

Hybridization and postcolonialism

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Abstract: Hybridization refers to a mode of knowledge and action associated with the **hybrid**. And this last idea denotes the interstices, the network of relationships, the places and instances that, while merging their essences and experiences, generate new productions and reproductions of themselves. Hybridity is viewed by several schools of thought and many practitioners of literature to be one of the main weapons against colonialism. This is especially true of theorists of postcolonialism such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha.

If hybridity is central to postcolonial studies for reflecting on our intercultural society, it is also true that this school of thought is itself hybrid since their origins. In fact, in our postcolonial age, literary texts and even scientific writing (historical, sociological, etc.) increasingly display a hybrid nature.

But how can this Hybrid Studies or Hybridology, through an historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist or a literary critic, detect such hybrid public meanings that lead to a more intense intercultural communication? One of the possible answers can be the following hypothesis: *besides the reading and writing of expert knowledges, **common concepts** (a central term in the sociological phenomenology of Alfred Schutz), used by common people from different cultural origins in a daily basis, may be one of the keys for mutual understanding between different cultures nowadays interconnected within our global postcolonial societies.*

Keywords: hybridity ; postcolonialism ; hybrid intercultural society ; Social Hybridology; common webs of meaning and conflict

1. The Hybrid

Hybridization refers to a mode of knowledge and action associated with the **hybrid**. And this last idea denotes the interstices, the network of relationships, the places and instances that, while merging their essences and experiences, generate new productions and reproductions of themselves.

Indeed, the hybrid is the essence of almost everything that exists. Nothing is pure, either in nature or in society. Since Antiquity, this term has been associated with the ideas of mixing, heterogeneity, mestizaje, monstrosity, etc. One of its genealogic roots is the Latin word *hybrida*, used to categorize the offspring of the cross breeding of a wild boar and a domestic female pig. The term gradually acquired the meaning of mixing two or more things of a different nature, in various areas of practice and in diverse branches of knowledge.

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For example, in biology, in the conception of life itself, a child is seen as a hybrid of two natures, male and female. In society, mediation is a hybrid of two polar entities, be they the individual and society, the human and the machine, or other combinations. Accordingly, mediating theories turn out to be hybrids emerging from various polar theories or even from mediating theories themselves.

We live today in a **hybrid, intercultural society** where different and even opposite concepts of identity merge in novel ways. Already Mikhail Bakhtin (1930, rpt. in English translation 1981) noticed that, in modern cultures, the very emergence of meaning derives, among other conditions, from the hybrid nature of language itself, its *polyglossia*.

This awareness of hybridity calls into question the classical dichotomies that shaped our traditional understanding of cultures. In *Narrative Innovation and Cultural Rewriting in the Cold War Era and After* (2001), Marcel Cornis-Pope applies this idea to the cultural and literary creation of the post-World War Two period, pointing out the extent to which the traditional dualities of race, gender, class, and narratological oppositions such as Realism / Formalism, and imitation / invention, are questioned and transcended by post-war writers attentive to hybrid intercrossings.

Artur Matuck takes a similar position in “Tecnologias digitais e o futuro da escrita” (Digital Technologies and the Future of Writing, 2009), arguing that

“The decodification of this hybrid reality needs an open and enhanced perception that becomes available only through a reformulation of the fundamental structures that inform human beings, culture, history, the planet, identities, scientific creation, and language itself” (p. 293).

In his turn, Peter Anders emphasizes the significance of ‘cybrids’ for contemporary culture, defining them as combinations of physical, symbolic or electronic digital images; or as hybrids between mediated entities and physical ones; or, finally, as mergers between the physical and the electronic (“Towards an Architecture of the Mind,” 2009).

Beyond the blogosphere, a **hybridosphere** exists nowadays, in particular inside cyberspace and in cybertime. This emerging and immersive virtual space consists of sites or blogs with a variegated nature. For example, *Hybrilog*, an experimental blog published since 2006, was built not only from various related media, as a mere hypermedia system, but by using diverse blogs with different natures.

What has resulted is a virtual space *sui generis*, characterized by a hybridization of media and not just by the simple hypermediatic connection among them (see Andrade, *Hybrilog*). More specifically, *Hybrilog* consists of six different types of blog: a classic text blog; a blog including videos, which is named ‘vlog’; a third blog, containing video-poetry, named ‘pvlog’ (from the juxtaposition of ‘p’ for poetry and ‘vi’ for video, followed by the abbreviation ‘log’); another blog containing digital art, called ‘artlog’; a fifth blog where hypermedia works were included, called ‘hyplog’; and finally, a sixth blog displaying games, or ‘gamelog.’

2. Hybridity / Postcolonialism

Hybridity is viewed by several schools of thought and many practitioners of literature to be one of the main weapons against colonialism. This is especially true of **theorists of postcolonialism** such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, sociologists and anthropologists working in Cultural Studies such as Stuart Hall and Néstor García Canclini, and postcolonial writers or representatives of ‘magic realism’ such as Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Milan Kundera.

For instance, Stuart Hall (1996) has attributed a ‘crisis of identity’ (pp. 1-17) to our intercultural world, consisting in a decline of traditional identities and the rise of new forms of identification. In *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (2001), Canclini emphasizes the

fact that hybridization is a passage from multiculturalism to interculturalism, through intersections and transactions among different identities.

