Bhabha's most original contributions is to have emphasized "the mutualities and negotiations across the colonial divide" (p. 116), as opposed to Said's focus on the colonizer and Fanon's emphasis on the colonized. On the other hand, Bhabha's Lacanian grounding and his focus on the semiotic domain has made him the favorite target of materialist critics such as Aijaz Ahmad (1992, 1995). Moore-Gilbert offers a solid counter-critique of Ahmad while acknowledging weaknesses in Bhabha's theoretical edifice.

The trope of hybridity has also influenced attempts to address theoretical formulations of globalization as a large scale and yet fragmented process (Appadurai, 1996; García-Canclini, 1989; Hannerz, 1987; Martín-Barbero, 1993; Pieterse, 1994). Most of these studies have approached hybridity as a by-product of the transcultural dynamics between tradition and modernity sometimes conceptualized as the local and the global (i.e. Appadurai's, 1996, notion of "disjuncture," Martín-Barbero's, 1993, reformulation of the concept of "mediations," and García-Canclini's, 1990, "cultural reconversion"). García-Canclini's *Culturas Híbridas* (1989), probably the most systematic treatment of hybridity, is grounded in the political and cultural struggles in contemporary Latin America, where "impure genres" are shaped by "oblique" vectors of power. García-Canclini (1989) adopts a dialectical framework focusing on symbolic vectors and material forces as mutually constitutive. He writes "cultural heterogeneity" is "one of the means to explain the oblique powers that intermingle liberal institutions and authoritarian habits, social democratic movements with paternalistic regimes, and the transactions of some with others" (1989, p. 3).

García-Canclini's formulation of cultural hybridity as a realm that crosses from the aesthetico-symbolic to the cultural politics of citizenship is echoed in performance studies. Leading works in this group include Werbner and Modood's *Debating Hybridity* (1997), Joseph and Fink's *Performing Hybridity* (1999), and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The New World Border* (1996). In a statement representative of that formation, Joseph (1999) argues that "the modern move to deploy hybridity as a disruptive democratic discourse of cultural citizenship is a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development" (p. 1). The volume edited by Joseph converges on the idea of "new hybrid identities," understood as a political gesture, as opposed to "the historical conditions of plurality, travel, miscegenation, nomadism, displacement, conquest, and exile that have informed ideas of hybridization globally" (p. 2). According to Joseph, hybridity is "a democratic expression of multiple affiliations of cultural citizenship in the United States" (p. 2), which is always in a state of tension with transnational and national political economy.

Likewise, Werbner propounds an understanding of hybridity as "a theoretical metaconstruction of social order" (1997, p. 1), which in Europe is linked to xenophobia. Hybridity's political potential, according to Werbner, lies in "the transgressive power of symbolic hybrids to subvert categorical oppositions and hence to create the conditions for cultural reflexivity and change" (1997, p. 1). Finally, Werbner advocates a theory of hybridity which "must differentiate, in the first instance, between a politics that proceeds from the legitimacy of difference, in and despite the need for unity, and a politics that rests on a coercive unity, ideologically grounded in a single monolithic truth" (1997, p. 21). Hale (1999), Kapchan and Strong (1999), and Stross (1999) have also grappled with the potential and pitfalls of hybridity.

Critiques of Theories of Hybridity

Having been enlisted for various political and scholarly agendas, hybridity has emerged as a privileged site for conceptualizing global/local articulations. Even the venerable *Journal of American Folklore* recently devoted an entire issue to "theorizing the hybrid" (Kapchan & Strong, 1999). This widespread use of hybridity has attracted critiques whose tone ranges from cautionary to scathing. These critiques are partly the result of hybridity's conceptual ambiguity, but are mainly caused by strong divergences on the meaning and implications of hybridity. In effect, hybridity is mired in two paradoxes. The first is that hybridity is understood as subversive and pervasive, exceptional and ordinary, marginal yet mainstream. For instance, Werbner (1997) writes that "The current fascination with cultural hybridity masks an elusive paradox. Hybridity

is celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and pervasive" (p. 1). The second paradox is that hybridity's foggy conceptual circumference, in other words its extreme openness, allows for unpredictable, arbitrary, and exclusionary closure. This is illustrated by Gómez-Peña (1996), who proposes the metaphor New World Border as a substitute to that of the New World Order. Proclaiming hybridity as the dominant characteristic of contemporary culture, Gómez-Peña acknowledges the concept's limitations, writing that "precisely because of its elasticity and open nature, the hybrid model can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything. Since the essence of its borders is oscillation, these boundaries can be conveniently repositioned to include and exclude different peoples and communities" (1996, pp. 12–13). These paradoxes have become wedges through which critics have attacked hybridity as poststructuralist license, and accused its proponents of reactionary politics wrapped in theoretical jargon.

