

Hybridity

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Abstract

This exploration of hybridity begins by offering a description of the term and its uses in divergent and related fields, then a critique of assumptions (those of purity, of marginality and identity). A discussion of cultural creativity, syncretism, diffusion, race and biology (the history of migration, language, culture, and ‘blood’) leads on to consideration of how syncretism and hybridity seem to do duty as terms for the management of the more esoteric cultural aspects of colonialism and the global market. The argument focuses on cultural creativity – innovation and authenticity, ownership of cultural forms, and of technological modes of cultural mix (science fiction film as example) – to underscore how lack of attention to political and economic difference makes possible celebrations of hybridity as the fruit of late capitalist globalization. This links hybridity to more explicit political terminologies and construes hybrid artefacts as commodities of difference in the context of transition – urbanization, privatization, trinketization.

Keywords: Hybridity; diaspora; syncretism; cyborg; urbanization; mixture.

Hybridity and diaspora

It is by now established that authors writing on diaspora very often engage with the mixed notion of hybridity. I think this term offers much for debate, and this debate in turn offers material that elaborates, and may further complicate, the cultures and politics of diaspora. This essay explores this uneven terrain and presents a kind of topographical survey of the uses and misuses of hybridity, and its synonyms.

In its most recent descriptive and realist usage, hybridity appears as a convenient category at ‘the edge’ or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration. Nikos Papastergiadis makes this link at the start of his book, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, where he mentions the ‘twin processes of

globalization and migration' (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 3). He outlines a development which moves from the assimilation and integration of migrants into the host society of the nation-state towards something more complex in the metropolitan societies of today. Speaking primarily of Europe, the Americas and Australia, Papastergiadis argues that as some members of migrant communities came to prominence 'within the cultural and political circles of the dominant society' they 'began to argue in favour of new models of representing the process of cultural interaction, and to demonstrate the negative consequences of insisting upon the denial of the emergent forms of cultural identity' (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 3). Hybridity has been a key part of this new modelling, and so it is logically entwined within the coordinates of migrant identity and difference, same or not same, host and guest.

The career of the term hybridity in a new cultural politics in the context of diaspora should be examined carefully. The cultural here points to the claim that hybridity has been rescued – or has it? – from a convoluted past to do duty for an articulation of rights and assertions of autonomy. The hybrid is a usefully slippery category, purposefully contested and deployed to claim change. Strange then that the term can be so productive, from its origins in biology and botany, its interlude as the more weighty syncretism to its reclamation in work on diaspora by authors as different as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Iain Chambers, Homi Bhabha, and James Clifford. It is in the to and fro of these works especially that hybridity has come to mean all sorts of things to do with mixing and combination in the moment of cultural exchange. Gilroy, for example, finds it helpful in the field of cultural production, where he notes that 'the musical components of hip hop are a *hybrid* form nurtured by the social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound system culture was transplanted during the 1970s' (Gilroy 1993, p. 33). Hall, as we will see in more detail presently, suggests hybridity is transforming British life (Hall 1995, p. 18), while Chambers finds talk of tradition displaced by 'traffic' in the 'sights, sounds and languages of *hybridity*' (Chambers 1994, p. 82). Bhabha uses hybridity as an 'in-between' term, referring to a 'third space', and to ambivalence and mimicry especially in the context of what might, uneasily, be called the colonial cultural interface. Clifford uses the word to describe 'a discourse that is travelling or *hybridising* in new global conditions' and he stresses 'travel trajectories' and 'flow' (Clifford 1994, pp. 304–6, italics in this paragraph are my emphasis). Worrying that assertions of identity and difference are celebrated too quickly as resistance, in either the nostalgic form of 'traditional survivals' or mixed in a 'new world of hybrid forms' (Clifford 2000, p. 103), he sets up an opposition (tradition/hybrid) that will become central to our critique of the terms.

There is much more that hybridity seems to contain: ‘A quick glance at the history of hybridity reveals a bizarre array of ideas’ (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 169). In addition to the general positions set out above; hybridity is an evocative term for the formation of identity; it is used to describe innovations of language (creole, patois, pidgin, travellers’ argot etc); it is code for creativity and for translation. In Bhabha’s terms ‘hybridity is camouflage’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 193) and, provocatively he offers ‘hybridity as heresy’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 226), as a disruptive and productive category. It is ‘how newness enters the world’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 227) and it is bound up with a ‘process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences’ (Bhabha 1994, p. 252). For others, hybridity is the key organizing feature of the Cyborg, the wo-man/machine interface (Haraway 1997), and it invokes mixed technological innovations, multiple trackings of influence, and is acclaimed as the origin of creative expression in culture industry production. With relation to diaspora, the most conventional accounts assert hybridity as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or ‘hybrid identities’ (Chambers 1996, p. 50). Whether talk of such identities is coherent or not (this question needs to be asked) hybridity is better conceived of as a process. Kobena Mercer writes of ‘the hybridized terrain of diasporic culture’ (Mercer 1994, p. 254) and even the older terminologies of syncretism and mixture evoke the movement of ‘hybridization’ rather than a stress on fixed identity. Finally, a turn of the millennium volume *Hybridity and its Discontents* is able to describe hybridity as: ‘a term for a wide range of social and cultural phenomenon involving “mixing”, [it] has become a key concept within cultural criticism and post-colonial theory’ (Brah and Coombs 2000; cover).

Hybridity and the anterior pure

The idea of borrowing is sometimes taken to imply a weakening of culture, and it is exactly this that belongs to the essentialist nationalisms and chauvinisms that are arraigned against the hybrid, diasporic and the migrant. Thus, if we are to tackle this terminological fetish, we need to ask why so many writers insist that affirmations of hybridity are useful in the arena of cultural politics. Such affirmations are proclaimed precisely because of the varieties of cultural borrowing that are thereby entertained, and these may be more important than the philosophical incoherence of the terms, but this incoherence has to be considered. A key question would be: to what degree does the assertion of hybridity rely on the positing of an anterior ‘pure’ that precedes mixture? Even as a process in translation or in formation, the

idea of ‘hybrid identities’ (Chambers 1996, p. 50), relies upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance. Hybridity theorists have had to grapple with this problem with a revealing degree of agitation. Gilroy, for example, has moved away from an allegiance to hybridity and declared:

Who the fuck wants purity? ... the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities... I think there isn’t any purity; there isn’t any anterior purity... that’s why I try not to use the word hybrid ... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails (Gilroy 1994, pp. 54–5).

