

Introduction: Cultural Hybridity in the Americas

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“E Pluribus Unum,” the motto of the U.S.A., has probably never been a reality. The idea that there ever was a homogeneous ‘one’ which emerged from the meeting of different cultural traditions is fictitious. In Latin America, on the other hand, there has traditionally been an acknowledgement of continuing difference, although José Vasconcelos’ idea of a “raza cósmica” may also be said to point toward homogeneity. American realities – North and South – in the twenty-first century, however, suggest that we cannot really speak of an “unum” either for the New World as a whole or for any American nation. “E Pluribus Plures” may be more to the point. As this volume illustrates, the simultaneity of diverse cultural traditions and practices anywhere in the Americas and the constant meeting of different cultures in regional, national, as well as transnational contexts indeed testifies to a mutual exchange, to dynamic interaction and to cultural hybridity.

The concept of (cultural) *hybridity*, which all of the contributions in this collection apply, discuss or modify from a range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives in order to come to terms with the manifold cultural encounters, interferences and exchanges which characterize (not only) the New World, has assumed a central position in the field of literary and cultural studies. The term, which stems from the field of biology where it had usually been employed to denote a crossing of species, has long left behind the negative implications and connotations of inferiority, contamination, miscegenation and perversion, which it had had in nineteenth-century racist scientific discourses; it has become a most useful metaphor for conceptualizing and analyzing cultural contact, transfer and exchange, especially in the field of postcolonial studies (cf. Zapf 303). *Hybridity* has been employed to describe and analyze “diverse linguistic, discursive and cultural intermixtures,” as Harald Zapf points out, cautioning that “*mixture* should not be understood as homogenizing fusion but rather as a connection of different parts” (302).

Hybrid, according to Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius, may be defined as “everything that owes its existence to a mixture of traditions or chains of signification, everything that links different kinds of discourse and technologies, everything that came into being through techniques of *collage*, *sampling*, or *bricolage*” (14, our translation). Consequently, the concept of *hybridity* questions ideas of purity and homogeneity and thus opposes essentialist notions of culture or identity; it is, as Robert

C. Young rightly states, “a key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism” (27).

In his preface to the English translation of Néstor García Canclini’s *Hybrid Cultures*, the late Renato Rosaldo argues along similar lines and points out that “hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two-way borrowings and lending between cultures).” Ultimately, Rosaldo radically concludes that “Instead of hybridity versus purity, this view suggests that it is hybridity all the way down. From this perspective, one must explain how ideological zones of cultural purity, whether of national culture or ethnic resistance, have been constructed” (xv).

Though such attempts at defining *hybridity* in the contexts of (postcolonial) literary and cultural studies do indeed share some common ground and highlight similar aspects, it is also true that “there is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes” (Young 27; cf. Zapf 304). In other words, the concept of *hybridity* itself is a hybrid construct, which is based on a number of – at times highly divergent – theoretical and ideological perspectives and assumptions, and which has been a site for continuous academic and political contestation, making us realize that we are “still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed” (Young 27; cf. Zapf 303-04). In this vein, Zapf underlines the “term’s proneness to being functionalized strategically” (304), when he points out that “Discourses of hybridity must be regarded as rhetorical, political and ideological tools that are power-laden,” and concludes that “Hybridity is most often invoked and praised by migratory or minority intellectuals with multiple identities, by advocates of multiculturalism and tolerance with a trans- or intercultural and interethnic biographical background” (304).

One of the most important theorists who has shaped the concept of *hybridity* and who himself “locates his own history as that of someone from a border position,” (Childs/Williams 73) is Homi K. Bhabha – although, to be sure, his theories have been variously challenged (cf. Childs/Williams 90ff.). His approach sets out to analyze the complex dynamics of the discursive (trans-)formation of cultures and identities within the context of (post)colonialism. Putting particular emphasis on the potential of language as a system of representation, signification and sense-making (cf. Fludernik 12), Bhabha, quoting Said, is convinced that “the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the ‘world’ is divided, administered, plundered” (qtd. in Childs/Williams 73) in order to reconstruct the discursive practices that contribute to establishing power relations.

At this interface between discourse and power, *hybridity* becomes the very moment “in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other” (Young 22). Thus widening the scope from language and discourse to culture and hierarchy, Bhabha applies the term especially to (cultural) identity and argues that *hybridity* is to be understood as “the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination

through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority)” (“Signs” 154).

It is this “active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power,” then, which Bhabha conceptualizes as a ‘hybrid displacing space’ that – resulting from the “interaction between the indigenous and colonial culture” – constitutes the site for potential counter-authority (Young 23). *Hybridity* thus becomes “a ‘third space’ between colonizer and colonized that effects the hybridization of both parties rather than (syncretically?) embracing both in however explosive a mixture” (Fludernik 13). In so doing, this ‘third space’ “enables other positions to emerge [and] displaces the histories that constitute it” (Bhabha, qtd. in Huddart 126).