One form of criticism argues that because of its pervasiveness, hybridity is theoretically useless. Werbner (1997) summarizes this point of view when she writes that "All cultures are always hybrid. . . . Hybridity is meaningless as a description of 'culture,' because this 'museumizes' culture as a 'thing.' . . . Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid . . . since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds" (Werbner, 1997, p. 15). Since all culture is always hybrid, this argument goes, then hybridity is conceptually disposable. Gilroy (1993) offers a slightly nuanced rendition of this argument when he states that "creolisation, *métissage*, *mestizaje*, and hybridity" are "rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents" (p. 2).

A second objection to the use of hybridity is that it is a form of self-indulgence by diasporic intellectuals who have the cultural and economic resources that allow them to spend time and effort theorizing. This argument is maintained by several contributors to the Werbner and Modood volume (1997), such as Friedman (1997), who in Werbner's words, finds hybridity discourse to be a form of "moral self-congratulation" (Werbner, 1997, p. 22), or Hutnyk (1997) who sees hybridity as a political dead-end that trivializes ethnic politics. In communication scholarship, this argument is taken up against postcolonial theory at large by Kavoori (1998) who argues that the term postcolonial "*is a term less about the world it seeks to describe and more about the world its users occupy*" (p. 201, emphasis in original).

The third argument against hybridity is related to the second. Werbner (1997) writes that "Too much hybridity . . . leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racist oppression unresolved" (p. 20). Van der

Veer (1997) puts it this way, "the hybridity celebrated in Cultural Studies has little revolutionary potential since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace" (p. 104). The use of hybridity has thus been criticized as politically suspicious because it allegedly lends legitimacy to a corporate rhetoric that frames cultural mixture as a market to be taken by capital, and at the same time elides accusations of economic domination and assorted forms of imperialism. Ahmad (1995) delivered one of the most scathing condemnations of hybridity, arguing that within the current context of global market neoliberalism, "speaking with virtually mindless pleasure of transnational cultural hybridity, and of politics of contingency, amounts, in effect, to endorsing the cultural claims of transnational capital itself" (p. 12).

A fourth criticism of the use of hybridity is found in the discussion of the meanings and implications of multiculturalism. Here, hybridity is seen as a strategy of cooptation used by the power holders to neutralize difference. Chow (1993) encapsulates this view, when she writes: "What Bhabha's word 'hybridity' [revives], in the masquerade of deconstructing anti-imperialism, and 'difficult' theory, is an old functionalist notion of what a dominant culture permits in the interest of maintaining its own equilibrium" (p. 35). Chow (1993) and others (see García-Canclini, 1989), point out that hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of dominant sectors in society.

The insights offered by critics of hybridity underscore the ambiguous and disputed meanings of the concept. However, they merely describe hybridity's controversial status, and stop short of engaging it as a problematic. After all, if hybridity is pervasive, as most scholars of culture seem to agree, then we do need to name hybridity and develop contextual tools to tackle its vexing ambiguity. Hybridity becomes a floating signifier ripe for appropriation, precisely because we use the concept without rigorous theoretical grounding. I am not insinuating that there should be a singular perspective on hybridity that scholars ought to adhere to. Rather, I am contending that a nongrounded use of hybridity is detrimental to theorizing in international and intercultural communication because it encourages superficial uses of the concept. Such uses will tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, utilitarian rather than critical. Since instances of cultural mixture abound in intercultural relations, a merely descriptive use of hybridity is especially threatening because it leads to uncritical claims that "all cultures are hybrid" and evacuates hybridity of any heuristic value. This underscores the importance of grounding hybridity contextually and theoretically, utilizing it tactically in individual projects and strategically in communication theory at large. The following analysis will use the 1998 *Washington Post* series on

"American Popular Culture Abroad" as an opportunity to address, first, the implications of the use of hybridity in representations of cultural globalization. Second, the analysis will serve as the initial step in theorizing a strategic vision of hybridity within intercultural and international communication.

