

## EDITORIAL

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It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory ... may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.<sup>1</sup>

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.<sup>2</sup>

This issue is concerned with 'hybridity'; with a concept that has become of increasing significance within contemporary cultural and political theory. The strategic importance of hybridity, clearly articulated in the above epigraphs from Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, has been recognized within many disparate arenas of debate and is here displayed.

The Bhabha epigraph above comes from an earlier issue of *New Formations*. The editorial to this issue stated: 'Hall's vision of a radical pluralism and Bhabha's account of an agonistic political fluidity may mark a new phase in the left's thinking not only about culture but also about the nature of a socialist society and how to work towards it.' Four years on, we may say with some confidence that we were not wrong. The articles in this issue alone should attest to the importance of Hall and Bhabha's work for current cultural debate. From Coombes' discussion of hybridity in contemporary curating to Lavie's work on 'border hybridity', there is a shared concern with the issues of hybridity and a 'third space', of cultural identity and diaspora.

Annie Coombes, for example, argues that we are witnessing the growth of a new curatorial strategy which is informed by the political project of decolonization. A series of exhibitions claiming to represent a new 'postcolonial' consciousness have, she claims, attempted to challenge the Eurocentrism of the Western art establishment, and to do so through the cultural strategy of 'hybridity'. Her concern is that, under the banner of multiculturalism, in displaying culturally hybrid objects from once colonized nations, there is a danger that the specificity of experience which informs such objects is denied. The postmodern practice of 'bricolage', comprising free-flowing confusion and flux, apparently celebrating difference, can actually result in in-differentiation. Her argument, then, is that what appears as an innovative curatorial strategy, is simply an echo of the age-old Western ability to collect and appreciate cultures, to place them, as Bhabha has said, 'in a

1. Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', *New Formations*, no.5, Summer 1988.

2. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1990.

3. Homi Bhabha, 'The Third Space', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, op.cit.*, p208.

universal time-frame that acknowledges their various historical and social contexts only eventually to transcend them and render them transparent'.<sup>3</sup> In its place, argues Coombes, 'We need an account of difference which acknowledges the inequality of access to economic and political power.' We also need an account of hybridity which is conceived not solely as an articulation of the 'postcolonial'. For this, she argues, serves to marginalize diasporic formations – the Other within.

It is this 'Other within' that provides the focus for both Ted Swedenburg and Smadar Lavie. In his discussion of American Rap, Swedenburg turns his attention to the 'incisive style of collage' at work in Rap (in contradistinction to the in-differentiated bricolage discussed by Coombes), and argues that it forms part of a diasporic transnational Atlantic culture. He too wants to challenge those manifestations of multiculturalism which recognize the proliferation of 'other' voices within popular culture only to assimilate them within dominant art practice – to treat black music as 'a source for white musicians to mine'.

Smadar Lavie's explorations of the experiences of Palestinian 'citizens' of Israel and Third World Israelis leads her to assess critically existing models of hybridity and to argue for the development of a 'border model'. As distinct from what she labels Bhabha's 'response oriented model of hybridity' and Gloria Anzaldúa's more community focused model, Lavie argues for a notion of hybridity more pertinent to the context of Israel – one which does not demand a distinction between nation and empire. This understanding of hybridity assumes nation and empire in a state of constant flux and hence the existence of 'inner borders' to be explored.

In the piece by Diana Jeater, we find reference to Bhabha's conception of a third space. It is used by Jeater to rethink 'whiteness', not as a unified identity, but as a complex identification in need of articulation and exploration. Andreas Bjørnerud also draws upon the notion of a third space in his discussion of identity and the non-sovereign self, and argues that we should replace a politics of identity with a politics of identification. For identification, one could argue, is contextual and flexible and so avoids the rigid binarism of identity, recognizing alterity both within and without. This move from identity politics to a politics of identification is located here by Bjørnerud around a discussion of the later writings of Barthes and the extent to which they do and should manifest a gay identity. He argues against the charge that Barthes should have 'come out', if the notion of coming out implies that there is a truth of identity which one can know and express. The key point being that if we adopt a notion of identity as intersubjective and historically variable, we can reconceive coming out in performative rather than expressionist terms.

The adoption of such a politics of identification impacts not only on our conception of the self but also on our conception of 'the people'. Essential, unitary and homogeneous, existing prior to articulation: it is this conception of both 'the self' and 'the people' that is challenged by the above contributors. And this issue of the constitution of 'the people' is also addressed, in different form, by both John Frow and Christopher Norris.

Norris' project is to mount a defence of the notions of truth, ideology and class as a necessary prerequisite for confronting the failure of political judgment that currently engulfs us.<sup>4</sup> Within both Labour Party rhetoric and the 'New Times' analysis of the last British general election, Norris perceived a 'domestic version of the wider postmodernist outlook' – a similarity with 'Baudrillard's style of puckish nihilist abandon' and the 'ultra-nominalist' scepticism found in the writings of Lyotard. What assumptions these disparate perspectives share, according to Norris, are threefold: the belief that truth is synonymous with consensus belief; that ideology is an outmoded concept; and that talk of 'class' or 'class interest' is a liability. Thus the pragmatists, the postmodernists and the 'end of ideology' theorists, all combine to reject a realist perspective, a position which maintains a distinction between truth and falsehood, and so the scope for critical and oppositional thought is lost. This, argues Norris, is a 'cautionary reminder of the sceptical extremes to which 'theory' may be driven when divorced from any sense of real-world cognitive and moral accountability'. As such, his piece stands as an oppositional voice to 'Hall's vision of a radical pluralism and Bhabha's account of an agonistic political fluidity'.

Frow's project, however, is to argue that the 'popular' is not a useful descriptive concept. Its coherence lies neither in the spurious notion of 'the people', nor as the Other of the 'high', as various descriptive conceptions have implied. Rather, Frow argues, the 'popular' is an effect of contemporary cultural practices. Both 'high' and 'low' are constructed spaces; the former being the particular site for intellectuals. Indeed, intellectuals are here characterized by their commitment to the institutions of cultural capital, and by their anxieties about their place within them.

Rod Giblett addresses a rather different debate: that of the sublime and its Other, the uncanny. The writings of Sartre, Eagleton and others are scrutinized as examples of Giblett's thesis that: 'the masculine sublime and the project of modernity maintains itself by "managing" the constant threat of inundation posed by the feminine and pre-modern slimy.'

Finally, a word about Simon Frith's piece.<sup>5</sup> Assessing the historically changing intellectual responses to music and its shifting place within the hierarchy of the arts, Frith contemplates the issues of meaning, expression and description. In describing musical experiences, Frith argues, we feel obliged to apply adjectives and therefore attach words to what is a purely aural experience.<sup>6</sup> This is part of the continuing project to make music meaningful. Frith's suggestion is that we should focus not on music's meaning, but the possibility of meaningless – on music's ability to 'flout the strict sense of the word'.

4. See Gary Day's review of *Uncritical Theory* in this issue for further discussion of this project.

5. For discussion of Frith's work see the review by Ken Hirschkop in this issue.

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