The latitudes of sexuality fester in the earthy connotations of this quote as Gilroy knowingly references the less reputable anxieties at stake. It was probably work like that of Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995) which provoked the outburst. Numerous scholars have examined the botanical and biological parameters of hybridity, but the matter is perhaps best exemplified in Young’s historical investigation which traced the provenance of the term hybridity in the racialized discourse of nineteenth-century evolutionism. The Latin roots of the word are revealed as referring to the progeny of a tame sow and a wild boar (Young 1995, p. 6). Is this old usage relevant to the diversity of cultural hybridities claimed today? In the sciences of agriculture and horticulture hybridity is used with little alarm: the best known hybrid being the mule, a mixture of a horse and donkey, though significantly this is a sterile or non-productive mix. In the world of plants, hybrid combinations are productively made by grafting one plant or fruit to another. Although in this field such graftings may seem legitimate, only a mildly imprudent jump is needed to move from notions of horticulture and biology to discussions of human ‘races’ as distinct species that, upon mixing, produce hybrids.

Both Gilroy and Hall have made efforts to distinguish their use of hybridity from its dubious biological precedents. Gilroy clearly recognizes the problem of purity when he laments ‘the lack of a means of adequately describing, let alone theorizing, intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior “uncontaminated” purities’ (Gilroy 2000, p. 250). He is correct that the descriptive use of hybridity evokes, counterfactually, a stable and prior non-mixed position, to which ‘presumably it might one day be possible to return’ (Gilroy 2000, p. 250). Who so wants to return is a good question. But equally, can a focusing and tightening of descriptive terminology, or the even further off ‘theorizing’, be adequate to the redress that is required? Does it disentangle the range of sexual, cultural and economic anxieties race mixture provokes?

Gilroy continues, this time with the arguments of Young firmly in his sights:

Whether the process of mixture is presented as fatal or redemptive, we must be prepared to give up the illusion that cultural and ethnic purity has ever existed, let alone provided a foundation for civil society. The absence of an adequate conceptual and critical language is undermined and complicated by the absurd charge that attempts to employ the concept of hybridity are completely undone by the active residues of that term's articulation within the technical vocabularies of nineteenth-century racial science (Gilroy 2000, pp. 250–1).

It is difficult to accede to the view that scholarship should not attend to the antecedents of emergent critical terminologies. Hall also reacts, naming Young, admittedly in defence against an even more sweeping condemnation of postcolonial theory, yet significantly with the penultimate words of a volume entitled *The Postcolonial Question*, where he writes:

a very similar line of argument is to be found . . . [in] the inexplicably simplistic charge in Robert Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995) that the post-colonial critics are "complicit" with Victorian racial theory because both sets of writers deploy the same term – hybridity – in their discourse! (Hall 1996, p. 259, emphasis in original).

It is absolutely imperative that the uses and usefulness of hybridity as descriptive term, as political diagnostic and as strategy, be evaluated without recourse to petty common room squabbles. That the use of a term can be condemned because of one sort of association or another remains problematic unless the consequences of that association can be demonstrated to have unacceptable consequences. As hybridity appears in several guises, it is important to look at what it achieves, what contexts its use might obscure, and what it leaves aside.

Contact zones

As a process with a long pedigree, hybridity evokes all manner of creative engagements in cultural exchange. Some works stress the developmental temperament of the migrant encounter, starting with – this is a somewhat arbitrary 'origin' – anthropological studies of syncretism of the 1940s where ethnographic field researches, such as those concerned with migrant work communities in the 'copper belt' of what is now Zambia, were carried out under the colonial auspices of the Rhodes Livingston Institute and the Manchester University

Anthropology School (see Schumaker 2001). Syncretism was the word recruited to describe the formation of new cultural practices in the urban work towns set up near the colonial copper mines. Anthropologists had previously only been interested, in a diminutive, salvage kind of way, with the 'loss' of cultural forms under 'contact' and acculturation. Salvage anthropology was concerned with documenting 'disappearing worlds' and lost customs, survivals and traditions, and it was only in belated recognition of the resilience of indigenous communities that they began to think in terms other than decline and fade. The studies of the mining communities initiated by the Manchester School (Gluckman *et al.* 1955) were instrumental in the first effervescence of 'syncreticism-talk' in the post WW2 period, but later South American examples of creative communal response to mining colonialism were prominent. Michael Taussig's study among tin mine workers in South America supplements economist readings of commodity fetishism with cultural contextualization, showing how local ideas about Christianity (itself problematically local and global), and of the devil, produced specific understandings of capital and money's malevolent force (Taussig 1980). Fusions here provide a cogent yet unorganized take on 'mixed' economic conditions (see Nugent 1994 on transition). Yet, other modes of developmental syncretism were not so explicitly culturalist. Consider, for example, how the Green Revolution adoption of new seed technologies ostensibly to feed the third world could not so easily be described as cultural hybridity without deep irony, the same today applies to those with specific commercial interests who are involved in genetic patenting overwriting diversity in the agricultural sector (see Visvanathan 1997).¹