Cultural Globalization and Hybridity in the *Washington Post*

In October 1998, the *Washington Post* published a series of articles on "American Popular Culture Abroad." The first article appeared on October 25, with the headline "American Pop Penetrates Worldwide" (Farhi & Rosenfeld, 1998). Exhibiting its global credentials, the paper credits numerous contributors to the story corresponding from Tehran, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Beijing, New Delhi, Mexico City, London, Paris, Jerusalem, Bogota, Warsaw, Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo, and Toronto. Two articles followed on October 26. One was submitted from Los Angeles with the headline "Hollywood Tailors its Movies to Sell in Foreign Markets," its subheadline claiming "Studios Say 'Ethnic' Films Are Not Popular Overseas" (Waxman, 1998). The other was sent from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and was titled "Malaysians Create Hybrid Culture with American Imports," with the subheadline "Despite Government Censorship, Young People Enthusiastically Embrace Western Music, Fashions" (Rosenfeld, 1998). On October 27, the *Washington Post* carried the last two articles in the series. "Barbie, 'Titanic' Show Good Side of U.S." was filed from the Iranian capital, Tehran (Lancaster, 1998), while the other, "With Popularity Comes Pitfalls" (Trueheart, 1998), was sent from Paris.

As the newspaper of record in the capital city of the world's sole remaining superpower, the *Washington Post* is highly influential. It is read by the U.S. political elite, whose opinions and policies have global implications. As a significant site of representation, the capital's leading newspaper carries discourses that warrant attention and scrutiny. Due to this status, the *Washington Post*'s discourse of hybridity as the primary characteristic of international cultural relations between the United States and developing nations merits a close reading. An examination of the five articles on "American Popular Culture Abroad" first reveals that in some instances, hybridity is deployed directly, such as in the headline on Malaysia ("Malaysians Create Hybrid Culture with American Imports," Rosenfeld, 1998). In most cases, however, hybridity is generally evoked as a characteristic feature of transcultural dynamics. Due to hybridity's conceptual ambiguity and the controversy over its meanings and implications, the *Washington Post*'s adoption of the concept calls for a critical deconstruction of the articles. In that undertaking, I attempt to an-

swer the following questions: How is hybridity deployed in the articles? Is it embedded in a progressive discourse of cultural globalization that takes into account global inequalities? Or is hybridity used as a shroud for cultural disparity, justifying the cultural, and by extension politico-economic, global order?

As a reading strategy, deconstruction exposes the "discrepancy between a text's explicit 'statement' [hybridity as enlightened diversity] and its implicit 'gesture' [hybridity as a progressive discourse of cultural difference, or hybridity as cultural hegemony]" (Derrida, 1976, p. 162). It proceeds in two phases. The first stage is *renversement,* which means inversing, or overturning, where the critic knocks down the "violent hierarchy" (Derrida, 1972, p. 56) characteristic of discursive formations. This shakes up positions of discursive privilege and privation since "to deconstruct is first of all, at a given moment, to knock down the hierarchy" (Derrida, 1972, p. 57). However, this inversion does not change the systemic rules of the discursive formation, therefore, deconstruction needs to proceed with its second phase, "the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept'," (Derrida, 1972, p. 57) which "never let itself become understandable in the previous regime" (1972, p. 57). It is in the interval between *renversement* and *irruption* that deconstruction occurs, and continues unfolding as an *analyse interminable* (Derrida, 1972, p. 57). Chang (1996) has warned against a popular misreading of Derridean deconstruction, reminding the reader that deconstruction "does not license uncurbed textual freedom, nor does it in any way lead to interpretive anarchy or moral relativism" (p. xii). In this article, deconstruction will serve to disentangle the implicit gesture from the explicit statement on hybridity presented by the *Washington Post.*

Hybridity and the Lure of the West

The five articles in the *Washington Post* series "American Popular Culture Abroad" focus on two dimensions of the transnational reception of U.S. mass-mediated culture: Western technology and non-Western desire. Western technology is depicted as an instrument that undermines censorship in non-Western countries, and also as a fetish of Western slickness, modernity, and creativity to which foreign audiences aspire. In the article "Barbie, 'Titanic' Show Good Side of U.S." (Lancaster, 1998), the reader is treated to a detailed report of the impotence of governments worldwide against the cultural tide unleashed onto their countries by Western technology. Focusing on the reception of American popular culture in Iran, which is perceived as the ideological and cultural arch-nemesis of the United States, the article quotes an Iranian journalist saying that "part of the fascination with American movies" is due to "Hollywood special-effects wizardry" (p. A1). The other articles describe a variety of ways by which the United States can project its

culture around the world because of its highly developed media technologies. One article quotes an American film marketing executive explaining the popularity of American popular culture abroad: "This is a huge, huge pace, and it's being fueled by the various platforms for American product, whether it's the newest one, DVD, or basic cable, or pay-per-view" (Waxman, 1998, p. A1). Another article claims that,

> There is less to Iranian censorship than meets the eye. Despite stiff fines, satellite dishes are widely if discreetly used, and customs authorities are helpless against the flood of tapes, videocassettes and other illicit materials smuggled from abroad; one diplomat described an Iranian friend who boasted recently of having passed through the airport here with 35 CDs hidden in his clothing and bags. (Lancaster, 1998, p. A1)