Against this backdrop, culture has to be understood as a site of competing practices, ideologies, and representations of the world, the subject, history, etc. (cf. Bronfen/Marius 11) in so far as political and collective subjects must not be regarded as given, but as the continually evolving results of discursive practices; their active contestations, responses, and proclamations offer them a chance for self-assertion in relation to discourses or master narratives that may have tended to exclude or marginalize them in the past. Active participation in all kinds of cultural arenas thus opens up what Homi K. Bhabha calls “cultural difference,”¹ which designates the internal difference between the speaking subject and the subject that is spoken about or partially shaped in that act of speaking as well as the difference between Self and Other. Ever since the Civil Rights Movement there has been in the United States, according to Afro-Canadian writer Cecil Foster, “a neo-mythic ‘melting pot’ of differences: of colours, ethnicities, races, nationalities, lineages, diasporas, and cultures. It was a melting pot that could not fully dissolve every difference in a brew of absolutes” (225). In Latin America, the successes of the New Indigenous Left in past decades have also significantly altered national identities and hierarchies – with the revolutionizing changes introduced in Bolivia by President Evo Morales being among the most internationally noticed redefinitions of national identity from a formerly

¹ Bhabha points out that “Cultural difference must not be understood as the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogeneous empty time of the national community. The jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces of national society. ... Cultural difference, as a form of intervention, participates in a logic of supplementary subversion similar to the strategies of minority discourse. The question of cultural difference faces us with a disposition of knowledges or a distribution of practices that exist beside each other, *abseits* designating a form of social contradiction or antagonism that has to be negotiated rather than sublated” (*Location* 162). Cornel West, who further developed Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of cultural difference, speaks of four basic options available to subcultures as strategies of representation: (1) an individual interaction with the mainstream and its legitimation; (2) an arrogant group isolation; (3) a comprehensive rejection of both the mainstream and group isolation; and (4) the option which West favors and which he calls “a cultural politics of difference.” This last strategy neither simply demands inclusion in the mainstream; nor does it simply want to shock the mainstream. It is a practice that invites critical reflection and a reconsideration of concepts like “self” and “other.”

subaltern perspective. Cultural narratives and performances, a variety of which are explored in this collection, significantly contribute to articulating and to negotiating 'cultural difference' both individually and collectively in discourses of hybridity that shape and redefine culture.

Following this notion of *hybridity* and cultural difference, we have moved away from the utopia of a 'cultural diversity' or 'multiculturalism,' in which the Other is an object with a certain essence that can be known or controlled. Rather, the polyphony and simultaneity of cultural practices – no matter whether they contest one another or are joined together into a new cultural discourse, whether they illustrate or constitute contacts, contrasts, or confluences – account for the general departure from essentialist notions of cultural identity. When we speak of 'cultural difference' nowadays, we imply a willingness to accept and further develop what one perceives to be useful in the mainstream, while also fostering critical subcultures and an open ear for alternate voices.

One may acknowledge that, despite all the critical responses that have been pointing at the deficiencies of Bhabha's poststructuralist approach – often concerning the vagueness of his theoretical concepts, at other times relating to his blurring the distinctions between colonizer and colonized (cf. Childs/Williams 90ff.) or his inflated but murky style – Bhabha's views on hybridity have not lost their appeal. They continue to inform postcolonial theory and practice and they are an important background for this collection of essays. On the one hand, Bhabha underlines the very productivity of internal cultural differences being negotiated in an ongoing process of hybridization – a notion which will be of particular significance in our investigation of forms of cultural hybridity in the Americas. On the other, according to Zapf, Bhabha also introduced a concept that "seems to have been designed to be applied to a wider context from the beginning" (306). In other words, the universal applicability of Bhabha's approach, though frequently criticized, turns it into a viable and fruitful concept for other postcolonial scenarios, including, of course, the inter-American context. Zapf even argues that, "in the introduction to his essay collection [*The Location of Culture*], it is Bhabha himself who – by referring to African American artist Renée Green, Toni Morrison, Fanon, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto or the Nuyorican Pepón Osorio – implicitly invites us to put his theory into an American context" (306).²

The cultural artifacts, rituals and performances analyzed in this collection not only express a distinct view of the U.S.A. as less homogeneous than the official story of the Statue of Liberty or of Uncle Sam would have us believe, a view which – after the events of September 11, 2001 – has been reinstalled as a "United We Stand" mindset by a number of intriguingly persuasive master narratives of cultural identity and homogeneity. They also hint at the fact that, beyond the borders of the United

² With regard to the 'universalizing tendency' of Bhabha's concept one must not forget, however, that forms of hybridity are always culturally produced, i.e., shaped by a very specific cultural environment, which needs to be taken into consideration in closer analyses of cultural practices and artifacts (cf. Zapf 307).

States and all other American nations, there exist multiple forms of hybrid spaces that bring forth a polyphonic range of cultural practices still waiting to be explored.³ In Latin America, as Néstor García Canclini reminds us in *Hybrid Cultures*, there is the continuation of residual traditions. But on the other hand there is what he calls “modernity;” throughout the Americas, we find cultural plurality, polyvocality, code-switching, *mestizaje*, and cultural syncretism – especially in the Caribbean.⁴

The turn the academic discipline of American Studies has taken in the last decade toward ‘Transnational American Studies’ is to be applauded in view of the pervasive transnational factors that shape the United States. In this context Inter-American Studies (a.k.a. Hemispheric Studies or New World Studies) emerges as the approach of choice in examining the hemispheric contexts of all American cultures – be they local, regional, national or transnational. Latin American Studies has been at least equally hesitant in opening up the field into Inter-American Studies. This collection also hopes to contribute to establishing more firmly the usefulness of inter-American perspectives within both North American Studies and Latin American Studies. José Martí’s warning that the biggest danger for the Americas is that neighbors there do not know one another still needs to be heard – also in academic disciplines concerned with the New World.⁵

