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Hybrid Spaces – Theory and Beyond

An Introduction

Johannes Angermüller
and Katharina Bunzmann

From Theory to Posttheory

Since the 1970s, the theorization of the humanities has profoundly transformed the dominant intellectual traditions of the English-speaking world. Yet while "Theory"—also known as "Yale School of Deconstruction," "French Theory" or "High Theory"—mainly focused on literary and philosophical texts, by about 1990 the intellectual atmosphere had decisively shifted to less hermetic and downright political issues. »The Yale School has always been a Male School,« Barbara Johnson pointed out shortly after Paul de Man's death in 1984 (1989: 45), when "Theory" had entered a stage of crisis already. Ever since it has been symptomatic of the politicized mood in academia that Theory's former students have become suspicious of the politically questionable aspects of "Eurocentric" high cultural works (e.g. Spivak 1988). For some observers, even "Theory" had succumbed to the "reactionary" and "patriarchic" influences of the Western tradition. However, with the coming of what may be termed "posttheory"—the "desire" called Cultural Studies (Jameson 1993)—, many students in the humanities turned to various new lines of research, especially on social and historical issues, in order to go beyond the politics of traditional scholarship.

Yet by no means has posttheory—or (American) Cultural Studies—claimed to do without Theory's prior achievements. Theory once brought in radically reflexive approaches concerning reading and writing texts and explored textualist, deconstructive, and discourse analytical theories, especially in English and foreign language departments, where the reign of the humanists was coming to a close (cf. Wellek 1982). The fierce controversies over "poststructuralism" between the new theory avant-garde and the humanist establishment revolved primarily around the question of whether texts point to a "metaphysical exterior" like an author, a society, or God (LaCapra 1982). For the poststructuralists the only viable solution was to free the play of the signifier (Derrida 1967). What they did was to describe how texts produce their meaning—a meaning that always exceeds what is "meant" by the supposed "origins" of the text. But while the poststructuralists introduced rigorous text analytical instruments, they also helped to re-define the relationship between "the world, the text, and the critic" (Said 1983). If it is true that "Theory" overcame traditional literary criticism, which could not survive in a "post-historical" University emptied of humanist "referentiality" (Readings 1997), its main problem was that it did little to address the questions that resulted from the rapidly changing position of the humanities in society. Given the job crisis that has struck many fields of academic research for a long time (Bérubé 1998), many students have felt the need to readjust their scholarly interests in order to deal with politics, history, and society. In a word, the socio-historical turn from Theory to "posttheory" is symptomatic of an ongoing crisis in the humanities—a crisis going beyond the mere desire to get politics back in.

To put it briefly, posttheory expresses the need for supplementing Theory with the social and historical dimensions involved in the production of literary-cultural texts. While Theory has textualized the world, posttheory opens an already textualized world to political, social, and historical analysis. Posttheory draws from the deconstructive radicalism of Theory and attempts to turn it into investigations responsive to pressing political needs. In posttheory, the gap between text and world has closed—a gap still constitutive of Theory—and we are left with a patchwork of texts, blurred genres, and deconstructed identities—heterogeneous developments collectively subsumed under the catchy term "hybridity."

Hybridity

Perhaps hybridity is not just a trendy buzzword in ethnic and postcolonial studies, where it first gained prominence (Bhabha 1994). Not only a sequel to the multiculturalism debate, the growing field of hybridity should be symptomatic of a more general problematic in many fields of cultural analysis—the poststructuralists' deconstruction of essentialism, the critique of conceptual hierarchies, and the skepticism toward origins, in short: the crisis of the old epistemological principle of identity. Henceforth, identity renounces its contained relationship with the selfsame and enters the play with the Other. Thus, hybridity is the product of a deconstructive movement that has shattered the text's as well as the world's origins, centers, and essences.

In this volume, "hybridity" is understood as this broad movement away from identity. Accordingly, since the late 1980s, feminist, gay and lesbian studies, among others, have witnessed a turn from political essentialism to "queerness," which has brought about the dissolution of coherent identities, conceptual purity, and cultural unity (Butler 1990). The "blurring of boundaries" (Geertz 1980) also encompasses binary oppositions that were once considered cultural universals, e.g. the distinction between nature and culture. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway claims that living beings are not derived from original essences that can be conserved and maintained in a pure state of nature (Haraway 1990). However, the old epistemological principle of identity has not only been called into question by Theory, but also by adjacent developments like systems theory, pragmatism, analytical philosophy, "classical" structuralism, and it is in this context that hybridity has become a wild card for the vacant place of metaphysics, identity, and essentialism.