This excerpt articulates Western technology with non-Western desire for U.S. popular culture. Technology and desire constitute a potent articulation undermining allegedly authoritarian protectionist tendencies. The frustrated desire that non-Western audiences have for U.S. popular culture is depicted as an irresistible attraction. Accounts of the relationship between U.S. popular culture and foreign audiences are peppered with varying degrees of sexual connotation, casting U.S. popular culture as a dominant male who commands submissive desire from global audiences. The first article's headline sets the tone, proclaiming "American Pop *Penetrates* [italics added] Worldwide" (Farhi & Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A1). In the same article, the authors write about "the *desire* [italics added] to appear more American" (Farhi & Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A1) which motivate Indian youth as they adopt one fad after another from U.S. cultural imports. Another article describes how Malaysia, "like much of the developing world . . . *embraces* [italics added] American popular culture" (Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A23). The article proceeds by claiming that in Malaysia "as elsewhere, *the love affair is fraught with turbulence and passion* [italics added], ambivalence and confusion" (Rosenfeld, 1998, A23). Direct quotes from artists and intellectuals about sexual content in U.S. popular culture are highlighted. For example, a nationally renowned Malaysian cartoonist is quoted saying that people in his native village are no more "*innocent* [italics added]" (Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A23) as a result of being exposed to U.S. popular culture through television. Likewise, a Malaysian advertising executive is quoted claiming that to Malaysian censors "Armpits are a no-no. No bare shoulders or backs. The *American influence they want to keep out is almost always sex* [italics added]" (Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A23). Still another article describes a McDonalds restaurant in a non-U.S. location as a "*pleasure zone* [italics added]" (Trueheart, 1998, p. A19), while another article writes about "*the lure of the forbidden fruit* [italics added]" which has "grabbed younger Iranians by the lapels" (Lancaster, 1998, p. A1). While it is true

that U.S. material culture enjoys global popularity, research has consistently shown that audiences prefer locally produced fare because of cultural proximity (see Chadha and Kavoori, 2000; Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996; Straubhaar, 1991; Tracey, 1985). The articles do not contextualize reception by introducing other media texts—national and regional—enjoyed by the international audiences spellbound by U.S. popular culture.

American technology and non-Western audience desire are the discursive axes upon which the transnational reception of U.S. popular culture is aligned. They form the basis of a hybridity discourse paternalistically grounded in a binary between an aspiring non-West and U.S. popular culture, the latter setting global standards of taste to be emulated by the former. It is ironic that one of the articles quotes no less than the head of the Malaysian Research Centre, supposedly one of the most enlightened members of his society, saying that "we don't know what we want" (Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A23). In the same article, a Malaysian rock star, dubbed "The Bob Dylan of Malaysia," similarly says: "Our own people are very insecure about their music" (Rosenfeld, 1998, p. A23). A condescending tone is also manifest when Hollywood is described as a source of learning, elevating the level of sophistication of worldwide viewers—foreign audiences are claimed to have developed a more refined artistic taste as a result of their exposure to American movies. In support of this claim, Sony Pictures Entertainment President John Calley is quoted saying, "foreign moviegoers want to see anything that's good. They're like us. We have in some way Americanized much of the world; they've assimilated a lot of stuff" (Waxman, 1998, p. A1). The flip side of this equation, according to at least one of the articles, is that U.S. popular culture and public culture suffer as a result. This is expressed by Gitlin, who states that, "Insofar as American-based studios are making stuff for the global market, the stuff is dumbed down" perhaps leading to "the cheapening of social discourse" in the United States (see Waxman, 1998, A1). This view ignores the alternative perspective that the adoption of U.S. commercial broadcasting and its programming formats, largely dependent on sensational talk and game shows, might have "cheapened" social discourse globally. Nevertheless, the articles posit American popular culture as a benchmark, an opportunity for developing countries to shed their allegedly unsophisticated tastes as they attempt to emulate the cultural sensibilities of American audiences. Again, this position ignores numerous landmark reception studies where audiences are seen as actively capable of alternative interpretation (Ang, 1985; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980, 1994). The articles thus contend that foreign audiences *create* hybrid cultures while succumbing to the seduction of U.S. popular culture. The contradiction between granting

global audiences agency in creating hybridity, while denying them agency in receiving U.S. popular culture, is complicated further by the articles' concomitant claim that reception is the site where hybrid cultures are created.

