

# Introduction

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## Abstract

This brief introduction examines some of the notions which may serve both as *decor* for introducing the articles in the issue and as providing a few problematic spheres of critical dialogue and research regarding Southern African literature and languages.

In the wake of the theoretical and methodological proliferations informed by the introduction of especially psychoanalysis and deconstruction in the arts and humanities during the seventies and eighties, the turn of the nineties immersed scholarship into the renewed challenges of notions of aesthetics, value, power, knowledge, feminism, nation, culture, space, history, labour and racism to name but a few—no hierarchy intended. A common recognition of the uncertainty which prevails in the work of scholars who engage in critical dialogue around these notions is evident in the prominence of the recognition of the complexity and multiplicity related to the critical and analytic engagement of each. This is evident in the study of aesthetics (Eagleton 1990; Regan 1992), new historicism (Veese 1989), feminism (Benhabib & Cornell 1987; Boyce-Davies 1994a & 1994b; Meaney 1993), culture (During 1993; Easthope & McGowan 1992), the nation (Bhabha 1990), racism (Goldberg 1993) and modernity (Baumann 1992; Hall 1992; Waugh 1992) amongst others. The reworking and rethinking of critical discursive practices also accompany this recognition. The way in which scholars engage ideology (Žižek 1994), materialist dialectics (Ollman 1993) and more particularly Marxism (Derrida 1994) as well as linguistics (De Beaugrande 1991) are examples. That the study of these notions and critical practices should follow an interdisciplinary route, unfold through processes of dialogue or (communicative) interaction and that it should ultimately focus on 'the local' seems inevitable. In these moves, a host of new concepts are being coined, defined, contested and abandoned. In this introduction, I raise a few fragmentary thoughts which may serve as *decor* for some of the arguments which are developed in this issue. Notions of *cultural difference*, *hybridity*, *interdisciplinarity*, *the incorporative*, *aesthetics* and *language* are addressed.

The realities of *cultural difference* manifest in the ebb and flow of the formation and dissolution of subcultures, the indigenous or regional culture's continuous adjustments to various forms of modernisation processes and more particularly the traversing of all forms of culture by the reality effects of the heterogenous life-processes of daily life. The appreciation of cultural difference is based on the recognition of cultural temporality and regionality of one's own and other culture(s). Simultaneously, consciousness of cultural temporality and regionality provides the space for the acknowledgment and accepting of the differentiation between the multiplicity of the symbolic representations of social life-forms. Concurring with Bhabha (1990:2), this thought trajectory provides the rudiments for the indefinite inconclusive acceptance of the 'equivocal nature' and the 'ambivalent tension' that narrates the margins and boundaries of the 'society' and the societies of the modern nation. Cultural difference, then, traverses and intervenes in homogenous and harmonious totalisations of Tradition, People, the Reason of State, (High) Culture, The Club, The Guild, General/Universal Knowledge—which aim at the coercive and ultimately the hegemonic homogenization of experience (see Bhabha 1990:3 and 1990:313 on Lefort). The positive value of cultural difference is that it provides the space for a coming to speech of the silenced and suppressed voices of both past and present minority—i.e. qualitatively speaking—discourses. Its operation is that of crossings and multiple intersections. Nevertheless, it is not to be reduced to functionalist readings of culture, neither to nation-

al-popular sentiments, nor to 'the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogenous empty time of the national community' (Bhabha 1990:3,312). As such, cultural difference

marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself.

and

articulates the difference between representations of social life without surmounting the space of incommensurable meanings and judgements that are produced within the process of transcultural negotiation (Bhabha 1990:313,312 - e.a.).

The notion of *hybridity* in cultural difference does not imply a simple adding-up or subtracting of the diverse threads of identity or essences traversing culture. On the contrary,

[H]ybridity is the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life; it is an instance of iteration, in the minority discourse, of the time of the arbitrary sign—the minus in the origin—through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization (Bhabha 1990:314 - e.a.).

And we know that translation continuously comes about in the never-ending 'implication' of the individual forms of identity in other symbolic systems.

*Interdisciplinarity* is the discursive practice which scholars engage in the spaces opened up by cultural difference and the translations required by hybridity. Positively, interdisciplinary study and research works with 'a logic of intervention and interpretation'. It intervenes not in order to cause chaos or to pose empty protests and oppositions. Its most important feature is that it empowers minoritised discourses to come to speech. Individuals are empowered to analyse and engage critical thought and reflection. There is a universe of knowledge available for everyone. Its empowerment effects the continuation of the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge, social and official structures and systems in society on the terms set by and for minorities themselves.

Interdisciplinarity is the acknowledgement of the emergent moment of culture produced in the ambivalent movement between the pedagogical and performative address, so that it is never simply the harmonious addition of contents or contexts that augment the positivity of a pre-given disciplinary or symbolic presence. In the restless drive for cultural translation, hybrid sites of meaning open up a cleavage in the language of culture which suggests that the similitude of the symbol as it plays across cultural sites must not obscure the fact that repetition of the sign is, in each specific social practice, both different and differential. It is in this sense that the enunciation of cultural difference emerges in its proximity; to traduce Foucault, we must not seek it in the 'visibility' of difference for it will elude us in that enigmatic transparency of writing that conceals nothing in its density but is nevertheless not clear (Bhabha 1990:314).

