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Philosophy Social Criticism 2008; 34; 587

DOI: 10.1177/0191453708090330

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Simone Drichel

The time of hybridity

Abstract Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity is one of postcolonialism's most keenly debated – and most widely misunderstood – concepts. My article provides some elucidation in the increasingly reductive debates over hybridity in postcolonial studies, suggesting that what is commonly overlooked in these debates is hybridity's complex relationship to temporality. I suggest that this relationship is not given the credit it deserves often enough, resulting in skewed discussions of hybridity as simply (and mistakenly) another form of syncretism. In focusing on the 'time of hybridity' in the context of a bicultural politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, I draw renewed attention to hybridity's investment in temporality as that which both enables a postcolonial politics and shifts these politics into the realm of (Levinasian) ethics, creating an as yet largely unexplored phenomenon which Leela Gandhi has referred to, in a fortuitous phrase, as an 'ethics of hybridity'.

Key words biculturalism · ethics · hybridity · Maori · politics · postcolonial · temporality

I

'Post-*this*, post-*that*, but why never post-*the other*?' Homi Bhabha ponders in his introduction to the 1997 *Front Lines/Border Posts* special issue of *Critical Inquiry* (1997: 433). His question is particularly pertinent in the context of colonial and postcolonial studies, where, as Derek Attridge reminds us, '*the other* tends to stand for the colonized culture or people as viewed by the dominant power' (1999: 23). Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 (at least), it has been a well-established fact in the field that 'the other', as constructed by the colonial gaze, circulates in colonial discourse through the easily recognizable currency of stereotypes. The ongoing fascination – some might prefer to call it an obsession – with otherness in postcolonial studies is clearly ambivalent, then, to say the least. In continuing to foreground

PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL CRITICISM • vol 34 no 6 • pp. 587–615

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and David Rasmussen

www.sagepublications.com DOI: 10.1177/0191453708090330

PSC

otherness, Nandana Dutta observes, postcolonialism remains invested in, and therefore potentially is complicit with, colonialism's founding violations:

Postcolonial theory has regularly critiqued colonialist constructions of otherness, but, because so much of its articulation is in the mode of revenge historiography, the uncovering of the 'other' as constructed/violated by colonialism has been its busiest area of operation. The 'other' as an object of study for colonialism has merely been transformed into the 'other as constructed by colonialism' as an object of study for postcolonialism. (2004: 432)

Through its reluctance to move *post* the other, it appears, postcolonialism risks the credibility of its own critical project, its very unwillingness to break with past concerns throwing its own *postness* into question. All the more surprising, then, one should think, that postcolonial critics – Bhabha himself most notably among them – have not launched that 'post-*the other*' rallying call that Bhabha misses in the current symphony of 'posts'. It seems that postcolonialism is informed by contradictory impulses: it needs both to move 'post-*the other*' to be properly *post*-colonial and yet at the same time to maintain the other as its foundational or, perhaps more appropriately, undeconstructable concern.

This gives rise to a range of questions, for if an investment in otherness – if now with a critical distance – remains a hallmark of contemporary postcolonial debates, then we need to ask: What is it about 'the other' that prevents us from going *post* it? What makes 'the other' so valuable a concept that to risk postcolonialism's own *postness* for it is justified? Further, are there ways of minimizing this risk? If colonialism's way of dealing with cultural otherness was to contain it within the boundaries of preconceived stereotypes, what strategies can *post*-colonialism offer for dealing with an otherness it is so loath to relinquish? How can postcolonialism continue to embrace 'the other' without simultaneously recycling stereotypes?

These questions guide my discussion in this article. I contend that if the stereotype is 'an arrested, fixated form of representation', as Bhabha suggests (1994: 75), then for the other *not* to reappear as a stereotype in postcolonial debates, different forms of representation need to be assumed. In other words, to be able to remain a focus in postcolonial debates without once again becoming reduced to a stereotype, 'the other' needs to appear as a *partial* assumption of a stereotype: both be and not be the stereotype. How is this possible? For Bhabha, the possibility of a partial assumption of a stereotype arises from the 'third space' he calls hybridity. In other words, hybridity is of singular importance in postcolonial studies because it is what allows postcolonial critics to maintain a focus on 'the other' without its becoming weighed down by

the historical baggage of that concept. And yet, as my discussion below indicates, hybridity itself seems to create more problems than it solves. Does this mean that one of postcolonialism's most keenly debated – and most widely misunderstood – concepts has had its time? That in heading this article 'The time of hybridity' I am effectively memorializing a concept 'whose time would belong to the past', as Jacques Derrida puts it in an analogous context (1983: 34)?

On the contrary. Rather than declaring the concept *passé*, my article aims to bring it centre-stage once more and provide some elucidation in the increasingly reductive debates over hybridity in postcolonial studies. I would like to suggest that what is commonly overlooked in these debates – which tend to circle around the benefits (or otherwise) of hybridity – is the concept's internal logic. What is implicit in Bhabha's description of the stereotype as 'an *arrested, fixated* form of representation' is that stereotypes result from a-temporality. Only a non-exposure to time – as that which brings about change – can produce a representation that is 'arrested' and 'fixated'. Consequently, if hybridity is a *partial* assumption of a stereotype, then this partiality must, in most fundamental ways, lie in hybridity's complex relationship to temporality. I suggest that this relationship is not given the credit it deserves often enough, resulting in skewed discussions of hybridity as simply (and mistakenly) another form of syncretism. It is my intention, in focusing on the time of hybridity, to draw renewed attention to hybridity's investment in temporality as that which prevents the fixture of stereotypical representation. I want to suggest that it is only because of this ability to prevent fixture that 'the other' can be a *postcolonial* focus. In other words, we do not need to move 'post-*the other*' only because this other – as hybrid other – stands in relation to temporality.