Hybridity as Corporate Multiculturalism

This contradictorily simultaneous granting and denial of agency continues as the *Washington Post* articles establish hybridity as a discursive context in which the American movie industry is largely motivated by customer expectations of overseas audiences, again imbuing these audiences with a sort of consumer agency. Thus one article (Waxman, 1998) begins:

> Most Americans know that our popular culture exerts a powerful influence across the globe, shaping attitudes, trends and styles. But the inverse—a more subtle effect—is also true: The worldwide hunger for U.S.-made entertainment helps steer our own culture, by encouraging projects that will sell overseas and discouraging those that foreign audiences are thought to spurn. (p. A1)

Consequently, according to these articles, the global marketplace dictates studio practices. Hence the headline "Hollywood Tailors its Movies to Sell in Foreign Markets" (Waxman, 1998, p. A1). The article then claims that "The global market is the engine behind Hollywood's assembly-line," thus justifying the high number of violent action films churned out by Hollywood. Some ingredients for global box-office success are added at the last minute:

> Two months before the opening of *Armageddon,* the story of an asteroid hurtling toward Earth, Disney decided to add not only $3 million more in explosions, but also reaction-to-the-asteroid shots from Morocco and Paris. Said Disney Studios Chairman Joe Roth, "It was to make sure the movie had more of an international feel to it." (Waxman, 1998, p. A1)

This cosmetic internationalization of the movie's textual surface in fact begs an alternative explication. What those so-called international scenes do is to cast the United States as the sole protector of the world, since no other country participated in the attempt to destroy the asteroid. In effect, then, the cosmopolitan textual surface asserts the position of the United States as the sole remaining superpower.

Based on a "customer-as-king" cliché arguing in favor of the alleged benefits of transnational capitalism to the world population, hybridity is enlisted as a natural dimension of global strategic marketing, predicated on conquering diverse niche markets. Thus transnational capitalism is painted as a progressive force spearheading the global expansion of democracy. As demonstrated in the preceding pages, this corporate

discourse evokes the interrelated themes of customer desire and satisfaction, the retreat or weakness of the state, and the conflation of capitalism with democracy. These are the principal tenets of economic neoliberalism, a philosophy of governance that has been ascendant for several decades and has become the dominant policy mode in leading political and economic circles. This vision of hybridity is thus grounded in the neo-liberal ideology driving the current stage of globalization, with its relentless push towards opening new markets, dismantling state barriers to market expansion, and widespread consumerism. At the surface of the *Washington Post*'s version of hybridity, foreign audiences are elevated from their initial status as immature viewers to that of an active and sophisticated market audience. In turn, this discourse sets up foreign audiences as a culpable Other in the context of racial tensions in the United States. The articles quote U.S. movie executives defending their propensity not to cast minority actors in major movies, imputing their exclusionary casting decisions to foreign audiences. In "Studios Say 'Ethnic' Films Are Not Popular Overseas" (Waxman, 1998, p. A1), the reporter writes:

> Foreign distributors, according to [Hollywood] executives and producers, are less interested in investing in films that focus on women (*Fried Green Tomatoes* was not a big hit overseas) and have almost no interest in movies that have African Americans or other minority casts and themes. (p. A1)

Insinuated in this statement is the assumption that foreign audiences are racist and misogynist. The article then refers to the lawsuit by Lawrence Fishburne against producer Andrew Vajna, who dropped the actor from the cast after securing the less costly and relatively unknown Samuel L. Jackson for the role in *Die Hard With a Vengeance*. The article describes the objections by minority actors in Hollywood to what they see as institutionalized racism, but the reporter perfunctorily uses the euphemism "racial bias" instead of racism. Similarly, the article does mention that independent movies with foreign funding do not face the same casting restrictions. However, the general tone is the one manifest in this quote by a Sony executive:

> We're cognizant of what does not work internationally . . . Black baseball movies, period dramas about football, rap, inner-city films—most countries can't relate to that. Americana seems to be desired by international markets, but there comes a point when even they will resist and say, "We don't get it," and it's generally in that ethnic, inner-city, sports-driven region. He paused. We can't give 'em what they don't want. (p. A1)

The commercialism of this last passage speaks for itself. To be fair, the reporter attempts to provide some nuance to this theme, describing how

Whoopi Goldberg's *Sister Act* was very popular abroad. However, the issue of race is surreptitiously discarded when the reporter concludes, "It's a question, largely, of mathematics. In Hollywood, cold calculations are made based on the projected international box office revenues" (Waxman, 1998, p. A1). This is not to accuse the reporters or newspaper of racism but to underscore that the article's general orientation preempted an adequate treatment of the issue of race. The article goes on to describe the "Star Power" list that Hollywood goes by, with Tom Cruise scoring a perfect 100, followed by Harrison Ford at 99, Mel Gibson at 98, etc. The top 20 list only contains 2 women, with Jodie Foster rating 94 and Julia Roberts 92. The list makes no mention of minorities. According to the articles, the reason Hollywood does not cast African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American actors in major blockbusters is because minority actors are not popular with foreign audiences. The same case, to a lesser degree, is applied to women actors. Domestic U.S. issues are thus given a global amplification pitting U.S. minorities against foreign audiences.