Space

While "space" has probably been less celebrated by the critical theory market, it, too, was a response to the crisis of Theory. If we assume a theoretical rupture between structuralism and poststructuralism, then it consists in the poststructuralist temporalization of structure. And indeed, Derrida's deconstruction pinpoints the moving and decentering character of signification; Luhmannian systems reproduce themselves in time; in Butler gender

identities are deconstructed through performativity.¹ But the main achievement of poststructuralism was not the new focus on time—already well-known in high modernism. In fact, it is space that has now become the paradigmatic category for the interdisciplinary discourse.

The major impulses for this “spatialization” came from France (see, for instance, Derrida’s notion of spatialization, 1967: 96ff.), where theorists like Foucault made space a crucial concept of socio-historical analysis. In the *Order of Things*, Foucault aimed at a cartography of discourse that maps the epistemic style of an age (1966). Moreover, Foucault stressed that power was articulated through discipline, whose ordered space characterized prisons and hospitals (Foucault 1975). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari took up this idea and distinguished two different notions of space: ordered, “striated” vs. open, “smooth” space (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Thus for Foucault and Deleuze/Guattari space was not a neutral transcendental category but historically structured and socially situated. In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu elucidated the homology between spatial and social structure (Bourdieu 1992: 68ff.). But not only the structuralists were interested in space. It was a maverick French Marxist, Henri Lefebvre, who investigated the question of how everyday life becomes entangled with its spatiality (Lefebvre 1974). With Lefebvre, space became a respected problem in Marxist scholarship, which has now produced an array of interesting studies in the fields of urban sociology, geography, Cultural Studies, and postcolonial anthropology (cf. Massey 1994).

In the United States, pioneers like Marshall Berman, who in *All that is Solid Melts Into Air* discussed the impact of capitalist transformation on places like Berlin, Petersburg, Paris, and New York City, triggered a wave of Marxist and cultural studies scholarship on space (Berman 1982; cf. Sassen 1991). In *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward Soja has integrated the various branches of this new field and given a coherent theoretical account of it (1989). For academic Marxists like Fredric Jameson and David Harvey, the global, multinational age was ushered in by a new capitalist mode of production that has transformed the geopolitics of space (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1998). With the reconceptualization of capitalism in terms of space, an older generation of Marxists have enjoyed renewed attention,

¹ Even though Bourdieu cannot be considered a poststructuralist, it should be noted that his habitus concept, too, is directed against the atemporality of Lévi-Straussian structures.

such as the world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein and Ernest Mandel, who, too, has always insisted on the crucial distinction between core and periphery (Mandel 1972; Wallerstein 1974). Much of the work done by dependency theorists in the 1970s (Frank 1978) is still pertinent to ongoing debates, like “globalization” (Albrow 1997). Interestingly enough, however, the discourse on globalization, which has probably enjoyed more attention in Europe than in the U.S., has largely ignored the wealth of research done in dependency theory and adjacent areas. So recent studies like the remarkable work by Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994) will be important because they integrate the numerous, isolated traditions in socio-historical scholarship like the French *Annales School*, comparative political economy, and dependency theory. Certainly, space and hybridity no longer constitute separate fields of investigation. Post-colonialism, to name only one field, with its interest in the effects of imperialism on culture (Said 1993), has looked into the relationship between hybridity and space.

The contributions to this volume, originally presented at the “Post-Modern Perspectives” conference (November 1999, Erlangen, Germany), reflect the growing exchange between hybridity, up to now largely confined to the humanities, and the more socio-economically oriented research on space. It is the editors’ hope that with this truly international selection of authors on a broad range of topics in sociohistorical, cultural, and literary studies, the academic community’s own sense of space will not remain unaffected.

Summaries of the contributions

Stephen Shapiro argues in “Periodizing Postmodernism: Betamodernism and Geo-culture” that the year 1989 has marked the beginning of a new phase of capitalist accumulation led by Asia, in particular by China. He emphasizes that postmodernism must be seen as a Western phenomenon. In his view, postmodernism is not the immanent cultural logic of late capitalism itself. According to Shapiro, people living in the West should learn to think in global dimensions but also to understand Asian sensibilities.

In her article “Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Socialism,” Epp Annus contrasts the development of postmodernism in late capitalist with similar tendencies in late socialist countries. Following Fredric

Jameson, Annas points out that postmodernism was not confined to Western countries. As she argues, certain features commonly used as indicators of postmodernism apply to late socialist societies as well. Against this background, the author delivers a detailed analysis of the social, political and literary developments in Estonia from the 1960s on with a special emphasis on literary postmodernism in Estonia.