Néstor García Canclini is to be applauded for the inter-American reception that his study, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, has enjoyed. He masterfully examines cultural hybridity in the Latin American context, speaking of a “multitemporal heterogeneity” and of “intercultural hybridization,” which occur because, according to García Canclini, in Latin America traditions continue while modernity has not yet completely arrived (3, 207). He has diagnosed three processes that promote cultural hybridization in Latin America: “(1) the breakup and mixing of the collections that used to organize cultural systems, (2) the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, and (3) the expansion of impure genres” (207). García Canclini proposes a postmodern, relativizing approach to the study of hybrid cultures because

The postmodern contribution is useful for escaping from the impasse insofar as it reveals the constructed and staged character of all tradition, including that of modernity: it refutes the originary quality of traditions and the originality of innovations. At the same time, it offers the opportunity to rethink the modern as a project that is relative, doubtable, not antagonistic to traditions nor destined to overcome them by some unverifiable evolutionary law. It serves, in short, to make us simultaneously take

³ In the U.S.A., of course, we still have English-only movements, we have, for example, Pat Buchanan and others speaking of the representative position of so-called “Euro-Americans,” and we have the so-called Rush Limbaugh Institute for Advanced Conservative Studies spread its version of the American way of life and thought.

⁴ For Mexico City, Ilan Stavans has spoken of a resulting “ethos of ambiguity” (*Borrowed* 12). On *mestizaje* in Mexican American contexts, cf. Raab, “Chicanos and Anglos.”

⁵ On José Martí’s perception of the U.S.A., cf. Raab, “Pan-amerikanisches Ideal und US-amerikanische Vormacht: José Martí’s Sicht des ‘vecino formidable’.”

charge of the impure itinerary of traditions and of the disjointed, heterodox achievement of modernity. (143-44)

In this spirit the contributions gathered in this collection examine specific instances of cultural practices in the Americas – historically as well as at the present time – that may be identified as sites used by individuals or communities to articulate their often marginalized position and to challenge well-established hegemonic discourses and hierarchies; the essays in this volume are concerned with phenomena of interrelated cultural practices and positionings, with the relation of those performances to ideologies and hierarchies, and their competition in defining the Americas.⁶ Interestingly enough, what they all hint at is that, in this process of countless interrelations, contestations, contacts, contrasts, and confluences, the ground is slippery; the structures, the languages, and the dividing lines are constantly changing and require our attention. Roland Hagenbüchle and Josef Raab’s designation of the United States as “from the start ... a borderland and a country of ‘grenzgangers’” also holds true for other American nations (xiv). Hybridity, a processual quality, and a resistance to (one-sided) definitions characterize not only national, cultural or ethnic group identities but also the identity of individuals. Literary scholar and cultural critic Ilan Stavans – who grew up as a member of the Jewish diaspora in Mexico City and who has meanwhile become a U.S. citizen and moved to New England – asks, for example:

What makes me Mexican? White-skinned, blond, brown-eyed, with a name like Ilan, which in Hebrew means “palm tree,” and a surname like Stavans. What makes me a Mexican? And what, after all these years, attaches me to the land where I was born and raised? I have no easy answers, of course. Ours is an age of miscegenation and dislocation. To be born and raised in the same place is no longer the norm. (*Borrowed* 22-23)

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ‘miscegenation’ of which Stavans speaks is increasingly not only a biological one but a cultural phenomenon. Taco Bell, El Vez, and Univisión in the United States are cultural hybrids just like McDonald’s, Molotov, and CNN in Latin America. Examples abound. Consider, for example, the Jewish-Chinese bakery, deli, and café “Nussbaum & Wu” on Manhattan’s Upper West Side: staffed primarily by Colombians, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, it serves bagels with everything from lox to egg salad, Asian pastries, ‘American’ carrot cake and muffins, (so-called) French and Italian breads and coffees.

⁶ In many ways this collection can therefore be seen as an expansion of a work like *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, edited by Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal. The editors of that collection stated as their goal that they wanted to “make visible the intricate processes of cultural and racial interaction in racial consciousness and identity in the Americas, which have been obscured by the dominant oppositional thinking that undergirds both ethnic studies and the nationalist frameworks of American and Latin American Studies” (1). While Kaup and Rosenthal concentrate on literary negotiations of American ethnic identities, however, our collection takes a broader, cultural studies-oriented approach.



Illustration 1: New York City Deli at Broadway and 113th Street
© Josef Raab

On one side of the counter, the main language is Spanish; on the other side it is English; but on both sides other languages are also heard, along with Spanglish and code-switching.