Investigations into and descriptions of the acculturation process had been governed by what can only be characterized as a period of anthropological prejudice and single-minded ethnocentrism – the whole discourse about westernization and diffusionism suggests an obsessional fear about identity and with maintaining and even extending the cultural hegemony of the dominant culture. In settler societies this took on the racist appearance of first extermination programmes, and then more insidious forms of 'ethno-cide'. One such was the allegedly benevolent 'smoothing of the dying pillow' of the so-called Aborigines Protection Society in Australia in the first part of the twentieth century. The idea of easing the pains of the ethnocidal compact was an unforgivable companion to the white Australia policy. Here, atrocities such as the forced removal of 'mixed' and 'half-caste' children from the care of their aboriginal parents in favour of fostering (and domestic slavery) in white missions and with white families have long caused concern. As documented in the film *Lousy Little Sixpence* (dir. Alec Morgan and Gerry Bostock 1982 – sixpence was the

compensation Aboriginal parents were offered) and fictionalized in *Rabbit Proof Fence* (dir Phillip Noyce 2002, the rabbit fence was an Australia-wide divide erected to secure farmland from breeding bunnies), the ‘stolen generations’ remain a running sore in race relations in Australia.² Remembering that the dispossession of Australia’s original inhabitants had as much to do with mineral and agricultural capitalism, it is not necessary to stress that the notion of ‘culture clash’ also betrayed significant pathologies on the part of the self-proclaimed ‘masters’. Interestingly, the term ‘culture clash’ was used by anthropological critics of Western imperialism, though again with a culturalist bent that was less concerned with political redress than with management of ‘relations’. The very idea of cultural survival through fusion, mixture, miscegenation, creolization et cetera, provoked apoplexy among the great and the good of colonial rule, and much energy has subsequently been expended attempting to unravel the violent consequences of a paranoid ‘first contact’. It remains an open question as to what degree fears of cultural mix were governed by base economic interests and how far psycho-social categories must be contextualized.

Another field where the notion of hybridity has a distinct history focused on preservation is in linguistics. The concept of creolization and the idea of a linguistic continuum both evolve from the study of the interactions like that between African and European peoples in the Caribbean. Out of the violence of slavery there emerged a number of new languages which were classified in a derogatory mode called pidgin and more locally patois. French patois (Haiti) or English patois (Jamaica) provided for the development of the idea of hybrid languages, which consisted crudely of one language’s vocabulary imposed on the grammar of another. It is important to remember that the process of slavery also produced an amalgamation of various African languages, and there are other examples such as the ways colonialism in the Pacific spawned a range of idiomatic ‘tongues’ – and entailed a separate but similar history of violence, acculturation, missionary activity, ‘black birding’ (meaning the kidnap of islanders to work on Queensland sugar plantations) and ongoing underdevelopment. The resulting creolized languages offered fruitful material for linguistic research, but these researches were often undertaken in isolation from, and even blissful neglect of, socio-political contexts. Some examples of a political linguistics can be found (eg., Newmeyer 1986). However, among linguistics scholars there is often a good deal of resentment of the way a technical term – creole – has been appropriated metaphorically to do work in culturalist discourse.³ The precious anxieties of scholarly terminology often inhibit clarity and analysis. Although outside of linguistics, the cultural translation model for creolization is popular and often invoked.

Translation is loosely regarded as a metaphor for method in many disciplines and has thrived in cultural studies and social theorizing inspired by writing from Clifford Geertz to Jacques Derrida and beyond. Geertz presented the idea of the anthropologist as interpreter, providing ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1973) while observing ‘over the shoulder’ of his Balinese informants. With *The Interpretation of Cultures* and later with *Works and Lives* (1988) Geertz set off a cascading debate on the propriety of translation and interpreted/translated texts of culture in the hands of institutionally resourced academics. The translator is a broker between cultural forms or documents, and is thereby in a powerful position, not always evenly ‘in-between’. Among the most interesting, yet still problematic, commentators on this set of issues has been Derrida, who wrote that ‘In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but in another sense, everything is untranslatable; translation is another name for the impossible’ (Derrida 1996/1998, pp. 56–7). His argument is that language and cultural experience is idiomatic and the idea of a perfect translation is misguided, and yet, attempts to translate are made, however quixotically. If there is no ‘pure’ access from outside to the idiom of a language or culture (note the appearance of a certain clean metaphoric tone) there can be no absolute equivalence of translation. This idea undermines the sanctity of the scene of translation in ways now recognized by many, but not all. The self-appointed ventriloquists of culture still prevail and the metaphor of translation as a code word for ethnographic studies of ‘otherness’ has not been displaced. Yet Derrida also identifies the translator as a ‘rebel against patriotism’ (Derrida 1996/1998, p. 57) and translation as an art. In these circumstances, the impossible governs a politics of translation where a dialectics of exchange might be a more interesting way to make sense of the process. The question of who translates and why has been broached several times, for example by Virinder Kalra in relation to the analysis of Bhangra lyrics in the seemingly hybrid musical cultures of British-Asian creativity. The argument is that in making the (theoretically important notion of the) hybrid the focus of attention, intended and explicit political content falls away in translation, due to, variously, the (idiomatic, institutional) situation of the translator (see Spivak 1999, Kalra 2000).

In many formulations, the hybridizing moment is a communication across incommensurable polarities, with or without peculiarities of idiom or grammar (often left without). At an abstract level this translation syntax implies the possibility of a calculus of difference, though reliant upon an idealized and perfect assumption that translation across difference occurs. Sadly, it is only in some distant future time that the calculation capable of computing the turbulence of culture can appear. Often translation is assumed by those who can

enforce their way, and so the translated text becomes an appropriation of (cultural) ownership and even of creativity without attention to contexts. The terminological ambiguity of this contact zone complex means we should perhaps take seriously the possibility that a focus upon the energies deployed in discussion of hybridity can open up crucial issues of power and control such as who translates and why. This is not the same as saying hybridity can be effective despite, or even because of, its problematic conceptual difficulties. But neither should we deny the usefulness of a technical term that allowed questions to be asked as to the political context and investments engaged in the scene of translation or in ‘contact’ itself. Whether it does so, however, is a bigger problem.