In his article "Travels in Theoretical Spaces: Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault," Steven D. Spalding brings together Deleuze's and Guattari's nomadology and Foucault's heterotopology in order to establish a "spatial hermeneutics." The author explicates Deleuze's and Guattari's notions of striated, smooth, and potentialized spaces and Foucault's "heterotopias." Comparing the three theorists, Spalding suggests a nomadological heterotopology that defines the space of the nomad as heterotopic, a view that conceptualizes nomadic spaces no longer merely as a practice parallel to others but as a tacit critique of those other practices. As a conclusion, Spalding delivers a reading of the television series *X-Files*, arguing that *The X-Files* highlights the implicit alliance between discourses of truth and hermeneutics of space.

In "From Liberal to Democratic Irony: An Essay for Marx's (Late)Modern Interpreters," Kathy Purnell suggests that a new politics of freedom in liberal democracies must be developed through the cultivation of "democratic irony," a concept that will empower individuals to create new forms of human solidarity. The concept of "equality" should be placed at the center of social critique. Purnell argues that the insistence on formal modes of equal recognition can lead to highly ambiguous results. For instance, political leaders as unlike as Farrakhan and Buchanan are united in their plea for the patriarchal family and embrace family values. According to Purnell, the adequate late-modern form of human emancipation is not formal equality but "democratic irony"—a concept inspired by both Richard Rorty and Karl Marx.

In their article, "Nobody Simply Vanishes: The Politics of Disappearance," Jung Min Choi and John W. Murphy deal with issues of essentialism, identity, and multiculturalism. They argue that essentialism has found advocates and opponents on both sides of the political spectrum. Choi and Murphy place particular emphasis on multiculturalism, defending it against critics of postmodernism, yet also pointing out the complex relationships between multiculturalism and leftist politics. The authors' conclusion is

that multiculturalism, by advocating the co-presence of mutual confirmation of different cultures, can produce a responsible social order.

Lasse Thomassen, in "From the Modern to the Post-Modern: Deconstructing Habermas," reads Habermas against the background of Derridean deconstruction and comes to the conclusion that Habermas' project breaks down due to its internal contradictions. As Thomassen argues, the allegedly universal presuppositions of Habermasian discourse ethics are both their own conditions of possibility and their limit. Therefore, the author sees Habermas' theory caught in a postmodern limbo that could only be resolved by going beyond Habermas.

In "How Do We Globalize? Post-Modern Education Beyond the Entrepreneurial University," Angelo Raciti poses the question of how globalization has affected the universities. Going back to Immanuel Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties*, the author gives an overview of how organizations of knowledge have changed since the eighteenth century, which he links to the development of the modern nation state. Today, the modern university finds cohesion no longer through the conflict between different modes of knowledge but rather through a certain attitude toward the nation and the national language. Raciti sees the solution for the present crisis of the universities in the establishment of close contacts between researchers of different disciplines and in different places, who, inspired by the Kantian model, could begin to reestablish exchanges between various modes of knowledge.

In his article, "Language and Power in Postmodern Ethnography: Representing Women with HIV/AIDS," Thomas Piontek discusses how women are represented in discourses on AIDS. As he argues, representations of women living with AIDS are especially problem-ridden because, while trying to avoid certain traditional gender stereotypes, they fall prey to other clichés instead. For instance, Piontek criticizes thinking in the binaries of "us/them" or "innocent/guilty." He is also critical of the desire to know how a person was infected with HIV, a desire that almost automatically leads to labeling. Furthermore, even texts that explicitly claim to deal with *women* and AIDS tend to make the women invisible. Piontek reaches the conclusion that ethnographic representation can only be successful if it does not reduce Otherness to Sameness and stays aware of the limits of representation.

In his article "Management of Voices: Power and Participation in North Belgian Audience Discussion Programs," Nico Carpentier analyzes

two TV talk shows, focusing on discourses of participation. The two talk shows claim to empower ordinary people to discuss social, moral, and political topics in public. Referring to theories of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault, the author argues that this claim is in fact false. According to Carpentier, the non-egalitarian power structures involved in the production of the TV shows do not really allow for an emancipatory, critical participation of the studio guests. Disciplinary technologies, such as the institution of the host, control what can be said.