The newspaper stories offer no critical evaluation of Hollywood's modus operandi, contributing to the erasure of ideological issues in favor of strictly economic explanations of movie industry practices. These practices embody what the Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1992) coined "corporate multiculturalism," and illustrates the "great danger [that] lies in thinking that multiculturalism could be exported multiculturally" (p. 550). In effect, the hybridity enlisted in the pages of the *Washington Post* indirectly enacts a backlash on diversity by claiming that the bottom line determines the color line. The articles thus articulate economic neo-liberalism with socio-political conservatism, foregrounding hybridity to conceal a corporate-justified "racial bias" that operates both within the United States and globally. Hybridity is thus professed as an important element of transnational corporate multiculturalism.

Articulating Hybridity and Hegemony in Cultural Globalization: Towards an Intercontextual Theory of Hybridity

In light of the deconstruction of the *Washington Post*'s version of hybridity, it is beneficial to reformulate the questions raised in the first pages of this essay: How does the appropriation of hybridity in the *Washington Post* frame cultural globalization? More specifically, does the deployment of hybridity justify, or question, uneven transnational and transcultural relations? This tactical endeavor focusing on one text (the "American Popular Culture Abroad" series) echoes the larger strategic concerns of the postcolonial project, which, according to Shome (1996), are summed up in two questions:

How do Western discursive practices, in their representations of the world and of themselves, legitimize the contemporary global power structures? To what extent do the cultural texts of nations such as the United States and England reinforce the neo-imperial political practices of these nations? (p. 42)

The *Washington Post* series constructs a monolithic hybridity in which cultures as different as Poland, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Brazil are lumped together as unabashedly welcoming United States popular culture since it is more appealing than local fare. As stated earlier, research has shown that audiences usually prefer local to imported popular culture products, an issue completely neglected in the articles. Hybridity is thus seen as a capitulation to the seduction of otherness, and not as a mutation and renewal of identity. This point is made clear in the way the *Washington Post* articles construct hybridity as a defeat of local governments in the non-West, depicted as underdeveloped, corrupt, and authoritarian. Finally, the articles do not scrutinize Hollywood's claim that global market demands lead to casting decisions that exclude minority actors. The *Washington Post* "American Popular Culture Abroad" series thus provides a textually seductive but politically unfruitful deployment of hybridity. This recognition gives credence to materialist critics who accuse proponents of hybridity of complicity with the claims and goals of transnational capitalism.

Actually, the articles' characterization of hybridity offers a heuristic exemplar of the vulnerability of the postcolonial project to appropriation. In this case, hybridity is appropriated in an attempt to fix the meanings constructed by global audiences in their reception of U.S. popular culture. This transnational cultural flow occurs in a context where American-based media conglomerates have become increasingly active in the global arena. These transnational corporations control both production structures and program content. To a large extent, they also control the worldwide distribution of their products. However, as nearly two decades of scholarship on active audience formation in media and cultural studies demonstrates, it is the reception of products that is not fully controllable by transnational media corporations. The articles' portrayal of reception as a space of hybrid creation results in the eviction of power imbalances in transnational cultural exchanges, and the concomitant celebration of a nonthreatening hybridity. The hybridity in question here operates to discursively foreclose the reception process, putting the entire chain of signification under the control of transnational capital. In their embrace of a power-free notion of hybridity, the *Washington Post* articles validate Western cultural preeminence.

Exposing this hybridity's explicit statement of enlightened diversity and unmasking its implicit gesture of cultural hegemony clears the scene

for an alternative, and critical, theory of hybridity to emerge. This is important because, as stated earlier in this article, the demise of the cultural imperialism model has left a major theoretical void in international communication, culture theory, and research. Moreover, theoretical construction is a necessity because mere criticism offers no exit from the political and conceptual paradoxes of hybridity. These are (a) hybridity's concurrent subversiveness and pervasiveness, and (b) hybridity's extreme polysemy and instability, in that it is always in the process of occurring, unfolding, and undoing the fixity of binary opposites. As such, hybridity is always subject to discursive preemption, like the one performed in the *Washington Post*'s articles. Therefore, a critical theory of hybridity in the context of intercultural and international communication must address hybridity's propensity for conceptual and political slippage.