Cyborgs (or the sexual life of savage machines)

It is plausible then to consider another valorization of mixture, if only to indicate the dangerous absence of attention to questions of inequality – across notions of race, culture contact and, in Gayatri Spivak’s preferred term, the international division of labour. In studies of science and technology it has been possible to present hybridity as the central coordinate of contemporary capitalist relations, and sometimes as an unmitigated boon. If anthropologists were obsessed with saving culture, linguists with the specificity of language, then science studies personnel have been obsessed with human and industrial hardware. The cyborg is the ‘hybridization of human and machine’ in the work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 405) – though they do note that the cyborg is a fable, and that hybridity, like mobility and difference, is not libatory in itself (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 154). Other presentations of the cyborg are altogether more upbeat, postulating an advanced fantasy multicultural future similar to the bland uniformity of the television space age sit-com Star Trek. Geordi [Levar Burton] the black engineer with prosthetic eyewear in the New Generation series, and Seven of Nine [Jeri Ryan], the technologically enhanced Borg poster girl in the Voyager series, are classic examples of the type (we can ignore the android Data as just a robot, an inferior point of view character for pre-teens). Famed for its forays into racial politics with the first cross-race screen kiss in the original 1960s series (Captain Kirk [William Shatner] and Communications Officer Uhura [Nichelle Nichols] were under the influence of mysterious interplanetary drugs) no-one less than Martin Luther King thought it worthwhile to congratulate director Gene Roddenberry and visit the set. Yet, the prime directive of Star Trek’s Federation (a kind of intergalactic American Empire) exhibits the same anxiety about racial mixture that its key character roles seem designed to deflect. The prime directive counsels against

interaction with ‘pre-warp’ cultures (meaning: underdeveloped planets) – though more often than not the plot requires this directive be breached. The overt text is about the volatile dangers of unrestricted technological advance (meaning: against technology transfer), but in nearly every case the transgression of the rule takes on a voluptuous cross species sexual charge. Up above, in the starship, purity is secured, Geordi and Seven are integrated into the Starfleet crew.⁴ The cyborg of science fiction is significantly the moment of erasure of cultural difference under the efficiency of the machine-human interface, eradicating or compensating for structural defects (Geordi’s blindness, Seven’s sense of collective responsibility as one of the technology-fixated Borg).

Californian ‘History of Consciousness Programme’ theorist Donna Haraway has a more serious take on the figure of the cyborg, and is on the whole enthusiastic. For her, a ‘cyborg anthropology attempts to reconfigure provocatively the border relations among specific humans, other organisms, and machines’ (Haraway 1997, p. 52). Her concern ranges from prosthetic devices – these could be as mundane as eyeglasses – to the internet as a global prosthesis, and her studies of science offer considerable scope for speculations about hybridity. To restrict this discussion to one of her specific examples, like the especially-bred-for-cancer-testing OncomouseTM, might seem like reduction as her text deserves separate reading: there is in fact substantial work available on these themes in the emergent discipline of social studies of science and technology (Nader 1996, Bowker and Star 1999). But using the insight that ‘informatics hybridizes with biology in the New World Order’ (Haraway 1997, p. 129), the parameters of this work can be elaborated insofar as it pertains to diaspora and hybridity – specifically the occlusion of difference under the sign of technological advance. Again think of the character of Geordi in Star Trek with his eyewear (let alone the Borg themselves as paradigmatic cybernetic human-machine interface in space) and consider how marginality is relegated to the deviant and abnormal, only to receive a technological fix in the phantasmagorical ‘modernity’ of this fiction.

The cyborg, like the gene map, is more often than not blind to the socio-political components of race in its enthusiasm to eliminate difference by magical intervention. A critique of the erasure of race and inequality in the cyborg might address the failures of a discursive critique of gender too. If the cyborg is a woman, what achievements in terms of liberation can be claimed – so much for OncomouseTM, who though dedicated to cancer therapy, comes from a line of rodents whose experimental activity has had to do less with practical prosthetics than with the fashion industry and cosmetics. The trademark is a family resemblance. Cyborgs abound. We might also invoke

the science fiction of the writer William Burroughs: part novelist, part junkie, and his education at the Los Alamos school which was to become the site for the development of the atomic bomb. Los Alamos evokes images of the old Wild West. Yet upon this rural homestead scene is grafted the think tank of advanced military science, with the Oppenheimer and Roosevelt gang about to wreak ‘destroyer of worlds’ god-like devastation upon Japan. The colonial conquest context of the old West continues today in the hybrid science of nuclear physics, as space exploration and the weapons programme, with new metals et cetera, stress tested in space, not always with success. The spin-offs include both the development of building tiles and security cladding, as well as lazer technologies and satellite surveillance, all of which have practical use in imperialism’s ‘war on terror’ as war on Islam, and which continue to enforce the U.S. economic hegemony in business. To then suggest that the internet generation can be conceived as cyborg humanity is hardly remarkable – the code of language itself was thought by Burroughs as alien, ‘as a virus from outer space’. Language as a cyborg hybridization provokes more effectively in Burroughs than in the staged hybridity of Star Trek.⁵ Language certainly has landed the human animal into considerable trouble – though it is of course the instigator of, and precursor for, pleasure, sex and travel, and fantasy writing. And in such writing the fertility obsession of the white race, which so often descends upon sexuality and accusations that the mixed, mongrel, mulatto and half-caste are degenerative impurities, can be worked through in the safety of the speculative imagination.

Avatars of a technology-humanity interface paranoia are the end-time outcomes of an eschatology that runs from nature to human to machine. The middle phase was the nature-human mix. Avtar Brah and Annie Coombs report that it was in the eighteenth century that ‘the concept of hybridity was expanded to incorporate humans’ (Brah and Coombs 2000, p. 3). There can be no doubt that what are nowadays catalogued as human hybrids have a very long gestation; we could think of the goat-men, winged feet, angels and mermaids of western mythology, et cetera.⁶ It is probably somewhat impolite, but certainly correct, to note that the human has long been a promiscuous boundary jockey. The mythological nature-human hybrid then gave way to less imaginative concerns in the evolutionary development and civilizational programming paradigms of white supremacy. In myriad examples, salacious carnal mixing has been a favourite theme. What deserves study is the motley inventive terminology of mulatto, mestizo, cross race, mixed blood, half-caste, quadroon and octaroon, all manner of mixed miscegenation in marriage and heterogeneous alliances in several shades of adulteration with diverse nominations of interbreeding betraying a disproportionate fervour and zeal for classification.