Soenke Zehle's "Ecopolitics at the Site of (Virtual) Production: Environmental Justice Organization in Silicon Valley" describes the impact of the computer industry on human beings, particularly workers, as well as nature. His aim is to discard the myth of the "clean industry" and to raise the awareness of the considerable amounts of toxics resulting from the production of computer hardware. Yet, Zehle's critique concerns not only health issues but also the exploitation of workers, especially of immigrants. The author concludes that the "virtual revolution" needs to be reassessed in terms of its consequences for actual, real places and people and that new ways of organization are needed to battle it.

In "Subjective Destitution and the Postmodern Saint: A Reply to Žižek's Interpretation of *Breaking the Waves*," Christopher Craig Brittain analyzes Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Lars von Trier's film *Breaking the Waves* from the standpoint of the female protagonist. In particular, Brittain focuses on Žižek's and Trier's representation of women as being selfless, suffering martyrs. Furthermore, Brittain deals with Žižek's Lacanian perspective, which he finds problematic since Lacanian cultural analyses tend to connect feminine *jouissance* to masochism and suffering.

In her essay "The Female Is Either the Obstacle Or the Reward": Queer Communications in *The Well of Loneliness*," Christina Rauch re-reads Radclyffe Hall's highly influential lesbian classic. In contrast to most of the criticism the novel has brought about since its publication in 1928, Rauch is particularly interested in the curious absence of the female in Hall's narration of the lesbian. Drawing the reader's attention to Mary Llewelyn, the protagonist's lover, she finds that Hall's notion of lesbianism as "perverted nature" forces the novelist to write the female out of the narrative space that is to be occupied by the lesbian. Rauch reconstructs the discursive patterns of the novel as exemplified by the verbal and non-verbal communications of its characters. She comes to the conclusion that Hall's attempt to synthesize the sexologist discourse of her time with the tradi-

tional homosocial triangle (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) inevitably leads into the narrative fix which is represented perfectly by her paradigm of the lesbian as martyr.

"Re-Writing Desire 'Over the Edge': Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* and the Excess Inscription," Fleur Diamond's contribution, analyzes how lesbian sexuality is represented in *The Monkey's Mask*, a contemporary lesbian crime novel in verse. Diamond argues that in this queer text the very discourses that demarcate the bounds of the normal and the deviant are rewritten and perverted. In *The Monkey's Mask*, belonging to a genre revolving around questions of concealment and disclosure, sexuality is a secret text to be read, translated, and recontained within the texts of lawful and orderly conduct. In contrast to standard crime novels, Diamond argues, *The Monkey's Mask* does not allow the reader to solve the mystery in the end; rather, the text deconstructs the notion that narratives "about" desire can conclusively represent desire and thus sensitizes the reader to the limits of rationalist, orderly discourses.

In "No Anchorage At All? Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, the Loss of Memory, and the Subject of Postmodernity," Mike Petry analyzes Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Unconsoled* (1995) by focusing on identity and memory or, rather, the absence of memory. As Petry argues, compared to the other Ishiguro narrators, the protagonist in this novel (the pianist Ryder) comes closest to a representation of the troubled subject of postmodernity. Petry interprets Ryder as the hyperbolic fictional representative of the fragmented subject of postmodernity. The relationships between the fictional characters are considered allegories of postmodern life and its dilemmas. In *The Unconsoled*, even reality itself is represented as nothing but a discourse. However, Petry warns against interpreting the novel in purely negative terms and insists that apart from its disturbing aspects the text also contains a joyous affirmation of the play of the world.

In "Revising Irish Postcolonial Criticism: Literary Criticism, National Identity and the Protestant Poet," Stephanie Bachorz contests the notion of Ireland's postcolonial identity being different from that of other postcolonial countries. Examining current trends in postcolonial Irish criticism, she asks to what extent the Irish nation-narrative is inclusive vis-à-vis minority discourses. In this context, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity is referred to as an antidote to essentialist definitions of "Irishness." The poetry by Derek Mahon, a Protestant poet from Belfast, serves as a positive example

of a "revised" postcolonial understanding in which the "Other" is no longer excluded.

In "John Barth's *LETTERS*: 'At the Turn of History's Palindrome,'" Jianping Wang reads *LETTERS* as a witty and profound exploration of the problematic representation of history at both private and public levels. As Wang argues, Barth raises the fundamental issue of "the history of History," thus putting "History" itself into question. The solution Barth suggests is to define fiction as a kind of true representation of the distortion we make of life, as it were »the representation of the representation.« According to Wang, *LETTERS* affirms Barth's prime tenet, namely that the structuring mind can transcend postmodern history and offer a viable alternative, linking myth, history, and fiction.

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