I want to suggest, further, and importantly, that the temporality inherent in Bhabha's idea of hybridity shifts 'the other' into the realm of (Levinasian) ethics, creating an as yet largely unexplored phenomenon which Leela Gandhi has referred to, in a fortuitous phrase, as an 'ethics of hybridity' (1998: 136).¹ For Levinas, time is the ultimate other – alterity – which disrupts ontology, and Bhabha's insistence on hybridity's 'disjunctive temporality' suggests that at least one reason we cannot move 'post-*the other*' is that this other is not only the other as constructed by (post)colonialism but also postcolonialism's *other* other – the ethical other who cannot be reduced to the (re)presence of representation, and who reminds us of our responsibilities and obligations.

If the 'time of hybridity' provides the trajectory for this article, my starting point lies with a discussion of Maori identity – Maori otherness – in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The reason for launching a discussion of the ethical/hybrid nature of otherness from within the context of the New Zealand situation is simple: New Zealand's official government

policy of biculturalism maintains a binary distinction between the two parties involved in the original colonial project – settlers and natives – and therefore structurally preserves, in perhaps purer form than elsewhere, a sense of the original *colonial* distinction between self and other in *postcolonial* times. The accommodation of the temporal aspect of otherness – alterity – within the colonial sense of otherness therefore becomes pressing, if the recurrence of stereotypes is to be avoided. Aotearoa/New Zealand willingly embraces a binary policy all too familiar from colonial times; to turn this familiar and oppressive distinction between settler and native, self and other, into an *enabling* binary distinction between two peoples, Maori otherness, I suggest, needs to be conceptualized as *hybrid* otherness.

II

How can we conceptualize an indigenous identity without trading on the same old stereotypes we have become so used to in discussions surrounding (formerly) othered peoples? Though hardly a new problem within postcolonial contexts, it is one that presents itself with perhaps even greater persistence in Aotearoa/New Zealand than elsewhere.

Founded upon the Treaty of Waitangi, a treaty signed between Maori and the British Crown in 1840, contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand embraces biculturalism as official government policy. Biculturalism was introduced in New Zealand during the 1980s in a conscious attempt to address the country's colonial legacy. Under its banner, a number of legislative milestones were laid towards the postcolonization of the country – most notably among them the Maori Language Act (1987), which elevated the Maori language to a second official language in New Zealand, and the Treaty of Waitangi and Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Acts (1975; 1985), which established the Waitangi Tribunal as a formal commission of inquiry to hear grievances against the Crown. As such, biculturalism functions as a much-needed safeguard against a return to the country's default policy setting of assimilation.

Encapsulated in what Maori academic Pat Hohepa calls the 'one-people myth', the idea of assimilation is routinely dished out as a staple diet to prevent the kind of 'cultural divisiveness' that popular opinion sees as resulting from any reminders to the Crown of its treaty obligations in protecting Maori rights as a treaty partner. That assimilation proves a remarkably persistent touchstone in New Zealand politics is particularly obvious in light of a recent election campaign by former National Party leader Don Brash.² Brash emerged from political obscurity when he gave a speech on 'Nationhood' to the Orewa Rotary Club on 27 January 2004. In this speech, Brash polemicizes against the 'dangerous

drift towards racial separatism in New Zealand', which he regards as an effect of the 'treaty grievance industry'. Against this drift, he invokes the standard assimilationist rhetoric Governor Hobson proclaimed upon signing the treaty: '*He iwi tabi tatou*: we are one people.' Opinion polls taken immediately after the speech – putting National ahead of Labour for the first time since Labour came into office in 1999 – suggest what the 2005 New Zealand general election results, with Labour just two seats ahead of National, confirm: Brash has struck a chord with 'middle New Zealand'. Even after more than a decade of official biculturalism, it appears, assimilationist thought is deeply ingrained in a large section of New Zealand society, making it all the more important to insist on a visible form of collective Maori otherness, such as biculturalism has sought to enable since the late 1980s. A maintained – even accentuated – binary distinction between two 'peoples', Maori and Pakeha, therefore remains a crucial factor in preventing a return to assimilationist policies.

This maintained distinction between Maori and Pakeha suggests that Aotearoa/New Zealand cannot readily embrace a transcending cultural hybridity – the solution commonly promoted in other postcolonial contexts. Demands for a Maori identity politics find an ill-matched response in vague offerings of 'hyphenated identities'. Identity politics, with its emphasis on a distinct Maori identity within a bicultural framework, tends to rely on precisely the essentialist rhetoric of indigeneity, authenticity, purity, distinctness, etc., that hybridity is meant to displace. How, then, can we negotiate these two positions? Does hybridity have a place in a context such as New Zealand, where the indigenous population is fiercely protective of its own separate and distinct identity as guaranteed by the treaty? How can we pay tribute to this binary distinction without reinscribing an essentialist rhetoric? How can we articulate Maori identity as *hybrid* otherness within a bicultural framework?

My motivation behind pursuing these questions structurally matches that of Nandana Dutta, who explains that the 'plea for preservation of the otherness of the other seeks an enabling binary opposition' (2004: 449). It is my contention that New Zealand's binary oppositions are enabling in the sense that they provide a limit case which allows us to disentangle conflicting senses of hybridity: a spatially informed understanding of hybridity as 'transcendence' or 'syncretic mixing' of opposed positions and a temporally based understanding of hybridity as a 'troubling' of opposed positions through their *partial* assumption. Because New Zealand insists on a maintained binary framework, the possibility of a spatial understanding of hybridity remains foreclosed; conversely, with the spectre of stereotypes looming large in any context structured by binary distinctions, Aotearoa/New Zealand is pulled towards a temporal understanding of hybridity so as to avoid a simple repetition of colonial structures in postcolonial times. What I am proposing, instead

of a *simple* repetition of colonial structures in postcolonial times, is a complex rearticulation of these structures: not a 'bare' but a 'covered' repetition, to invoke Gilles Deleuze's well-known distinction. Most immediately, and for reasons I am about to elucidate, this repetition is covered by quotation marks: the (colonial) other is rearticulated as (postcolonial) 'other'.