Ann Pheonix and Charlie Owen conceptualize the issue of race mixture as a terminological confusion with worrying consequences:

Although people with one black and one white parent have historically been categorized as black, they have, simultaneously (and contradictorily) been identified as separate from both black and white people. The specific terms commonly used to describe people of mixed parentage, and sexual unions between black and white people, tend to pathologize those who cannot easily be fitted into the taken-for-granted racialized binary opposition. Thus “half-caste”, “mixed-race”, “bi-racial”, “maroon”, “mulatto” (from mule), and “metis” (French for mongrel dog) all demonstrate essentialism and bipolar thinking (Pheonix and Owen 2000, p. 74).

Why was it that British colonial purity – after initially open and later covert mixings galore – sought so often to limit intercourse between hosts and guests? Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler writes extensively of this in an essay in the Brah and Coombs volume as well as in her book engaging with miscegenation, sexuality and colonialism, exploring Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* in the context of colonial education practices (Stoler 1995). The context here is primarily an anxiety and ambivalence about desire, sex, intermarriage and hegemonies of bloodstock. The fear is not of winged goat-men but of black people claiming white privileges through the spurious accident of ‘paternity’. Ruling class elements of the white ‘race’ wanted to keep the lines of descent clear. In this regard, attention to the sexual urge in race mixture resonates with Young’s difficulties with hybridity as a category in contemporary theory in so far as it focuses attention on the dependant relationship to ‘purity’. Thus the historical legacy of slavery, apartheid and ‘Aboriginal Protection’ is predicated on notions of the distinct ‘races’ that colonial administration and race law long wanted to keep separate. And they wanted this separation to protect from fear of a ‘contamination’ that was always already well underway.

That issues of sexual border crossing still exercise anxieties today is revealed in everything from excessive additional attention paid by immigration officials and other public service personnel to ‘mixed’ couples, through to the calculated provocative image morphing advertisement campaigns of Benetton, or the ‘coffee coloured people by the score’ pop song jingle of the 1960s.⁷ The entire problematic of mixed parentage and mixed relationships depends upon the fiction of racial difference in blood and genetics. This fiction persists despite the extensive statistical indications of both gene mapping, which show we are all mostly the same, and history, which show that, for example, 70 to 80 per cent of black people in the USA have some white ancestry (Zack 1993). The history of slavery and colonialism certainly accounts

for a greater intermixture of peoples than is generally accepted (Pheonix and Owen 2000, p. 75), but this matter is distinct from the domain of cultural exchange – one could note that legal impediments against mixed race marriage were not lifted in the USA until 1967, just as the White Australia policy, restricting non-white migration to that country, with racial purity as its unwritten but obvious goal, prevailed until 1973 (Sykes 1989, p. 23).

Yet another theme redolent with the paranoid-fear-world-conqueror complex, and dripping with sexual and miscegenation cyborg and technological anxieties, is acted out in the *Alien* movie series. The all-American heroic white heroine, Ripley, battles to preserve a prophylactic exclusion of another life form – sporting a metallic vagina dentate aggression instinct (Creed 1993) – which only wants to live, albeit at the expense of its host. That this can be read as a right-wing Reaganite parable of immigration and miscegenation fears has been amply demonstrated by Pamela Church Gibson, who points out that a joke at the expense of a Hispanic crew member of the spaceship in *Aliens* (dir, James Cameron 1986) plays on the terminology of 'ILLEGAL Aliens' (Gibson 2001, p. 40). The alien is not an innocent monster and it is the black American, the Hispanic and the welfare mother who are all symbolically killed off in the films. Ripley herself appeared as the perfect Reaganite woman – militarist paternalism – before she became sexually active in *Alien 3* (dir. David Fincher 1992). When Ripley is impregnated by the Alien, species distinctions are blurred at the same time that racial stereotypes are foregrounded but overlooked. Gibson writes:

Perhaps there is more work to be done around issues of ethnicity in these films. However, it should be remembered that racial and ethnic differences between the human characters are perhaps minimized when the Alien looms among them as the sign of a difference that threatens them all (Gibson 2001, p. 47).

In *Alien Resurrection* (dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet 1997) it is the Winona Ryder character who saves the day, an android that one crew member wanted to have sex with, much to his dismay when he finds out her true 'nature'. The most advanced example of human-technological mixture however is Ripley's resurrection – religious metaphor not without significance – as the product of DNA cloning. The Alien also mutates, and from Ripley gains a womb, so that rather than nesting, she births a new monster baby. Which Ripley, of course, kills, knowing full well, without words, that the spawn of the human-Alien mix is a greater danger – thus reasserting the message of race politics by displacement.

Creativity

It is not so strange then that the dynamic of exchange and mixture in the work of contemporary ‘hybridity theorists’ is intended as a critique of the negative complex of assimilation and integration. Such work insistently affirms the creativity and effervescence of cultural pluralization. This is conceived as a theorectico-political intervention by some major theorists, though it is, of course, never presented uncritically. For example, in Hall’s discussion of what he sees as very welcome changes in British cultural life, the term hybridization is used to describe the confluence of black style and the market. With a certain mischievous tone he notes a displacement where ‘some sectors of the mobile (and mobile-phoned) black youth’ have taken advantage of Thatcherism and the Enterprise Culture of 1990s Britain as part of a general trend towards ‘the racial and ethnic pluralisation of British culture and social life’. This process is ‘going on, unevenly, everywhere’ and through television and other media the ‘unwelcome message of cultural hybridization’ is being brought into ‘the domestic sanctuaries of British living rooms’ (Hall 1995, pp. 16–18). While this is good news, it is not unequivocally progressive. The same process can also be seen going on in youth culture where ‘black street styles are the cutting edge of the generational style wars’ (Hall 1995, p. 22). The question that should be put here has to do not with the evaluation of this diversity, but with the ways its advent leads either to new possibilities in a diasporized polity or, as seems just as likely, to increasing incorporation of the mobile-phoned youth into ‘host’ society, the culture industry, and more generally into a hybridized mode of capitalism. What is significant here is that the hybrid creativity of black style is affirmed (and it is affirmed also by the market, by the entrepreneurs who want to cash in), and expressions of enthusiasm for this creative change are obvious.