Héctor Tobar, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Buenos Aires bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, reports that he has found “a new American identity” in unexpected places. This new identity is marked foremost by the effects of inter-American migration and the resulting plurality of allegiances:

The *paisanos* of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, California, Texas, and other places where Spanish is spoken freely have pushed so far into the interior of North America that you could say a new Latin Republic of the United States is being born. About halfway into the United States, in places like Clay County, Alabama, the eastward push of the modern-day *paisano* pioneers meets the westward push of the Cubans and the Puerto Ricans, that other big, Caribbean strain of Latinness spreading across the country. In this new, Latin country, you can run a newspaper or run for office in Spanish, and save to send your children to Berkeley or Harvard while planning your retirement in a Salvadoran or Puerto Rican *pueblo*. ... All across this new country, people without a radical thought in their bodies are beginning to embrace, either consciously or subconsciously, that idea Che Guevara staked his life on in the last century: they believe they have a transnational identity, that their bodies and souls can live between two countries, that the physical border need not exist in the mind. (33)

International borders remain in the Americas, and the stakes for crossing them physically have become higher for many in past decades. Nonetheless, the inter-American communities that have sprung up, for example, near the Alabama chicken plant that Tobar describes in one chapter or around the countless maquiladoras in Northern Mexico (an effect of the 1992 North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]), testify to the continuing and intensifying interconnectedness of the Americas – due in large part to inter-American migration. Transnational media, revolutions in media technology (e.g. desktop film editing), and growing access to electronic media have

also contributed to increasing the simultaneity of different cultures in the same place or individual life.

It is the kind of cultural contact and mixing that “Nussbaum & Wu” constitutes and that Héctor Tobar describes, along with literary, linguistic, and historical encounters between and within North and South America that this volume explores from the vantage point of diverse academic disciplines. Moreover, it aims at reconsidering the validity of concepts such as “nation” and “border” and it examines how discourses of various kinds function to construct and constitute hybrid cultures.⁷ In the context of inter-American relations, it deals with the heterogeneous processes of perceiving and (stereo-)typing the American Other, of negotiating and refashioning the Self, and of translating or transferring cultural phenomena. Its focus is on the U.S.A., on U.S. Latinos, and on interrelations between the U.S.A., Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The contributions consider assertions of cultural hegemony and contestations of such ideologically motivated constructions. But they also take into account instances of local identity formations, unease with borderlines, celebrations of fluidity, and many contact zones (cf. Pratt) between and within the Americas.

Moreover, this collection examines the theoretical notion of *cultural hybridity* itself, which, as hinted at above, has been controversially discussed and instrumentalized for a range of ideological ends. As a “strategic rhetoric [that] frames hybridity as natural, commonplace, and desirable in intercultural relations, and therefore [as] noncontentious,” the concept has an immense persuasive potential, which has been exploited both in theoretical discussions and political debates (Kraidy viii).⁸ Against this backdrop, some of the contributions in this volume ask whether *hybridity* is actually a useful term when talking about New World cultures and literatures, or whether it has to be modified (both in theory and by application) in order aptly to describe and explain those cultural phenomena that are commonly referred to as being of a ‘hybrid’ nature.

The contributions in the first part of the collection, “Formations: Cultural Encounters and Hybrid Identities,” focus on the intricate processes of creating moments, or phenomena, of hybridity in and by cultural encounter. All the articles in this section are, in one way or another, concerned with various forms of cultural contact, con-

⁷ Taking her cue from Native American mythology (rather than from José Martí or Waldo Frank), Leslie Marmon Silko opens her massive novel *Almanac of the Dead*, in which borders of space and time are continually crossed, with a “Five Hundred Year Map” that shows Tucson, AZ as the center from which movements and arrows go in all directions – unhampered by what is now the international border between the U.S.A. and Mexico. The introduction to this map reads: “Through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americas the Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives. ... Native Americans acknowledge no borders” (14-15).

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the ways in which *hybridity* is used in public discourse, cf. Kraidy, especially ch. 4.

trast and confluence and, through a wide range of analyses, contribute to developing an idea of the manifold forces at work in the formation of hybrid identities.

In his account of “Living on the River,” the novelist Rolando Hinojosa-Smith shares his personal experience of being raised as a Texas Mexican in Mercedes, a border town in the Río Grande Valley. Articulating his view on issues of racial discrimination of Texas Mexicans by Texas Anglos, but also among Texas Mexicans themselves, Hinojosa-Smith elaborates on politics in Texas, separation in schools, interracial dating, and the former non-representation of Texas Mexicans in mainstream newspapers in order to describe both the current situation and the changes that have taken place up to the present day. In so doing, he provides illuminating insights into both the changing face of the town and the formation of his individual view of life during his time in the valley.

Barbara Buchenau’s essay on “Alternate Identities and Creolities in Canadian Literary Discourse” is concerned with Canada’s national self-fashioning. Using H.D. Thoreau’s model of identity as a theoretical starting point, she takes a closer look at the United States’ impact on the constitution of a Canadian self and examines the ways in which Canada has constantly been trying to distinguish itself from the U.S.-American Other. In her analysis of the life and works of two Canadian authors who wrote during the 19th and at the turn of the 20th century – Sara Jeanette Duncan and Emily Pauline Johnson – Buchenau then shows that, even though these authors did not share the same view on indigenous people and had a number of different ideas and values, they both stressed North American differences as a structure, or method, of defining and establishing a national identity. Buchenau demonstrates the intricate interrelations of Native American, Canadian, white, and other markers and the resulting hybridity.