III

In many respects, my insistence on 'quoting' the category of the other in postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand is nothing particularly novel, informed, as it is, by a desire to leave behind the lingering racial designation of Maori responsible for an unabated racism in New Zealand. This desire has already produced a number of reclassifications of 'Maori identity' over the years, of which mine is only one of the latest. Evidence of more general epistemological changes, these reclassifications shift from natural to cultural designations of identity. The difference between Maori and Pakeha was initially framed as a racial difference, later to be reconsidered as a difference in ethnicity and, more recently, culture. Like my own ambitions in that area, each of these shifts is motivated by a critique of essentialized descriptions of collective identities. Thus, the shift from race to ethnicity, with its promise to replace a biologist labelling with one that pays tribute to the socio-cultural contexts involved in the constitution of a people's identity, needs to be understood as such an attempt to divest racism of its object. The New Zealand sociologist Lynne Alice explains: 'Popular notions of "race" emphasise skin colour. Sociologists reject the term as inadequate, preferring "ethnicity," because it includes aspects of culture, like kinship, language, religion and geographic origin' (1991: 64). Racism, so the unspoken assumption here suggests, cannot feed on those 'aspects of culture' and therefore loses its grip.

Yet what might initially have seemed a promising solution to the problem of racism quickly turned out to rely on the same essentializing principles as 'race' did. Just how highly problematic a concept ethnicity is becomes obvious in traditional definitions of ethnicity, such as this one by anthropologists Linnekin and Poyer:

We use ethnicity to refer to a set of theories based on the propositions that people can be classified into mutually exclusive bounded groups according to physical and behavioural differences; moreover, these ascriptions are 'presumptively determined by . . . origin and background'. (1990: 2)³

The emphasis on 'origin and background' – ancestry and heritage – in this definition indicates that ethnicity remains in dangerous proximity to racial descriptions of identity (and their lingering overtones of racism).

Owing to this involuntary complicity with the discourses of racism it seeks to challenge, ethnicity is of limited value as a label designating collective identities. Even Stuart Hall, prominent defender of ethnicity, as well as architect of the idea of 'new ethnicities' (see 1992a: 257), ultimately relinquishes the term, and instead starts referring to these ex-racial and ex-ethnic identities as *cultural* identities.⁴

Cultural identity, however, is hardly less problematic a concept. Not only is '[t]he word "culture" . . . notorious for its fuzzy boundaries' (Bhabha, 1995: 118), but like race and ethnicity before, it fails to avoid the essentialism trap. When the identities of colonized peoples are defined in terms of their 'cultures', this usually refers to a culture of the past, traditional customs and folklore – which means that the colonized are denied a sense of 'authentic' contemporary cultural identity. Culture, thus understood, serves as yet another (colonial) means of othering because it comes to be associated solely with non-Europeans: whereas Europeans 'do not have' an ethnic or cultural identity because they are – *qua* their rationality – representatives of a universal human nature, colonized peoples remain outside that universal realm due to their localized culture. Culture, like race and ethnicity, thus serves as a label suitable for producing the colonized as a marked category and holding them apart from an assumed universal human nature. Despite shifting attention from the natural to the cultural realm then, the notion of 'cultural identity' reproduces the exclusionary practices introduced by 19th-century 'race' discourses; indeed, as Michael Jackson succinctly remarks: 'race [is] a word that "culture" now euphemises' (1999: 4).⁵

IV

As this list of changing labels for the collective identities of formerly colonized peoples illustrates, it is not at all easy to leave behind the essentialisms of old. Indeed, analysing the problem of essentialism, Pnina Werbner observes the firm link between essentialism and any notion of collective identity, pointing out that '[i]ncreasingly, the tendency [in current criticism] has been to label all collective representations – whether of ethnic and religious groups, or classes and nations – as misplaced essentialisms' (1997: 228).⁶ If this is so, then maybe the solution to the problem of essentialism lies not so much in finding a (more) suitable label, but in abandoning the notion of collective identity altogether? If collective identity and essentialism appear as two sides of the same coin, would it not be better to abandon the currency of collectivity altogether?

An insistence on the individuality of those othered has undoubtedly been the most immediately appealing, and most common, response to stereotyping as the prime instance of essentializing descriptions of

collective identity. As Maori writer Witi Ihimaera put it, for example, in the New Zealand context: 'The stereotypes don't count anymore. Maori people are individuals' (quoted in Beavis, 1971: 53). The logic underlying this shift of attention to the level of the individual is compelling: if stereotyping is based on the construction of a collective identity (or rather collective *otherness*), then the liberal-humanist appeal to the individual – pre (or beyond) cultural, religious, gender and other inscriptions – seems to circumvent that problem elegantly. Liberal humanism, however, is notorious for *not* shifting discriminatory practices. Humanism, in seeking to define an underlying sameness connecting all humans across their obvious (phenomenological) differences, simply reinstates a sense of European superiority when it takes the white European middle-class male as its model for the construction of a universal notion of 'Man'. This Man, rational, self-determined and, since Descartes at least, the centre of his universe, serves as the privileged unmarked term against which all humans are measured and (if they deviate from that norm) classified as marked, inferior, or other. In order to be accepted as equal, those deemed different have to assume the qualities displayed by those superior (rational, white, male, European) beings setting the norm.

In New Zealand, this liberal-humanist logic has played itself out in the long history of assimilation policies referred to above. Asking Maori to define their identities in terms of an abstract humanity (that is, the humanity as defined and embodied by Pakeha), stripped of their cultural markers, this logic effectively requires Maori to become 'brown Pakeha'. Clearly, then, a liberal-humanist emphasis on *individuality* remains powerless in the face of a discourse which relies on a distinction between the collective identities of self and other. An emphasis on *collective* identity in the name of race, ethnicity or culture, on the other hand, all too readily leaves the other re-othered, battling anew with essentializing descriptions of their identities.