Urbanization-causes-hybridity?

It is my argument, however, that syncretism and hybridity are academic conceptual tools providing an alibi for lack of attention to politics, in a project designed to manage the cultural consequences of colonization and globalization. Where Gilroy calls ‘syncretism … that dry anthropological word’ (Gilroy 1994, p. 54) there might be reason to be suspicious of the ways previous scholarly attention has focused on movements of mixture. The old explanatory routine of population pressure and subsequent urbanization as the root of all ills for contemporary society was much discussed in the syncretism literature of anthropology. These themes should feature prominently in critical discussions of hybridity. Where Papastergiadis writes approvingly of

the 'teeming hybridity of the postcolonial city' (Papastergiadis 1998, p. 175), there might be an opportunity for an incursion that remembers all those excluded from that city and trying to get in. Garcia Canclini also offers a typical example:

Undoubtedly urban expansion is one of the causes that intensified cultural hybridization. What does it mean for Latin American cultures that countries that had about 10 per cent of their population in cities at the beginning of the century now concentrate 60 to 70 per cent in urban agglomerations? (Canclini 1995, p. 207)

Surely, the rural population remains part of any demographic, especially where its movement is blocked (see the essays on the limits to travel theory in Kaur and Hutnyk 1999), and this in turn raises questions about who can and who cannot be considered hybrid or open to hybridity. Scare stories about over-population in the Third World, with subsequent campaigns for fertility control, and the tightening of immigration restrictions, intractable asylum law, and reduction of refugee programs, should all be questioned as the nether side of a hierarchical prejudice and exclusion. Closures abound. In his book *Population and Development*, Frank Furedi offers a cogent critique of the way population 'paranoia' and 'the goal of population stabilization' and control 'took precedence over that of development' (Furedi 1997, pp. 73, 80–4).

Many of those who had the good sense, relative fortune, or circumstantial luck to escape agricultural slavery (under feudal lords or under industrialized farming) by means of migration to the rich metropolis find themselves still to be afflicted by an international division of labour remapped across multiple zones. In the cities of the rich West as much as in the peripheral metropoles, the newly industrialized enclaves and the re-pauperised barrios, there continues a comprehensive demarcation. It should be clear that those who escaped the peasant predicament only to exchange landlords for racists and institutional discrimination are probably marginally materially better off than their excluded brethren still caught at the sharp end of IMF and World Bank agricultural policy. Those who remain in the theatre of that peasantry now find the emigration option replaced by sweatshop micro-production, service subservience or street-corner begging (perhaps just a few can avail themselves of new romantic tribal ethnicities so as to attend liberal colloquia on first peoples, but at best it is more likely they will be found hawking trinkets to backpackers). This does not mean they are the problem; equally, they are not to be romanticized. We should certainly salute the attempt of those workers who refuse slavery, and those who struggle under the wire (or risk asphyxiation on a channel tunnel crossing wedged

underneath a lorry, or the danger of drowning on a makeshift raft in the Florida Keys), but we cannot pretend that running away is the revolution. On the whole, prospects seem slim for those who want to escape the immiseration of their situations. The issue is not over-population, and to use this as a criterion for limiting redistribution is the ideological programme excused by the urbanization-causes-hybridity thesis. What must be analysed as more than a descriptive condition are the turbulent effects of population migration that, glossed as diaspora and settlement, has rearranged the necessities of struggle and life. Whether it be the settler colonialists in Australia, Southern Africa or the Americas, the Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia, Tamils and Bangladeshis in the Gulf or Punjabis in Britain – and so many more examples – scholarship has not achieved much in terms of promoting an openness that can undo exploitation and inequality.

The generalized fear of hybridity is also played out in science fiction urbanization scenarios where the cities of the future are imagined as dystopias of ethnic mixture – urbanization leads to the Asian hybrid future of *Bladerunner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982) in Los Angeles 2019 or the Islam-inflected megalopolis of the twenty-fifth century in *The Fifth Element* (dir. Luc Besson 1997). Like sexual mixture, urban crowding is fantasized as a problem to be worked through by agents of law: as with any number of (white, western) sci-fi heroes, Decker in *Bladerunner*, and Korben Dallas in *The Fifth Element* both fight to preserve the purity of the earth from non-human invasion. The Federation of Star Trek police space with patrols to manage threatening, endlessly multiplying, differences. It was German National Socialism that wanted *Lebensraum*, room to live, and tried to expand the borders of Germany. The Japanese Imperial Government of the 1930s went in for the co-prosperity sphere, which is akin more to economic imperialism than settler colonization. US imperialism today marches to war in the interests of corporate building contracts and resource extraction, yet all these modes of expansion are figured in the off-world adventures of *Bladerunner*, *The Fifth Element*, *Star Trek* and many other films where planetary expansion involves ‘terra-firming’ and conquest or pacification before acclimatization. The task of adapting Mars to human habitation (*Red Planet*, dir. Anthony Hoffman, 2000, *Mission to Mars* dir. Brian de Palma, 2000) is a well-worked variant of the *lebensraum* ambition and is motivated by the same failures to deal justly with the here and now. By displacing thought about life problems ‘here’ today onto fantasies of the future ‘there’, what do we avoid?

On this planet it is the local ‘aliens’ who are a terminological problem for sociological classification as much as for state administration. Talk of urbanization processes reveal the ways descriptions

congeal into a conceptual refusal to recognize settlement, opting instead for models of arrivals, second generations, immigrants, hybrids – as if these categories were ever stable and could be applied to really existing groups of people. As always from elsewhere, the lived-in formation of the centre is made subservient to an assumed but unchallenged, original template, as if there were rightful inhabitants. Londoners, in this example, are not those who live in London, but rather the ‘residue’ of the white ‘eastenders’ whose brethren mostly decamped to Essex in ‘white flight’. The racist cartography of urbanization is clear and can then be mapped on to the class position of advocates of hybridity-talk. Of course then the East end lads’ image becomes passé as hybridity is recruited to remake London as the multicultural capital, dining out on its mixed cuisine (expensive venues, underpaid and undocumented service staff) and its multiracial vibe (hints of danger, licentious scenes). It is in the interests of those invested in a certain version of multiculturalism to honour integrated ‘ethnic’ fractions and well-meaning whites alike in the polite society of the suburban milieu, with excellent services and shopping malls galore – and an indulgent inner urban ghetto-exotica, where fantasy cosmopolitanism can risk a dark inner city evening out. Of course, any political assessment that might carve up the surplus in a more equitable way, locally or globally, is left unconsidered.