Wilfried Raussert’s contribution juxtaposes Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavo Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1794) and James Balwin’s “Stranger in the Village” (1947). Focusing on the strategies of constructing hybrid identities in these works, Raussert illustrates that each of the autobiographical texts is deeply embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts and thus outlines a different concept of *hybridity*: whereas Baldwin’s text promotes an understanding of *hybridity* as emerging from black and white interaction within a North American history of centuries of black oppression, Equiano’s less skeptical concept of *hybridity* is derived from a series of migratory experiences in which several cultures and nationalities function as available points of orientation.

Christian Berkemeier’s “‘Frenchising’ The South: Anne Rice’s Gothic New Orleans” explores Anne Rice’s neo-gothic fiction, particularly focusing on her novel *Interview with the Vampire*. In his investigation, Berkemeier shows that Rice attempts to combine American horror novels and films of the 1980s and 1990s with the British Gothic tradition, resorting both to a number of stereotypical images of the American South and – as Rice’s novel is set in the times of the French Revolution – to a variety of clichés of decadence and deviance usually associated with France. By thus incorporating different literary and cinematic traditions, Rice, as Berkemeier argues, succeeds in southernizing or ‘Frenchising’ her narratives.

Michael Porsche's contribution also has a strong regional focus; it analyzes the treatment of the U.S. Southwest in the writings of Charles Bowden, which are shown to articulate the necessity of a new ecological consciousness. Bowden, as Porsche illustrates, propagates the idea of a teleological, enlightened anthropocentrism that serves as a basis for a new relationship between man and environment in a future U.S. Southwest. Emphasizing Bowden's growing concern and ultimate conviction that violent changes in the history of American civilization will emanate from regions such as Arizona and Chihuahua, Porsche outlines the author's rather ambivalent attitude toward western civilization, which is characterized by Bowden's belief in ultimate decline and, at the same time, by his hope that there is still a possibility of transcendence/redemption.

Silke Hensel's essay, "The Construction of Race in 20th-Century U.S.-Latino History," is concerned with the establishment and the development of both Mexican American and Puerto Rican ethnic identities in the United States. Critically pondering on the varying concepts of "race" the different ethnic communities resorted to, and reflecting on the political and ideological implications of such widely used denominators as "Hispanics" and "Mexican" – used in official publications for all Spanish-speaking groups in the U.S. –, Hensel reconstructs the ethnically specific experiences of integration in the U.S. and analyzes the respective strategies of both ethnic communities to develop and maintain an ethnic identity of their own.

Johanne Mayr's "Mirror writing" is likewise concerned with expressions of ethnic identities. Mayr juxtaposes the first novellas by Mexican American Demetria Martinez and Turkish German Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Both books were published under the same title of *Mother Tongues*. Proposing that both writings show symmetrical themes and reciprocal images, Mayr's comparative investigation serves to illustrate that cultural themes and conflicts are not necessarily characteristic of one particular ethnic group, but can well be of a universal, or 'transglobal,' nature. Without dismissing the fact that each of the texts is, of course, deeply embedded in a specific political and cultural environment, she thus promotes the idea of a 'trans-ethnic interchangeability.'

In Tomás Christ's contribution the focus remains on ethnicity but the medium he discusses is music. Christ discusses a variety of subversive strategies employed in contemporary Latino underground music, concentrating on two Latino bands from the 1990s, Brujería from the Los Angeles area and Stoic Frame from Albuquerque. Through a thick description of the bands' images, the ideological attitudes expressed in their music, their ways of self-fashioning, as well as their fusion of particular musical styles and conventions, Christ shows that the bands use an array of hybridized elements and patterns in order to articulate a non-conformist attitude and to undermine social, cultural and generic restrictions and conventions.

The essay by Native American novelist and cultural critic Gerald Vizenor, finally, revolves around the question of Native American Indian sovereignty and pursues the argument that the long history of the systematic exclusion of Native American Indians continues today in the shape of federal reservations and the administration of services by government agencies. Analyzing the example of casinos on their territory, he convincingly demonstrates that Native American Indians have become but a

'brand culture' on the American continent and have turned from a hybrid presence to the mere objects of hegemonic political power. Moreover, by reconstructing the long-winding debates on the remains of the so-called Kennewick Man, a nine thousand year-old skeleton discovered in Kennewick, Washington in 1996, Vizenor illustrates how these power relations are constantly (re)negotiated in what he labels a 'truth game' between Native American Indians and scientists or other authorities.

The contributions of the second part, "Perceptions: Images, Stereotypes, and Representations," look at ways in which the different parts of the Americas have been perceived, or have been represented, from the 'outside.' By thus addressing the manifold strategies both of self-fashioning and of representing the Other, this section not only emphasizes the potential of different media to shape, create and perpetuate images of individuals or collectives but also sheds light on the socio-political and economic functions these images fulfill in specific cultural contexts.

In his essay, "Imagining the Yankee: Stereotypes, Representations, and Realities in Chile," the historian Stefan Rinke elaborates on Chilean evaluations, representations and perceptions of the United States during the first third of the 20th century. Relying on a wide variety of sources, including press commentaries, cartoons and advertisements, he reconstructs the historical foundations of a number of images of the U.S. which still seem to be prevalent in the Chilean cultural memory. In so doing, Rinke convincingly illustrates that these images correspond to a range of heterogeneous Chilean interests and discusses the political and cultural functions of these images as instruments of sense-making and self-conceptualization.