And yet this risk of re-othering has to be taken, it seems to me, because what is needed to challenge the hierarchy encoded in the self/other binary, in the first instance at least, is an intervention on the very level of the binary, that is, on the level of *collective*, not individual, identity. As Hannah Arendt said so memorably: 'If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself *as a Jew*. Not as a German, not as a world citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man' (quoted in Bernasconi, 2001: 290). When read in the light of Jacques Derrida's account of deconstructive practice, Arendt's claim is more than simply persuasive; it is *logically* compelling. Derrida insists that the only effective challenge to binary oppositions can come from an engagement with their very logic, an engagement which must begin with an inversion of the hierarchy into which the terms are locked:

[W]e must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of the *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. (1981: 41)

Derrida points out that this phase of overturning needs to precede displacement (the strategy more commonly associated with deconstruction), if displacement is not to end up as a 'neutralization' of the opposition in which the dominant part simply absorbs its other:

To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a neutralization that in practice would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of intervening in the field effectively. (1981: 41)

A displacement of a binary opposition without a prior reversal of the hierarchy into which it is locked thus results in assimilation, not deconstruction. Concretely, in the New Zealand context, a displacement of the Maori/Pakeha binary which does not first elevate Maori to the primary term ends up as a neutralization – 'We're all New Zealanders' – that effectively disables Maori to voice political claims as Maori. A certain collective identity, a certain emphasis on the otherness of Maori from the dominant (Pakeha) identity, rather than a quick-fix universalism oblivious to the lingering legacy of colonialism, is thus crucial in the postcolonial situation. However, for reasons outlined above, I would hesitate to call this certain collective identity a racial, ethnic or cultural identity. Instead, I want to propose the label 'other' identities. In calling these necessary collective identities 'other', I would like to open up the possibility that these collective identities might be a complex – covered – rearticulation of colonial identities in postcolonial times. But can such a complex rearticulation deliver on the promises ethnicity and culture failed to keep? How effective a safeguard can the thin 'covers' of a quotation mark be at averting the lingering spectre of stereotypes?

V

Maori identity was originally not based on essences but came into existence upon colonial contact, when 'normal' (Maori) people adopted the label to distinguish themselves from the pale-skinned (Pakeha) newcomers who arrived on their shores. The adoption of this collective label thus translated what used to be a multitude of tribally based collective identities into the binarity of a 'racial' one. The original constitution of a

collective Maori identity takes place vis-à-vis Pakeha, and is therefore derived relationally, rather than from essences. The reference to these identities as 'other' reminds us of this important, but often disregarded, historical detail. It offers us an analytical concept that emphasizes the constructed 'nature' of Maori identity, and as such represents a first step away from essentializing designations.

I want to suggest that the moment Maori otherness, as constituted by a colonial discourse, is recited, *put between quotation marks*, something other than the fixed stereotypical notion of an essential Maori otherness can emerge. I rely here on Judith Butler's understanding of performativity, which shares important structural resemblances with Bhabha's hybridity: both locate agency in the very instance in which the violent (colonial) discourse is performed *otherwise*. In an interview, Butler explains:

[T]he real task is to figure out how a subject who is constituted in and by discourse then recites that very same discourse but perhaps to another purpose. For me that's always been the question of how to find agency, the moment of that recitation or that replay of discourse that is the condition of one's own emergence. (V. Bell, 1999: 165)

Butler's comment, made productive for the context of this article, suggests that while the notion of 'other' identities does not deny the power of the colonial discourse to interpellate its subjects as other, this interpellation is simultaneously the interpellation into a *subject* position and so endows the other with agency. Agency here lies in the power to appropriate and recite the very same discourse that brought the other into 'being' in the first place. In Judith Butler's more eloquent words:

To be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns. But not all name-calling is injurious. Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language; indeed, it is one of the examples Althusser supplies for an understanding of 'interpellation.' . . .

One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response. If to be addressed is to be interpellated, then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call. (1997: 2)

The promise for Maori, in other words, is that while they might be interpellated as other in the mainstream Pakeha discourse, this very interpellation also guarantees an identity through which, and in the name of

which, political agency is possible. To illustrate what is involved in the theorization of such performative agency, let me briefly turn to a literary example.

VI

In a story called 'Parade', published in 1975 as part of her first collection of short stories, *Waiariki*, Maori writer Patricia Grace relates a scene that has since been hailed as one of the founding moments in the history of Maori literature in English. In what is to become a recurrent motif in Maori writing – return from the city to a rural setting – Grace depicts a protagonist who returns home to a traditional Maori environment after a two-year sojourn in the city to find herself set apart, perceiving her former life through the eyes of (Pakeha) others: 'during my time away from here my vision and understanding had expanded. I was able now to see myself and other members of my race as others see us' (1975: 84). While living in a Pakeha-dominated environment, the protagonist learns to internalize their 'colonial gaze'; traditional Maori culture, as evoked through a public performance of action songs, consequently emerges as an artefact, an exotic culture (of the past):

And the [Pakeha] people's reaction to the rest of us? The singing, the pois? I could see enjoyment on the upturned faces and yet it occurred to me again that many people enjoyed zoos. That's how I felt. Animals in cages to be stared at. This one with stripes, this one with spots – or a trunk, or bad breath, the remains of a third eye. Talking, swinging by the tail, walking in circles, laughing, crying, having babies.

Or museums. Stuffed birds, rows of shells under glass, the wing span of an albatross, preserved bodies, shrunken heads. Empty gourds, and meeting houses where no one met anymore.

I kept thinking and trying not to think, 'Is that what we are to them?' Museum pieces, curios, antiques, shells under glass. A travelling circus, a floating zoo. (1975: 85)

The significance of this scene for emerging Maori writers in the 1970s lies in the ambivalence the protagonist feels towards her culture: in order to maintain their culture, Maori writers, like the protagonist in Grace's story, needed to enact their culture, but in the very enactment ran danger of buying into, repeating and consolidating all those fixed images of Maori otherness that had been circulating since colonial contact. In this final story in her first collection, Grace acknowledges this double-bind, but insists that the risk needs to be taken: 'It is your job, this. To show others who we are' (1975: 88).