Whereas I borrowed the notions above primarily from Bhabha, the notion of the *incorporative* comes from Goldberg (1993). Since race is one of the most important conceptual inventions by modernity (see Goldberg 1993:3), it provides the test case of how modernity's hegemonic rationality operating through categorial fixings, may be transcended and rendered powerless. The same is true of liberalism's strategies of tolerance manifesting in the bleaching of racial differences through assimilation and integration and strategies of 'improving race relations via intergroup management' (see Goldberg 1993:7,219). Integration—especially in the American experiment—was modelled on the 'common values (which) were to furnish the grounds for cohesion, the conditions of Americanness'. However, the 'central values continued to be defined hegemonically by those who were politically and economically dominant' (see Goldberg 1993:219). In distinction to integration, Goldberg (1990:220) asserts that incorporation moves beyond

the extension of established values and protections over the formerly excluded group, either a liberal bringing into or a Habermasian collectivist extension of the status quo.

On the contrary.

The continual renegotiation of sociocultural space is not fixed in and by a contract, a momentary communicative agreement that reifies relations. The body politic becomes a medium for transformative incorporation, a political arena of contestation, rather than a base from which exclusions can be more or less silently extended, managed, and manipulated.

The incorporative has two pragmatic sides to it. Firstly, it engages 'political projects (which) fashion the general social conditions, ... for delimiting restrictions on human flourishing, for social and individual well-being'. The values underlying these practices would comprise a concerned acceptance of the personhood of another, the participation in mutuality, relation, and reciprocity and even the activity of 'assuming ourselves into the situations of others and beyond Otherness' (see Goldberg 1993:221,218). Fanon's (1993:86) warning is apt when he says that 'it is utopian to try to ascertain in what ways one kind of inhuman behavior differs from another kind of inhuman behavior'. Institutions and instances provide the base for '*commitment*' to the effectivity of incorporative practices. Secondly, quoting Connolly (1991), Goldberg (1993:221) argues that incorporative practices

turn on the practical understanding that social subjects will confront and critically "engage the relational and contingent character of the identities that constitute them". They require that social subjects strive reasonably to represent the values of their self-ascribed identities in vigorous but open contestation and will be prepared to revise their commitments, even deeply held ones, to alter their values, ultimately to transform their identities in relation to their critical pushes and pulls of the incorporative dynamic.

Eagleton (1994:17f) argues that the notion of *aesthetics* has its origin as a discourse of the body. Referring to Baumgarten, the inventor of the concept, it signifies the distinction between the material and immaterial. Aesthetics then, denotes the re-cognition of the material and sensory world. In this move, Eagleton (1994:19-22) traces the development of the aesthetic to its crystallization as the political unconscious, consensual power and the imaginary. In distinction to German rationalism and British empiricism Eagleton proposes that the next stage in the aesthetics discourse must depart from 'the two great aestheticians, Marx and Freud, ...: Marx with the labouring body and Freud with the desiring one'. He believes everything should be thought through again 'in terms of the body' (Eagleton 1994:29).

Concerning the study of Southern African *languages*, their study does not have to be reduced to either the system/competence or the performance fields. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism—which is in effect a philosophy of language (Holquist 1990:41)—is based on the view that 'dialogue means communication between simultaneous differences'. Dialogism treats language as both a cognitive and social practice where simultaneity colours language as a heteroglossic phenomenon. By its dialogic nature and operation, language refracts the monologic impulses in the language of the period or professional, class and generational societies (Clark 1984:8f,13). 'Language', in its broadest sense, is

'at any given moment of its historical existence ... heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages' (Bakhtin 1981:291).

This view of language has points of contact with Foucault's notion of discourse.

Finally, the articles collected in this issue. With a backward glance to four

instances of continental Marxist discourse on aesthetics, Antony Easthope explores the possibilities of the continuation of Marxist aesthetics. Shane Moran uses Derrida's deconstruction of White Mythology to cross Helize van Vuuren's 1994 article on the /Xam. Sikhumbuzo Mngadi engages current discourse in Kwazulu/Natal politics and argues for a movement beyond the restrictions of post-arguments. Arguing for the primacy of a historical turn in the literary to cultural studies move, Jean-Philippe Wade bases his argument on the desirability of cultural transformation. Johan van Wyk traces the aestheticisation of politics in the Afrikaans drama of the thirties and Leon de Kock, with an example from 1885 engages a critique of the critics of 'Post' discourse. Employing a linguistic practice, Hildegard van Zweel provides a sound basis for the discussion of ideology in literacy programmes. Reshma Sookrajh, Michael Samuel and Nithi Muthukrishna provide exploratory arguments and proposals of curriculum development as it impacts on the teaching and learning of literature and language at schools. Two of the most significant threads running through the articles of this issue are the turn away from language and towards life and labour as well as a certain pragmatic/use turn of questioning and argumentation—which might spell the entering of 'the true sublime ... that infinite, inexhaustible heterogeneity of use-value' (see Eagleton 1994:30 on Marx).

I have opened this brief introduction with a wide and even though limited mentioning of some of the international concerns because they are also concerns in our own Southern African situation. In taking on our own realities, engagement with similar concerns in other parts of Africa remain not only desirable but imperative. I would have liked to refer to similar works on our own Southern African literatures and languages and published in Africa. This, however, remains part of what is being done and what is to be done in the paradoxical temporality of our own 'future anterior' (Lyotard's notion as discussed by Beardsworth 1992:54f).

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