In this endeavor, it is helpful to theorize hybridity as an undecidable (*indécidable;* Derrida, 1972, p. 58), defined as "that which no longer allows itself to be understood within . . . (binary) opposition, but which . . . inhabits it, resists it and disorganizes it, but *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution" (Derrida, 1972, p. 58, emphasis in original). Conceptualizations of hybridity are arduous to the extent that they attempt to constitute a third term, to fix the meaning of the hybrid. In spite of the potential for antiprogressive appropriation and conceptual ambiguity, hybridity is undeniable as a global existential cultural condition (Hall, 1991a, 1991b; Joseph, 1999; Kraidy, 1999; Rosaldo, 1995; Said, 1994; Werbner, 1997). Therefore, despite theorists' discomfort and reluctance vis-à-vis the concept of hybridity, I do not see any credible substitute to characterize the dual forces of globalization and localization, cohesion and dispersal, disjuncture and mixture, that capture transnational and transcultural dialectics. A critical theorizing is crucial precisely because hybridity's openness makes it particularly vulnerable to appropriation by transnational capitalism. Hybridity is such a slippery concept because it is simultaneously an undecidable and a conceptual inevitability.

The theoretical challenge to intercultural and international communication theory thus resides in the following conundrum: Under what conditions does hybridity, as a global pervasive condition, fulfill, or not fulfill, its progressive potential in a local context? In what context do social agents revert to a hegemonic deployment of hybridity? Finally, what attributes should a critical theory of hybridity require for it to be a meaningful heuristic within intercultural and international communication? In other words, what theory will allow us to render hybridity as a mode of lived experience and aesthetic sensibility, while at the same time map up the working of power shaping enactments of hybridity? More specifically, how can we theorize hybridity as a communicative practice

of meaning and power, or, how can we articulate hybridity and hegemony in communication theory? These questions have been the driving force behind this article, and the discussion and conclusion that follow attempt to address them.

The articulation of hybridity and power is perhaps best captured by the term "intercontextuality," coined by Appadurai (1996), which allows us to understand text and context to be mutually constitutive in a field of not necessarily correspondent power/signification. I propose an intercontextual theory of hybridity that explicates transnational cultural dynamics by articulating hybridity and hegemony in a global context. By context I do not merely mean an environment or a setting where practices unfold and texts find their grounding. Rather, I use context as a constitutive and constituting force, in the sense elaborated by Jennifer Daryl Slack (1996) when she wrote: "The context is not something *out there, within which practices occur of which influence the development of practices*. Rather, *identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context with which they are practices, identities, or effects*" (p. 125, emphasis in original). An intercontextual theory of hybridity emphasizes how processes of creating consent and coordinating interests in a moving equilibrium underscore manifestations and deployments of hybridity. In the context of international and intercultural communication, an intercontextual theory of hybridity focuses on the mutually constitutive interplay and overlap of cultural, economic, and political forces in international communication processes. Perhaps more importantly, an intercontextual theory of hybridity would examine the relationship between structure and agency as a dialectical articulation whose results are not preordained. In this respect, García-Canclini (1989) writes that:

> The increase in processes of hybridization makes it evident that we understand very little about power if we only examine confrontations and vertical actions. Power would not function if it were exercised only by bourgeoisie over proletarians, whites over indigenous people, parents over children, the media over receivers. Since all these relations are *interwoven* with each other, each one achieves an effectiveness that it would never be able to by itself. (p. 259)

This echoes Hall's proposition: "A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together in a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (1986, p. 53). An intercontextul theory of hybridity, to paraphrase García-Canclini and Hall, will allows us to comprehend how under certain conditions, in certain contexts, ideological elements coalesce in a certain discourse of hybridity. An intercontextual theory of

hybridity thus becomes a map of the diffuse workings of power. It recognizes that hybridity is not a posthegemonic state. To go back to international communication theory as an example, an intercontextual theory of hybridity moves us beyond cultural imperialism's economic determinism, and at the same time provides a needed amendment to "postimperialist" work that ignores power and inequality. Applied to transnational cultural dynamics, intercontextuality maintains that hybridity is always articulated with hegemonic power. Our attention, then, needs to be redirected from debating the political and theoretical usefulness of hybridity, to analyzing how hegemonic structures operate in a variety of contexts to construct different hybridities.