New Zealand critic Lydia Wevers observes the 'significant inversion of conventional terms' in this phrase (1998: 286), indicating that, paradoxically, in this very display of Maori otherness, Maori in fact emerge

from their assigned place of otherness into one of subjectivity and agency that puts others in their places. The reversal of terms, valorizing what was demeaned, turning the other into the agential self, clearly corresponds with Derrida's first principle of deconstruction – and is what postcolonial histories all over the world describe as a necessary step towards emancipation. Yet more notable even than the fact that the otherness of the colonized can be turned into subjectivity by othering the colonizer is the framing of this reversal by a performative act.⁷ Agency, in this scene, emerges in the very instant that reified otherness is publicly performed and thus *re-enacted* as otherness. In this enactment, 'ontological' otherness is transformed into a performative otherness without essential (ontological) bearing.

This move from ontology to performativity is one that much feminist and postcolonial work on identity – following the lead of Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha, respectively – describes as crucial in the attempt to imagine identities and agency beyond the humanist self. In his editor's introduction to the 1997 *Front Lines/Border Posts* special issue of *Critical Inquiry* referred to above, Bhabha acknowledges the issue's intellectual indebtedness to the 1992 *Identities* special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. He suggests that

One of the innovations of that volume was to shift the question of identity from a concern with the persuasions of personhood – whether individual or communal, subaltern or sovereign – and restage it as a question of historical and geographical location. I see its value, moreover, as shifting the question of identity from the ontological and epistemological imperative – *What is identity?* – to face the ethical and political prerogative – *What are identities for?* – or even to present the pragmatist alternative – *What can identities do?* (1997: 434)

As such, the *Identities* issue laid the ground for the 'postontological, performative condition' championed in the 1997 issue. Drawing on Etienne Balibar's notion of a postnationalist minority, Bhabha thus contends, in the introduction to the latter volume, that it 'is not what minority *is*, but what minority does, or what is done in its name, that is of political and cultural significance' (1997: 437).

Patricia Grace, in her insistence on the necessity to 'show others who we *are*', certainly seems to respond to the question '*What is identity?*' and thus to adhere to a view which affirms the ontological existence of Maori as a race and Maori culture as an essential part of that race. However, by situating this ontological claim within a performative framework, she (perhaps unwittingly) moves beyond such essentializing terms and towards an exploration of the question '*What can identities do?*', thus emphasizing the political force that inheres in the performance of identity. Aware of the 'colonial gaze', her protagonist is at once

inside and outside the performed identity, thus introducing a split in Maori identity at the moment of its articulation. This split articulation – the protagonist as both enunciating and enunciated subject – disavows the possibility of a unitary, unchanging Maori identity. Maori identity emerges not as originary and pure but in the ‘double-time’ of the perform(n)ative.

VII

Bhabha sees a necessity for such a performative re-enactment of ‘ontology’ because the colonial construction of ontological otherness artificially – and violently – arrests the movement of *différance*, thus turning multiple and shifting differences into a fixed and stereotyped form of otherness – the otherness of Grace’s ‘museum pieces’:

The subjects of the discourse are constructed within an apparatus of power which contains, in both senses of the word, an ‘other’ knowledge – a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness that I have called the stereotype. (1994: 77–8)

Colonial assertions of otherness thus always contain (and disavow) an alterity that cannot be articulated along the discursive principles of the dominant discourse. What is called for, consequently, is a deconstruction of otherness; and what brings about such a deconstruction of otherness is the performative re-enactment of ‘ontology’ – along the lines suggested by Derrida in his term *sous rature*, which Gayatri Spivak glosses as a ‘gesture effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible’ (1976: xli). Putting ‘the other’ under erasure thus means that we can continue to draw on it as an analytical category while being aware that it does not have an ontological foundation, that it attains the impression of ontological foundedness only because it disavows, as the condition for its enunciation, alternative interpretations/performances. In the strategic doubling of the *sous rature*, ‘the other’ emerges not as a simple mechanical repetition of a colonial concept but as a complex (or ‘covered’) re-articulation of this concept: a new concept under an old name.

The logic at the heart of the *sous rature* is that of iterability. What iterability offers is a disruption to the logic of representation. As such, it provides the conditions of possibility for those ‘different forms of representation’ that, as I suggested in the opening, are necessary for the postcolonial use of ‘the other’ not to turn into a renewed exercise in stereotyping. To explain the logic of iterability – key to my remarks below – I need to reflect, briefly, on the assumptions behind traditional western logocentric ideas of representation, for it is these assumptions

that iterability challenges. Most bluntly, logocentricism assumes a relationship of (original) presence and (secondary) re-presence. Representation is therefore always derivative, and the most perfect representation is that which re-presents the original presence with the least degree of distortion. An 'ideal' representation perfectly captures an 'ideal' presence. Derrida launches his attack on such ideas from a reflection on different forms of ideality, before linking ideality to the key idea of repetition:

There is the ideality of the sensible form of the signifier (for example, the word), which must remain *the same* and can do so only as an ideality. There is, moreover, the ideality of the signified (of the *Bedeutung*) or intended sense, which is not to be confused with the act of intending or with the object, for the two need not necessarily be ideal. Finally, in certain cases there is the ideality of the object itself, which then assures the ideal transparency and perfect univocity of language; this is what happens in the exact sciences. But this ideality, which is but another name for the permanence of the same and the possibility of its repetition, *does not exist* in the world, and it does not come from another world; it depends entirely on the possibility of acts of repetition. It is constituted by this possibility. Its 'being' is proportionate to the power of repetition; absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition. It could therefore be said that being is determined . . . as ideality, that is, as repetition. (1973: 52)

This is an important passage. In a reversal that is nothing short of revolutionary, Derrida asserts that the presence of an object in its ideality does not exist in the world and is then merely re-presented but that, on the contrary, the 'presence-of-the-present is derived from repetition and not the reverse' (1973: 52). This is possible because a sign necessarily needs to be repeatable to work as a sign. However, by the same token, because a sign does not have an ontological foundation, the *effect* of ontology – the 'presence of the present' – comes to depend on this very repeatability.