From this perspective, **hybrid literacies** are a necessary condition for the deconstruction of colonial discourse and the subsequent reconstruction of postcolonial literacies and literatures. **'Literacy'** can be defined as a set of reading and writing strategies regarding a specific mode of knowledge. In addition to the regimes of reading and writing in a national or 'mother' language, today we are witnessing a proliferation of diverse social literacies inherent to multiple languages operating in our postcolonial contemporaneity. In other words, a national language is only a particular case within the plurality of worldwide languages and voices. We can thus speak of scientific, technological, artistic, etc. literacies. For instance, literary and cultural literacies are ways of reading and writing specific cultural and literary languages. In particular, digital literacy comprises a social hermeneutics (reading) articulated with a social rhetorics (writing) and involving a digital *savoir*.

However, hybrid literacies are not mere additions to other ('simpler') literacies. For example, a **postcolonial literacy** cannot be understood only as the juxtaposition of 'western' and 'eastern literacies', the first one allegedly based on a more rational reading/writing regime than the second one. Rather, hybrid literacies usually operate through complex and multiple kinds of competences and performances, activated by social-cultural agents, involving reading and writing not just within their own cultures, but also and mainly in alien cultures.

Indeed, hybrid literacies often work in order to develop **multivocalities of otherness**. In other words, the understanding of the other is based not just on the process of reading and/or writing about alter-cultures in an abstract way, but also on interpreting the meanings of everyday communication acts in a more concrete way. Public understanding of cultures leads to better public communication between cultures, and the other way around.

3. Social Hybridology

If hybridity is central to Postcolonial Studies for reflecting on our intercultural society, it is also true that this school of thought is hybrid itself since their origins. In fact, in our postcolonial age, literary texts and even scientific writing (historical, sociological, etc.) increasingly display a hybrid nature.

As I have argued more than a decade ago, two major modes of writing are increasingly confronting each other: 'univocal writing and hybrid writing'. Unlike univocal writing, hybrid writing

"demands, openly or not, the impurity, the contact coinciding with the contract, contamination through communication. Indeed, this writing of fusion considers that such processes, ambigenous (i.e., mixed) but also ambiguous underlying hybrid writing, have become nowadays, more and more, the polysemic manner of social relations" (Andrade, 'A unidade e a hibridação das escritas', p. 8).

A practical example of this experimental writing in literature is the *GeoNeoLogical Novel* (2009).

Briefly, literary and scientific writings may metamorphose in the short term into what I call **Social Hybridology**. This new knowledge strategy can be understood not only as (a), a reflection on the hybrid, but also as (b), a hybrid itself. In other words, Social Hybridology is a genre of Hermeneutics using different forms of interpretation (sometimes opposite in nature) and aiming at a deeper understanding of the various literacies in existence today, literacies that are themselves often hybridized.

At the confluence of these incommensurable literacies, Social Hybridology is emerging as a unique way of knowing, reading, and writing in our contemporary postcolonial cultures, especially

within social networks. Social networks do not include only digital social networks, but also, as Georg Simmel has argued, webs of social relations and interpersonal interaction that have occurred in all societies in history. For example, while studying human conflicts, Simmel depicts either, (a) the objective relations (opposition, competition, etc.) among different interests such as those of noblemen and the king in thirteenth century's Europe; or (b) intersubjective relationships among individuals, such as love (p. 24). He also provides a deeper reflection on the form of social webs (p. 125).

Therefore, Social Hybridology is a heuristic term that reflects on hybrid processes, structures, contexts, practices, creatures, and objects that do not just proliferate in our societies, but are fundamental constituent modes of the entire social fabric. It offers both a literacy of the hybrid and a new kind of knowledge of past and present (post)colonial scenes.

4. Common webs of meaning and conflict

But how can Hybridology, through an historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist or a literary critic, detect such hybrid public meanings that lead to a more intense intercultural communication? One of the possible answers is the following hypothesis: *besides the reading and writing of expert knowledges, **common concepts** (a central term in the sociological phenomenology of Alfred Schutz), used by common people from different cultural origins in a daily basis, may be one of the keys for mutual understanding between different cultures nowadays interconnected within our global postcolonial societies.*

In fact, the term 'common' can be considered with both the connotations of 'ordinary' and 'collective'. In other words, maybe common knowledge can work as one of the common grounds for intercommunication among diverse planetary visions. Indeed, common knowledge is often visual, sonore or gestural, attributes that constitute, in some way, universal languages. And, in textual messages, we may search underlying logic languages: sometimes, these logic languages are more similar across different cultures that we may think, even after reading Levi-Strauss; other times, these logics have parts or dimensions that we may use to establish connections between different forms of thought and culture.

Thus, the clash of civilizations (S. Huntington) is often a **conflict of meanings**, like H. Bhabha (1997) puts it, when he talks on a discursive resistance against colonialism, through 'mimicry' and other ideas. Mobilizing hybridity, knowledges 'denied' by colonialist powers return, and may suggest alternative 'rules of recognition' regarding the contemporary post-colonial societies and culture. This contribution can be useful, if we articulate it with a more political posture of resistance, advocated by E. Said (2004) and others, from the other side.

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