Just as we often found anxiety about cross-racial sexuality behind discussions of cultural survival, syncretism, hybridity and mixture, at least historically, in the contemporary period a similar investment provokes concern about diaspora and urbanization. These ‘scourges’ of cultural homogeneity are seen to operate alongside a hybridity-talk that is unable and unwilling to defend against exclusionary attacks – the theorists of hybridity appear complicit in the middle-class comforts that their own cosmopolitan lives afford, while denying the same to others left to languish in the ‘third world’ and rural extraction zones. It is an ‘unrestful’ conclusion that the tranquil discussions of cultural hybridization, diaspora and mixture do little more than confirm middle-class securities and draw others into the hegemony of a fabricated, and commercialized, diversity.

Lessons of hybridity?

This might be the place to ask again if the use of a term like hybridity in the social sciences offers understandings hitherto unavailable, and do these understandings then form any sort of basis for political consciousness and a project of emancipation? Or is it merely the case that hybridity offers up no more than festivals of difference in an equalization of cultures that would confirm Adorno’s worst fears of a market that sells ‘fictitiously individual nuances’ (Adorno 1991, p. 35),

in a standardized world where each product must claim to be ‘irreplaceably unique’ (Adorno 1991, p. 68). Canclini is alert to this when he writes:

When hybridization is the mixing of elements from many diverse societies whose peoples are seen as sets of potential consumers of a global product, the process that in music is called equalization tends to be applied to the differences between cultures (Canclini 2000: p. 47).

The charge is that a flattening of differences is secured at the very moment that celebrates difference and the creative productivity of new mixings. This flattening has inflected the terms of scholarship to the core. In a provocative volume, *Ethics After Idealism*, Rey Chow suggests that the popularized concepts of hybridity, diversity and pluralism may be grouped with others such as heteroglossia, dialogism, heterogeneity and multiplicity, as well as with notions of the postcolonial and cosmopolitan. Her point is that these concepts all serve to ‘obliterate’ questions of politics and histories of inequality, thereby occluding ‘the legacy of colonialism understood from the viewpoint of the colonized’ and so able to ‘ignore the experiences of poverty, dependency, subalterneity that persist well beyond the achievement of national independence’ (Chow 1998, p. 155). Chow continues in a way that takes to task the metropolitan celebrant of the hybrid:

The enormous seductiveness of the postmodern hybridite’s discourse lies... in its invitation to join the power of global capitalism by flattening out past injustices in a way that accepts the extant relations of power and where “the recitation of past injustices seems tedious and unnecessary” (Chow 1998, p. 156).

The same distraction might be discerned in enthusiasm for the figure of the cyborg in Haraway, and science fiction (but be sure to note that this is not to say that this happens in the same way). The consequence, however, is that it becomes possible to forget colonial violence, white supremacy, systematic exploitation and oppression: for those who can join the ‘belonging’ reserved to the compliant elite fraction of hybridizing capital, hybridity saves. As already noted, it is Spivak who is the most critical thinker here, pointing out that attention to migrancy and hybridity reserves importance to the metropolitan sphere and leaves the zones of exploitation, as arraigned across international divisions of labour, in darkness. In several books, but most explicitly in her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she repeatedly takes to task those hybridized and diasporized members of the

cosmopolitan set who market themselves as representatives of the culture they call origin from the luxurious comfort they now call home (Spivak 1999, pp. 191, 361). This is ‘going native’ in a rather different way: brown employees of the World Bank, IMF and UN conference circuit can only politely be called hybrid. In this conception, hybridity is about the opportunism of diasporic migrants seduced by complicity and advantage. Spivak’s critique centres upon the mode of ‘post-colonialism’ which takes the place of ‘the thoroughly stratified larger theatre of the South’, by displacing interest and attention to that ‘South’ by way of a ‘migrant hybridism’ so that the South ‘is once again in shadow, the diasporic stands in for the native informant’ (Spivak 1999, pp. 168–9). Subalterneity is occluded or flattened, whatever other problems there might be with subaltern talk, by the celebrated access of hybridity talk. This is achieved with the help of the scholarly enthusiasm for hybridity as discussed above:

An unexamined cultural studies internationally, joins hands with an unexamined ethnic studies... to oil the wheels of what can only be called the ideological state apparatus... triumphalist hybridism as well as nostalgic nativism. Business as usual (Spivak 1999, p. 319n).

The business-as-usual that remains to be studied here is the culture industry co-option of cultural difference. The sophisticated artistic or rustic-ified ethnic performance of culture sits comfortably with an upward mobility of middle-class aspiration in the globalized ecumene. Beneficiaries of surplus while their class underlings succumb, the cultural effervescence of hybridity is indulgent insofar as it no longer contests monoculture but rather facilitates a corporate multiculture.

Surplus

The analytic advances of post-colonial and migration studies, let alone the globalization thematics of an elaborated Cultural Studies, still appear inadequate for thinking strategy and tactics for a political engagement with these issues. This ineffectual discourse of hybridity is here an academic correlate of what Canclini calls a ‘tranquillising hybridization’ (Canclini 2000, p. 48) that the culture industry develops as panacea for putting up with socio-economic disparities. Hybridity lulls us to sleep.