Bearing in mind, however, that the stereotype is 'an arrested, fixated form of representation', there is nothing in this insight as such that would disrupt the infinite replication of stereotypes. Rather, as Michael Pickering observes when he reflects on the origin of the term, repeatability and fixity of stereotypes are intrinsically linked:

. . . the term 'stereotype' was in the first place taken metaphorically from the trade vocabulary of printing and typography, where it referred to text cast into rigid form for the purposes of repetitive use. (2001: 9)

In other words, rigid forms – (stereo)types – are designed for producing indefinite repetitions with minimal variation. Derrida's point that 'absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition' suggests that stereotyping relies precisely on such absolute ideality.

The important next step in Derrida's argument – not taken in the long quotation above – is that, *because* it depends on repeatability, the sign

is open for continuous reinscription. Introducing his idea of iterability, Derrida calls this the point where ‘idealization finds its limit’:

Let us not forget that ‘iterability’ does not signify simply . . . repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event, for instance, in this or that speech act. . . . There is no idealization without (identificatory) iterability; but for the same reason, for reasons of (altering) iterability, there is no idealization that keeps itself pure, safe from all contamination. (1988: 119)

As Derrida reminds us, *itara* means *other* in Sanskrit and, in ‘exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity’ (1982: 315), he draws attention to the fact that every iteration of a sign reinscribes its meaning, but potentially does so *otherwise*. Iterability thus captures the strange double logic whereby identity is both self-identical and forever different from itself; identity emerges from (identical) repetition, but in that repetition identity is no longer self-identical.⁸ In repetition, identity loses its attachment to a metaphysics of presence which reduces everything to the same and opens itself up to the radical newness that comes with temporality. In these terms, the citation, or iteration, of collective otherness thus offers the possibility to reintroduce, quite literally, the sense of alterity that had been disavowed in the stereotype as a fixed form of otherness.

As key deconstructive ‘infrastructure’, iterability lies at the heart of both Judith Butler’s performativity and Homi Bhabha’s hybridity. Like Butler, Bhabha embraces the Derridean idea of iterability wholeheartedly, enthusing, ‘What is interesting about iteration is that it introduces that uncanny moment where something may look the same, but in its enunciation, in the moment of its instantiation, in the thing that makes it specific, it reveals that *difference* of the same’ (1995: 110). Derrida’s theory of iterability, especially as inflected through Bhabha’s reading, has had enormous ramifications within postcolonial studies. Bhabha invests iterability with significant political potential when he describes the time lag between repetitions as enabling of the production of ‘new and hybrid agencies and articulations’. The moment of iterability or reinscription, for him, is the ‘moment for revisions’:

The process of reinscription and negotiation – the insertion or intervention of something that takes on new meaning – happens in the temporal break in between the sign. . . . When the sign ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol, it also seizes the power to elaborate – through the time lag – new and *hybrid* agencies and articulations. This is the moment for revisions. (1992: 457; emphasis added)

The other emerges as ‘hybrid agency’, as partially assumed stereotype, in the moment of repetition. Time – or more specifically the ‘disjunctive temporality’ created by the time lag between repetitions – is therefore what enables postcolonial criticism to maintain ‘the other’ as a politically foundational concept without falling prey to renewed stereotypes.

In Bhabha's – perhaps overly optimistic – reading, (re)iterated identities are liberated from colonial oppression because stereotypical otherness recurs only partially, and is reinvested with the alterity disavowed by the stereotype: 'The changed political and historical site of enunciation transforms the meanings of the colonial inheritance into the liberatory signs of a free people of the future' (1994: 38).

VIII

The extreme proximity of such an idea of hybridity not only to (post-colonial) politics but also to (Levinasian) ethics⁹ is clear here, for hybridity not only renders established meanings ambivalent, it does so precisely in the name of an alterity which cannot be articulated along given discursive lines. Though Judith Butler on the whole remains critical of Levinasian ethics,¹⁰ Homi Bhabha occasionally cites Levinas with understated approval,¹¹ thus inviting suggestions that the common ground shared by ethics and hybridity might be sound enough to warrant the idea that there is not only a politics but also an *ethics* of hybridity.

Hybridity, or, perhaps even more fundamentally, iterability – as the temporal logic upon which hybridity relies – has immediate ethical appeal¹² because of its ethical impulse to free the other(ed) from ontology or, in Emmanuel Levinas' oft-repeated words, to revoke the 'reduction of the other to the categories of the same' (Kearney, 1984: 53). Ontology, Levinas suggests, is 'allergic' to alterity, or non-assimilable otherness,¹³ and therefore imprisons this alterity within ontological categories of being:

Western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity. From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains other – with an insurmountable allergy. It is for this reason that it is essentially a philosophy of being, that the comprehension of being is its last word, and the fundamental structure of man. (1986: 346)

Freedom from ontology is – for both Bhabha and Levinas – brought about through disjunctive temporality. Levinas is intensely critical of all forms of metaphysics of presence (or rather, in his terms, *ontology* of presence), which, he suggests, reduce alterity to otherness by subsuming the singularity of the other person to abstract categories or concepts. His critique of Husserl's theory of time serves as an implicit commentary on his own approach to temporality:

The present (*Gegenwart*) remains for Husserl the centralizing dimension of time, the past and the future being defined in terms of intentional representations (*Vergegenwärtigen* [*sic*]). To be more precise, the past, as

Husserl claims, is retained by the present and the future is pre-contained in, or protended by, the present. Time past and time future are merely modifications of the present; and this double extension of the present into the past (retention) and the future (protension) reinforces the ontology of presence as a seizure and appropriation of what is other or transcendent. (Kearney, 1984: 62)