The *Washington Post* articles are illustrative of the hybridity/hegemony articulation, because hybridity is summoned up to justify a transnational cultural hegemony made possible by power asymmetries. It is consequently an act of discursive naturalization of unequal relations by those at the privileged end of these relations. This underscores Laclau's argument that "A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized" (1977, p. 161). By articulating a hybrid vision of global culture characterized by nonconflictual relations and a longing for Western culture, the articles on "American Popular Culture Abroad" obscure the vast economic, political and technological inequities between nations. These issues are given marginal treatment, where they are neutralized by a utilitarian deployment of the hybrid.

In order to have a critical edge, hybridity should be understood as a communicative practice. A practice, in Stuart Hall's terms, is how a structure is actively reproduced" (1985, p. 103). This stands in stark contrast with hybridity as conceptualized in the *Washington Post* articles, which is posited as a result, a product of transnational mediations. Therefore, hybridity should be conceptualized as one modality in which hegemony is practiced, reproducing and maintaining the new world order. In the *Washington Post*, hybridity emerges as a privileged characterization of cultural globalization, one of a few theories advanced to understand intercivilizational interactions in the post-Cold War era (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1996).

Although hybridity may well be what Derrida (1972) would call an undecidable, we must find arbitrary entry points from which to tackle the practice of hegemony in hybridity. Whereas Derrida's post-Marxist tendency (which Hall, 1985, refers to as "no necessary correspondence") makes tackling the hybrid arduous, Hall's neo-Marxist interpretation allows the critic to narrow down on those conjunctures when corre-

spondence is sutured. To that effect, Hall writes that, "The principal theoretical reversal accomplished by 'no necessary correspondence' is that determinacy is transferred from the genetic origins of class or other social forces in a structure to the effects or results of a practice" (1985, p. 95).

The foundations of an intercontextual theory of hybridity have in fact been under construction, because the burgeoning studies have not led to a unified hybridity paradigm. It is clear that the concept of hybridity has been appropriated to serve a variety of theoretical explorations and political agendas. This undermines any claims to a universalistic theory of hybridity, which would obfuscate the contingent, contextual, and processual imbrication of the hegemonic and the hybrid. If, as Slack (1996) has argued, "the analysis of any concrete situation or phenomenon entails the exploration of complex, multiple, and theoretically abstract non-necessary links" (p. 119), then a theory of hybridity is both useful and necessary to understand global cultural complexity. Critics of hybridity in particular, and postcolonial theory more generally, should heed Butler's (1998) warning against "the resurgence of a theoretical anachronism . . . which seeks to identify the new social movements with the merely cultural, and the cultural with the derivative and secondary" (p. 36).

An intercontextual theory of hybridity provides an initial conceptual platform for a critical cultural transnationalism that helps us understand neocolonial discourses and actions in transnational cultural dynamics. I propose this theoretical development in the hope that future scholarship would take up the challenge to address hybridity in international communication theory and research. For more than a decade, a growing consensus has emerged to discard cultural imperialism, for reasons outlined earlier in this article. Still, cultural imperialism has been a *critical* paradigm whose proponents have exposed power imbalances between the industrialized West and the developing world. Most available alternatives to cultural imperialism tend to implicitly or explicitly espouse neoliberal ideology, without a critical scrutiny of its implications. Grounded in an intercontextual theory of hybridity, critical cultural transnationalism emphasizes *hybridities as practices of hegemony*. Such a theory is useful to the extent that it helps us illuminate the slippery and interstitial workings of power in transnational contexts that ostensibly declare themselves nonpower zones of cultural mixture. An intercontextual theory of hybridity belongs in the arsenal of the critical cultural scholar, because it illuminates issues of context, process, and representation central to intercultural and international communication. We need to continue theorizing hybridity as a condition that is not merely cultural. For, after all, in Hall's words, "The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency" (1992, p. 280).

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Note

[1] Oliveira (1995) argues that *telenovelas* in Latin America (a dramatic genre similar to soap operas) do not constitute "a reaction against an imported worldview," but rather "examplif[y] the creolization of U.S. cultural products" (p. 119). He concludes that the success of locally produced telenovelas in Brazil" enhance[s] not diversity, but domination" (p. 129). In support of his argument Oliveira cites Sinclair (1990) and Beltran and Cardona (1982), in addition to six other Brazilian studies. It is important to note that scholars like Rogers and Antola (1985), and Straubhaar (1991) have reached the opposite conclusion. Rogers and Antola even referred to a "reverse cultural imperialism" (1985, p. 33) from Latin America into the United States. The most recent reappraisal of this debate (Biltereyst & Meers, 2000), based on an "empirical comparative enquiry" (p. 408) of telenovela-flows from Latin America to Europe, recommends that "the telenovela phenomenon should not be treated as a case in the traditional North-South dialogue, but should be firmly located in the debate around globalization strategies of late-capitalist cultural industries" (p. 410).

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