Thus, the discursive replication of hybridity-talk deserves the critical attention it receives, if only to make explicit what is not being said. Gilroy calls for us to find ‘an adequate language for comprehending mixture outside of jeopardy and catastrophe’ (Gilroy 2000, p. 217). More than descriptive capacity is needed. Gilroy is correct, but for slightly skewed reasons when he declares his hand: ‘We do not have to

be content with the halfway house provided by the idea of plural cultures. A theory of relational cultures and of culture as relation represents a more worthwhile resting place. That possibility is currently blocked by banal invocations of hybridity in which everything becomes equally and continuously intermixed' (Gilroy 2000, p. 275). Let us then not be banal. The problem is that any 'resting place', while the culture industry makes all differences equivalent, is a kind of complicity internal to the problem – capitalist encroachment upon all aspects and varieties of life – mixed or stable, it does not matter which. Resting is not an urgent strategy of a struggle that wants to win. Like descriptive and theoretical competence, this means nothing if unable to examine and work past complicity in its own subsumption and suppression. The plurality of cultures, or the truism that everything is hybrid, surely leads to the torturous reasoning of: 'if so, so what?' Stasis.

Is it true that the synthetic figure of the hybrid is the one who emerges as benefiting from a new cultural surplus?⁸ Clearly, the schema of hybridity is one that has often thrived on surplus. The descriptive project of theory-making is itself the conceptual surplus enabling any discussion of hybridity or diaspora in the first place. And though this theory production is most often authorized by the benevolence of the national funding of institutes, universities and national literatures, and so on, it has been important to note that migration and movement also produce much cultural product – writing, film, art. Obviously, it has never been that unusual to accept the nation as the fulcrum of production – it has often been productive in cultural and redistributive terms, however monolithic. But has it not always been the case that travel also generates text? What needs to be examined is how the 'texts' of movement articulate with choices made in the interstices between nations, laws and powers; with actual travels, and blockages to travel; with the day-to-day practicalities of struggle in between secure locations. How do discussions of hybridity co-exist with opinions and policy that impact upon everyday, more or less transient, lives and lifestyles? How do imaginings of hybridity and diaspora constitute or construct communities as dynamic objects in the political, cultural and commercial arena?

Writings of diasporic character, so often marketed under the signature of hybridity, have been among the most often acclaimed, and most debated, items in theorizing the socio-political predicament of our times. High-profile intellectual names on the elite conference circuit testify to this: Bhabha, Hall, Gilroy, Spivak. The impact of this investment in theory is critical. For example, in a post-national register, Hall approves hybridity as forcing an 'unwelcome message' (Hall 1995, p. 18) upon Britain, transforming nationalist complacencies for the better. Bhabha calls this a 'third space'. Gilroy is

ambivalent, Spivak scathing. The positions are drawn up and the co-ordinates affirmed – for or against the nation, for or against versions of intellectual and practical politics: the stakes are high. In this context, pluralism is the ideology that conscripts various political movements as mere social interests into an alliance that serves the status quo. Such an alliance assures, through minimal concessions, the success of those already in position to benefit from the cosy comforts of magnanimity. Often intellectuals and similarly culturalist commissars are engaged to carefully efface and subsume, or recruited to bourgeois ends, concepts like difference, hybridity, multiculture. Support by impoverished, undervalued, excluded fractions – what was once called the working class – is engineered by pluralist diversity entrepreneurs from the bourgeoisie without corresponding recognition that they are defending their own established privileges and recruiting others to do the same. Alliances between the well-to-do and those who have nothing seem hard to sustain, yet this is exactly what pluralism and diversity demand if it proceeds from where we are now – an uneven and hierarchical domain. Pluralism on the basis of the current distribution would only be to confirm hierarchy, never its undoing.

Maybe it is the mongrel, interfering, mix that undermines racialist absolutism, and it is the corrosive friction of intercourse and exchange that destabilizes purity and property by right. But is it also perhaps the message of hybridity that reassigned fixed identity into what becomes merely the jamboree of pluralism and multiplicity? These contested themes are often played out in hybridity talk. If some kind of hybridity appears, paradoxically, to be a good thing, a more radical analysis is needed to equip organized groups and achieve it in an equitable way.

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Notes

1. For those interested in resource politics, Visvanathan's work is essential reading, but see also the organizations Minewatch and Partizans for the development of a global anti-mining activism (see Moody 1990).
2. Old news for some, the history of this period cannot be contained under the sign of mixed racism as the later duplicities of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs continue up to the present with betrayals of the Land Rights and Reconciliation movements by the Australian courts and the refusal of Prime Minister John Howard to acknowledge Aboriginal grievances continuing up to the time of writing (2003).
3. I thank Steve Nugent for this point and for alerting me to Newmeyer.

4. For a contrasting space fantasy meditation on purity, see the genetic drama *Gattica*, starring the improbably less than perfect Uma Thurman attempting to bypass screening tests so as to escape the bonds of earth.
5. But see also Constance Penley's *NasaTrek* (1997). Burroughs became a counter-culture and publishing industry darling in later life, as he ever was. See his music-performance crossover work with Laurie Anderson (*Home of the Brave*, 1986) and with the Disposable Heroes of Hip-hoprisy (*Spare-Ass Annie* 1993). As well as cameos in films like *Drugstore Cowboy* (dir, Gus Van Sant, 1989) and *Decoder* (dir. Muscha/ Maeck 1984). I am grateful to Megan Legault's excellent final film in the Goldsmiths MA Visual Anthropology for this last reference, *Encoding/Decoding* (dir. Legault 2000).
6. The riddle of the Sphinx – it was Sigmund Freud, with a symptomatic curiosity himself, who suggested that the riddle of the Sphinx was ‘probably a distortion of the great riddle that faces all children – where do babies come from?’ (as glossed by Barbara Creed 1993:18). It should not go unnoticed that the Sphinx is a hybrid creature – lion’s body, woman’s face – and Creed’s linking of this with the primal scene of much science fiction indicates again how the themes of correct sexual congress are played out in the fantastic.
7. For discussion of ‘mixed couples’ in the UK based on census data see Pheonix and Owen (2000); for an anti-racist morphing project in the art world, see www.mongrel.org
8. Perhaps only Gayatri Spivak’s work has really taken seriously the privilege of this positioning (Spivak 1999). Her discussion of surplus value is best accessed through the essays ‘Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value’ (in Spivak 1987) and ‘Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida’ (in Spivak 1993).

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