The anthropologist Ricardo Pérez Montfort is also concerned with the construction of identities and with cultural typology, as he investigates into the forces at work in the creation of national stereotypes in Latin America. Focusing on the images of the Peruvian "creole," the Venezuelan "llanero," the Argentinian "gaucho," and the Mexican "charro," he demonstrates that such stereotypes are the result of complex discursive processes, which evolved during the period between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and which were shaped by various (groups of) people and institutions, including literary writers, producers of mass media, politicians, government and tourism agencies, teachers, and, above all, representatives of folkloric studies.

Shifting the focus to the U.S.A.'s interest in Latin America, Ricardo D. Salvatore's essay, "Libraries and the Legibility of Hispanic America: Early Latin American Collections in the United States," examines the reasons for the extensive accumulation of *Latinoamericana* in U.S. libraries in the period from 1890 to 1940. It argues that the establishment of an impressive range of large-scale special collections was due to a U.S. American 'quest for knowledge' at the time, which, in turn, was closely related to neo-imperialist ambitions of the United States in South America. By thus reconstructing the political and economic motivation behind these transformations that took place in research universities and libraries, Salvatore sheds light on the interface between knowledge and economic power and unmasks the U.S. American ways of establishing an *informal empire* in the Southern part of the American continent.

Views of Latin America in the United States are also at the basis of Helmbrecht Breinig's contribution, which takes a close look at the interface between discourses

of ethnicity and discourses of gender in the construction, or perception, of Latin America in U.S. literature. He introduces the theoretical concept of *transdifference* which, in contrast to *hybridity*, is not a concept of mediation, synthesis or the overcoming of differences, but presupposes difference as a given state that will not vanish. In his exemplary analysis of U.S. American (and British) narrative texts, Breinig illustrates the ways in which traditional notions of the male and female gender and their manifold implications respectively are often employed in the discursive construction of the ethnic Other. He convincingly shows that the interaction of the two discourses of identity and alterity may inform these texts in a complexity-generating fashion, which, in turn, contributes to their potential to subvert conventional notions of binarism and fundamental opposition.

Turning to a different medium, Clara E. Rodríguez provides an overview of the representation of Latino characters on U.S. television. Starting from an analysis of an impressive range of census data, which serves to illustrate the demographic turn of the United States towards a multiethnic country, Rodríguez examines whether the ‘browning’ of the United States has impacted the mass medium of television. She argues that, though there have been some new initiatives to strengthen the Latino presence on TV, old patterns of underrepresentation and negative stereotyping are perpetuated and create images of Latino (and other ethnic) characters which do not at all correspond to the ‘census realities’ of the United States in the early 21st century.

The medium of film is discussed by Markus Heide, who explores the potential of hybridity and intercultural exchange as representational practices in Chicano movies. Conceiving of film as an important agent in the construction of ethnic identities, he argues that Chicano film, as a form of cultural expression originating between the U.S. and Mexico, incorporates a variety of linguistic, visual, and metaphorical elements and patterns from both cultures, thus turning intercultural exchange into an aesthetic means to negotiate hybridity. Taking into consideration a wide range of examples, Heide outlines various ways of employing hybridity both as a topic and a cinematic practice in Chicano film and describes the strategies these films have developed to criticize racist and discriminatory representations of Mexican Americans in Hollywood cinema.

Moving away from Latino ethnicity, the essay by Victoria Sullivan deals with the ways in which Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction of the 1980s represents East-Indian immigrant women. As Sullivan argues, is it especially during that decade that Mukherjee’s writings reveal her changing assessment of the immigrant from a victimized expatriate to an active ‘participant in the process of self-transformation.’ Thus, focusing on five recurring motifs characteristic of the border-crossings of Mukherjee’s female protagonists, Sullivan illustrates in how far the immigrant women portrayed by Mukherjee have turned away from their traditional background and become ‘postcolonial hybrids.’

The essays in the last part of the volume, “Transgressions: Cultural Hybridity and Beyond,” take a more theoretical approach and critically discuss the viability and applicability of the concept *hybridity*, while, at the same time, moving beyond that concept and/or suggesting and developing alternatives. In so doing, the contributions in this section take up and elaborate on a wide range of issues that have

already been touched upon in the first and second part of the collection, but also introduce new ideas that might contribute to the theoretical conceptualization of cultural encounters.

Marietta Messmer's contribution investigates the potential of literary historiography in the process of shaping an 'American' cultural identity. After reconstructing the changing conceptualizations and implications of the notion of "America(n)" in twentieth-century histories of North American literature, Messmer explores the construction and representation of inter-American cultural hybridity and border crossings in two major literary histories of the United States – the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* and the *Cambridge History of American Literature* – as well as in (U.S.) histories of Latin American Literature. Finally, she discusses the transformative impetus of Chicano/a literature and culture within American Studies and argues that a concentration on postborder discourses and *mestizaje* identities could serve as a basis for the emergence of a transnational and intercultural literary historiography which acknowledges the New World's ethnic and lingual diversity.