In his own philosophy, Levinas emphasizes the significance of that aspect of temporality which cannot be synchronized, where past and future are not mere modifications of the present but have an irreducible – diachronic – relationship to the present. The experience of such diachronic temporality – where the other cannot be reduced to the same – is what enables ethical transcendence and an encounter with alterity:

The relationship with the other is *time*: it is an untotalizable diachrony in which one moment pursues another without ever being able to retrieve it, to catch up or coincide with it. The non-simultaneous and non-present is my primary rapport with the other in time. Time means that the other is forever beyond me, irreducible to the synchrony of the same. (1986: 57)

Because such irreducibility to the metaphysics of presence (or, in Levinas' words, to the 'synchrony of the same') is what remains vital in any ethics, it also remains fundamental in any 'ethics of hybridity'. Once hybridity loses its double temporality and is reduced, once more, to presence, it stands to lose its ethical appeal. The threat of such a loss, I suggest, looms large in many insufficiently subtle postcolonial discussions surrounding hybridity.

IX

Despite its promises of freedom, and despite its association with ethics, the idea of hybridity is far from uncontroversial in postcolonial studies. Critics not only often draw attention to the 19th-century origin of the term and its indebtedness to Victorian racism, but frequently also charge it with the neo-colonial racism of today. Hybridity, according to this latter line of critique, re-others the other in the service of deconstructing the metaphysics of the West.¹⁴

A related – and arguably more serious – problem increasingly associated with hybridity is that in more recent postcolonial discussions, it has taken on normative tendencies. In fact, so great is its currency as a concept promising deliverance from binary oppositions and their ensuing essentialisms that it is now in danger of falling victim to its own success by becoming 'dangerously prescriptive' (Gandhi, 1998: 162). The concept of hybridity thus involuntarily creates a (universal) ideal against which local articulations of identity are measured, and it puts a 'theoretical

embargo' on those identities that are deemed incompatible with the ideal (ibid.: 163). As a result, a new binarism has come to structure postcolonial discussions, producing a 'dichotomous mapping of postcolonialism's field of discourse into those who celebrate hybridity and those who eschew it in favour of more essentializable (which is not to say essentialized) categories of identity' (Cooppan, 2000: 17). Within this new binarism, hybridity generally functions as a privileged term. Indeed, in crudely asserting that 'postcolonial theory opposes *essentialism*' (Weaver, 2000: 226), some critics even go as far as to suggest that in its privileging of hybridity, the entire field of postcolonialism has become narrowed down to a singular intellectual pursuit. Given its express criticism of all forms of metaphysics, it is of course highly ironic that hybridity is now in (ever increasing) danger of being 'fixed' in meaning in postcolonial discussions by becoming the new 'transcendental signified', the new universal norm against which all other forms of existence are measured. This problem is exacerbated through discussions such as the one offered by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their influential *The Empire Writes Back*, which uncritically valorizes 'models which argue for features such as hybridity and syncretism as constitutive elements of *all* post-colonial literatures' (1989: 15; emphasis added).

X

Unmatched in centrality in contemporary postcolonial debates, the term and concept of hybridity appears to repeat the very movement Derrida describes in 'Structure, Sign and Play', where the discursive centre – which 'is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*' – brings the 'play of structure' to a halt (1978: 279, 278). Ironically, given its emphasis on the in-between, the *entre* of fixed positions, hybridity thus comes to function as the new *centre* of postcolonial discussion. As such, it threatens to turn into yet another fixed (metaphysical) centre that at once structures postcolonial discourse and serves as its privileged term. Hybridity, in Bhabha's conception, works along similar lines to Derrida's process of *différance*. Neither *différance* nor hybridity has an ontological foundation, therefore escaping the metaphysics of presence. Just as Derrida insists that '*différance* is not' (1982: 21), Bhabha repeatedly describes hybridity as an interstitial third space which cannot be rendered present, which is 'unrepresentable in itself' (1994: 37; emphasis added). Similarly, just as *différance* is Derrida's 'non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences' (1982: 11), hybridity is Bhabha's non-unitary – split and double – *centre* of cultural differences. Derrida points out that as a non-originary origin, 'the name "origin" no longer suits it' (ibid.), and hybridity, similarly, might be more suitably labelled

as *c/entre*, with the slash functioning as a silent reminder – a trace of alterity – that this centre is decentred, both split and double.

Significantly, however, this decentred understanding of hybridity appears to have been lost in postcolonial discussions where hybridity has become (the privileged) part of a new binary couplet that arrests the movement of differences and locks them into an essentializing binary opposition between hybridity and essentialism. Hybridity thus no longer functions as *c/entre*, but instead becomes the latest instalment in what Derrida describes as a metaphysics of presence with forever-changing fixed centres:

[T]he entire history of the concept of structure . . . must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. (1978: 279–80)

A purportedly non-metaphysical and non-essential postcolonial ~~concept~~, hybridity thus paradoxically emerges as the latest (metaphysical and essential) centre in this long history of a western metaphysics of presence. As centre, hybridity is paired with, and elevated above, its binary opposite in one of its various incarnations: essentialism, authenticity, identity politics, etc. The irony of this renewed binary coupling is, of course, that hybridity – no longer *c/entre* but centre – becomes part of the metaphysics of presence again. Reclaimed for ontology, hybridity loses its fundamental exteriority: double-time gives way to presence.