Ruth Y. Hsu discusses both the concept of *hybridity* in the context of Asian American literary and cultural studies as well as some of the main theoretical concerns Asian Americanists are currently engaging with. Starting from the observation that, in the U.S., the majority of these scholars are still marginalized despite census realities (which she painstakingly documents in an extensive appendix), she makes a number of suggestions – both on an intellectual and ideological level – of how to improve that situation. After assessing a number of theoretical concepts developed in various fields of literary and cultural studies which might help to conceptualize *hybridity* from an Asian Americanist's perspective, Hsu, in the second part of her contribution, exemplifies her theoretical considerations and illustrates the hybrid character of Asian American forms of cultural expression through a close analysis of Russell Leong's story "Phoenix Eyes" as well as Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and *Circle K Cycles*.

Stephan Gramley explores the question of hybridity by looking at whether hybrid cultures can be grasped in terms of language contact phenomena (or other cultural contact phenomena such as those in the area of religion). Starting from the observation that the metaphor of *hybridity* in the area of language may suggest pure sources and degenerate offspring, Gramley puts both the myth of the purity of the (progenitor) languages as well as the myth of the inferiority of bastard offspring languages to the test. By analyzing cases of hybrid languages (pidgins and creoles), language leveling (koinés), linguistic borrowing, and language shift (including language loss and language death), he also pursues the question whether any of these forms of hybridity in language contact can also be found in phenomena of cultural contact (e.g. religion).

Inter-American contact is further explored by Heiner Bus. His analysis of exemplary texts by Chicano, Caribbean, Mexican, and British writers aims at developing the basis – or the framework – for the establishment of a concept of inter-American cultural identity. Starting with an overview of earlier 'drafts' of a transnational American identity outlined in the 19th and 20th centuries, his discussion then revolves around the viability of the 'Ariel-Caliban dichotomy' in the conceptualization of a 'hemi-

spheric identity.’ Bus convincingly illustrates that this dichotomy cannot grasp the complex and dynamic interplay of cultures and thus needs to be replaced by notions of ‘in-between,’ ‘co-existence’ and ‘interaction.’

Thomas Delaney’s remarks on “The U.S.A. in the Age of Globalization,” which are informed by his experience as a cultural attaché in the U.S. embassy in Germany, are concerned with the role, or the position, of the United States in a globalized world. He observes a mutual political, economic and cultural exchange between the United States and other parts of the world and argues that, through this exchange, the U.S. has become a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country which provides individuals and groups from different social and cultural backgrounds with the opportunity to unfold their identities. These developments, as Delaney argues, require a U.S. foreign policy that is aware of the cultural hybridity of the Americas and is willing to enter a dialogue rather than to withdraw into isolation.

Delaney’s position on the need for mutual recognition is further underlined by the late Roland Hagenbüchle, who explores the theoretical implications, the applicability and the ethic value of the concept of *hybridity*. He points out that, though it seems to work well as an analytical tool both in academic as well as in everyday life contexts, its crucial drawback is the lack of a distinct critical perspective. Stating that *hybridity* as a theoretical concept tends to disregard and thus to eliminate cultural differences, Hagenbüchle puts emphasis on the significance of the notion of *difference* as a critical concept and argues in favor of Helmbrecht Breinig’s concept of *transdifference*, which might well work as a more viable alternative to *hybridity*, as it includes an ethical dimension from the outset. Through his scrutinizing assessment of the ethical and ideological implications of the terminology and the concepts we employ in our analyses, Hagenbüchle thus reminds us of the necessity of a continuous and – what is more important – critical evaluation of our own scholarly practices.

Cultural phenomena of the kind that are studied in this volume are related to global, inter-American, national, and local developments and need to be examined in these contexts, as José Limón has recently argued.⁹ The discipline of American Studies has been slow, however, to acknowledge or explore the *inter-American* component of its subject matters, which relativizes and complicates the age-old U.S.A./Europe dichotomy of American Studies. Old habits die hard.

Another old habit is that of conceiving of American cultures as constituted by (one) center and margin, by (one) mainstream and minority/minorities. In this respect, Cecil Foster has diagnosed a certain ‘twoness’ for Canada: he speaks of “the image of a country being pulled in two irreconcilable directions: one still tied to a legacy that privileges somatic, cultural, and status Whiteness; the other of a country struggling to live up to the promise of freedom and the acceptance of somatic Blacks” (235).

⁹ Limón calls the “globalization of American literary studies ... a welcome turn,” but he cautions that the “local context” must not get lost when the ‘global’ becomes the primary frame of reference. He therefore proposes “the practice of critical regionalism” as an approach that is mindful of both global and regional contexts.

Versions of this competition between a (former) center and increasingly forceful, vociferous, and publically acknowledged margins can be found throughout the Americas. The idea that autonomous cultures are an illusion and that purists à la Samuel Huntington are fighting a losing battle is growing.¹⁰ As Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba have pointed out:

With human mobility, migration, or diaspora, either from rural to urban areas, from small cities to large metropolises, or from the Third World to the First, the concept of culture as an internally coherent autonomous universe can no longer be sustained. It is, then, important to rethink our habitat (home, city, country, world) not as a static place with peoples who enjoy fixed identities, but rather as dynamic territories and peoples with multiple identities. (4-5).¹¹

In their traditional uses, concepts like “U.S.A.,” “North America,” and “Latin America” imply a false sense of homogeneity and of clearly demarkated territory.¹² But as Guillermo Gómez-Peña reminds us,

Binary models of understanding the world are no longer functional: us/them, right/wrong, progressive/reactionary, global/local, Third World/First World, alternative/mainstream, center/periphery, etc., are constantly shifting terms in an ever-fluctuating cultural and political landscape. ... This binary morality is completely out of touch with the times and excludes the possibility of building a more complex and holistic sense of community. ... Such monolithic definitions of community overlook the obvious facts that nowadays, we all are members of multiple communities, at different times and for different reasons. (276-77)

Ilan Stavans has similarly characterized Latinos in the United States as “living on the hyphen” and as inhabiting “a universe of cultural contradictions and fragmentary realities” (*Hispanic* 9). In his view, U.S. Hispanics are “a sum of multiracial, multi-cultural backgrounds” (228). The classic characterization of cultural hybridity and

¹⁰ Huntington pleads for “Americans of all races and ethnicities ... to attempt to reinvigorate their core culture. This would mean a recommitment to America as a deeply religious and primarily Christian country, encompassing several religious minorities, adhering to Anglo-Protestant values, speaking English, maintaining its European cultural heritage, and committed to the principles of the Creed” (20). The Euro-American “core culture” that Huntington is trying to salvage is, however, itself a *hybrid* construct. But rather than acknowledging this core hybridity of U.S. culture Huntington establishes cultural hierarchies – with an imaginary Euro-American cultural leadership.

¹¹ The cultural production that has emerged from inter-American migration has been studied most thoroughly for the border region between the United States and Mexico. Attempting to remedy the lack of sufficient scholarly attention devoted to the intercultural, hybrid U.S.-Mexican borderlands, David R. Maciel and María Herrera-Sobek have collected in *Culture Across Borders: Mexican Immigration & Popular Culture* a fine interdisciplinary array of work in this area.

¹² The same holds true, for example, for the age-old dichotomy of ‘civilization’ and ‘wilderness’ in North America (cf. Turner).

plural identities comes from Gloria Anzaldúa, who reminds us of the centrality of gender and gendered identity in any discussion of *mestizaje*:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (80-81)¹³

Since cultural hybridity is a given (and a very desirable one at that!), isolationism – be it in politics, national identity, cultural practices, or academic disciplines – does not fit the realities of the twenty-first century.¹⁴ This does not mean that we advocate a cross-cultural blend that just makes everything bland; differences remain. But the omnipresent processes of cultural exchange in the New World as a whole, in individual American nations, as well as in communities of all sizes and definitions (whether regional or transnational) cannot be overlooked; they account for hybrid, interrelated, American cultures, which this volume explores. Individual, group, and national identities become slippery. As Manuel Castells has argued, nation-states and their corresponding (fictions of) ‘cultural identity’ are increasingly being replaced by community-based (multiple and shifting) identities. His prime example is the effect that the Zapatista Movement has had on identities and allegiances in Chiapas. This destabilization of former ‘master narratives’ of national identity is accelerated by the Internet and by the global media, as Castells convincingly demonstrates.

Thus, we end up with complex and constantly changing interfaces of center and margin as well as with competing narratives and representations of “America” and “the Americas.” What is needed, therefore, is an openness for challenges to national and cultural identities, a willingness to live with and respect difference and to acknowledge the pervasive interconnections and hybridities that have long characterized

¹³ Anzaldúa's prophetic stance bears a certain resemblance to Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself” and his self-characterization as “I am multitude.” However, Anzaldúa replaces Whitman's nationalist and ethnocentric position with a trans-national, trans-ethnic, and trans-gendered one – in short, with a hybrid model of identity.

¹⁴ We are well aware of the dangers of (U.S.) cultural imperialism that have been pointed out by Ariel Dorfman and many others. However, as Ilan Stavans has remarked, trans-national cultural transfers are inevitable: “I came of age in Mexico, in the 1970s, surrounded by fast food, American TV sitcoms, cartoons, and Muzak. ‘Is there a true national art?’ asked the intellectuals, distressed by the prevailing ‘colonial’ mentality. The United States is nothing but artificial, they claimed, looking instead to Mexico's rich past. Why, then, I might have retorted, does the country need so much trash to survive? Why is *Star Wars* so popular?” (*Latino USA* ix-x).

American cultures (and that go far beyond Bhabha's "interstices"). In his plea for "a differential double perspective," Roland Hagenbüchle – echoing Cornel West's argument for a "cultural politics of difference" – states in the concluding essay of this collection:

In assuming a differential double perspective (call it "ethics of imagination") we are enabled to create a self-transcendent value horizon, certainly not in Gadamer's sense of a "fusion of horizons," but in terms of a heightened awareness of the differences that separate us from others yet (as we ought to remember) also link us to others through what often are invisible ties of connection which tend to form "contrapuntal ensembles" (Said), inviting us to interact, contest, and negotiate. In this way, we not only come to gain a perspectival basis for criticizing other cultures, we also lay ourselves open to the Other's critical gaze. Most importantly, we must summon the courage to turn our eyes critically on ourselves and our own cultural tradition. (388)

Exploring mutual gazes, separations, and linkages, this volume highlights inter-American relations (i.e. the "contacts"); it contributes to an awareness of the differences that separate American cultures from one another (i.e. the "contrasts"); and it examines the factors that link American cultures to each other (i.e. the "confluences"). Cultural hybridity is by no means a recent phenomenon in the Americas. And it is here to stay.

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