To illustrate how this loss is brought about, let me once more refer to *The Empire Writes Back*, a book so tremendously influential that it cannot be described as entirely innocent in this development. Ashcroft *et al.* define syncretism – and, one might add, since they use the terms interchangeably, hybridity – as ‘the process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form’ (1989: 15), thus completely blurring the absolutely crucial distinction between a maintained and a transcended binary opposition in the discussion surrounding hybridity (and deconstruction more generally). Hybridity, as informed by Derrida’s discussion of iterability and theorized by Bhabha, pursues an enabling doubleness – the doubleness of iterability – and so is precisely *not* a concept committed to establishing ‘a single new form’. Bhabha states explicitly that hybridity ‘is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures’ but rather one that holds the tension of the opposition and explores the spaces in-between fixed identities through their continuous reiterations (1994: 113).¹⁵

This distinction is increasingly lost in postcolonial discussions that establish an opposition between hybridity and essentialism (or identity politics). Through the loss of disjunctive temporality, a performative hybridity turns into an ontological hybridity.¹⁶ As a 'single new form', hybridity falls prey to the metaphysics of presence and becomes yet another ontological fixture, thereby not only losing its ethical promise but also becoming locked into an irresolvable opposition between (ontological) otherness and (ontological) hybridity.

XI

The dramatic effects of such a loss of hybridity's disjunctive temporality are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where the 'dichotomous mapping of post-colonialism's field of discourse' into (ontological) otherness and (ontological) hybridity, with a privileging of the latter, presents the indigenous Maori population with an impossible choice. Aotearoa/New Zealand's postcolonial reinvestment in a Maori otherness in the name of biculturalism clearly stands counter to the transcending 'hyphenated identities' of (ontological) hybridity; paradoxically, then, the country's embrace of biculturalism – a self-reflexively *post*-colonial strategy for alleviating the violations of colonialism – seems to push the country back into the realm of *colonial* discourse and towards the 'limited form of [ontological] otherness' that is its currency. I contend, however, that rather than becoming *tied* to this limited form of otherness, postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand manages to negotiate a more enabling sense of otherness. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that the country's reinvestment in otherness offers postcolonial debates elsewhere a precious chance to rediscover that which is most valuable about hybridity, namely time. The New Zealand situation, I suggest, forces us to revisit this forgotten *time* of hybridity precisely because the country cannot be placed in either of the two positions offered by the 'dichotomous map' of postcolonial discussion.

I suggested above that this loss of the *time* of hybridity is – paradoxically – a result of the privileging of (ontological) hybridity over (ontological) otherness in this 'dichotomous map'. I now want to suggest that for the *time* of hybridity to re-emerge, this new binary needs to be deconstructed. In other words, if deconstruction operates by way of a 'double gesture' – reversal and displacement – (ontological) otherness now needs to be valorized over (ontological) hybridity before it can be displaced. Once displaced, (ontological) otherness gives way to (performative) otherness, thus revealing the forgotten time of hybridity.

Bicultural New Zealand lends itself to such a deconstruction because of its willing embrace of otherness; in fact, because the spectre of stereotypes always looms large in such an embrace of otherness, the urgency

of Bhabha's question – 'Post-*this*, post-*that*, but why never post-*the other*?' – is arguably nowhere greater than here. I want to suggest that rather than reinstating stereotypes, this affirmation of otherness constitutes the first step towards their deconstruction. The necessary second step – displacement – is brought about through temporality. The re-introduction of temporality disrupts the stereotype as 'arrested, fixated form[s] of representation' and therefore leads to a more enabling sense of otherness. This more enabling sense of otherness is that which cannot be gone *post*; it is the undeconstructable foundation for postcolonial criticism because it continuously prises open the fixating structures of the metaphysics of presence, instead of falling prey to them. One of my guiding concerns in this article has been to theorize such an enabling sense of otherness within the parameters of the binary structure provided by biculturalism, and I would now like to offer a few concluding thoughts to draw out what an enabling sense of collective otherness might look like.

XII

In an article entitled 'A Community without Truth: Derrida and the Impossible Community', John Caputo makes some useful advances towards formulating a deconstructive view of collective identity, or, in his words, community. He begins by reminding us that the term community has a military background:

[A] *communitas* is a military formation, referring to the common defense we build against the other, the fortifications built around the city: *munire*, to fortify ourselves, to build a wall, to gather ourselves together (*com*) for protection against the other, to encircle ourselves with a common wall or barrier that protects the same from the incoming (*invenire*, *invention*) of the other, that keeps the same safe from the other. (1996: 25)

Caputo leaves no doubt that deconstruction cannot but reject this traditional idea of community when he continues:

In that sense, community, that sense of community, is *everything* that deconstruction resists. For deconstruction is through and through *l'invention de l'autre*, the affirmation – *viens, oui, oui* – of the *tout autre* . . . and so everything that is done in deconstruction takes aim at this wall of defense that community throws up against the other. (1996: 25–6)

While deconstruction can thus certainly not be seen as an embrace of this traditional form of community, it can, so Caputo argues, be regarded as 'the recognition or affirmation of "another" community . . . beyond the community of identitarian fusion, one that is permeable and porous' (1996: 26). While traditional identity politics all too often pursues this

'community of identitarian fusion' for the sake of political unity, this other community always leaves gaps and fissures and thus is, in a certain sense, always an open community. To mark the essential openness of this community to the trace of alterity which forever forecloses 'identitarian fusion', I would like to call this community a 'comm/unity' – with the slash here, as in the *centre* before, functioning as a trace of alterity, a surplus (or supplement) which indicates that while this comm/unity has, at its disposal, the unity needed for political action, it is not uniform and thus without that 'wall of defense that [traditional] community throws up against the other'. This open comm/unity is thus both politically effective and attuned to ethical demands.

XIII

I believe we are now in a position to see why 'the other' remains such a valuable *postcolonial* concept despite its colonial legacy. The citation of 'the other' achieves a unique assemblage of political and ethical concerns: not only does it maintain the political unity required for effective intervention in postcolonial societies that are still organized along discriminatory lines; through its doubling of a-temporal (essential) presence, it also prevents the stereotypical fixture of that unity – and does so, I want to suggest, precisely in the name of irreducible (ethical) alterity. Crucially, it is the *time* of hybridity that allows for this assemblage.

Hybridity, then, does not belong to the past – its time is not the past. Neither, however, is it the present or – simply – the future. Instead, the time of hybridity is a radical futurity, a futurity which springs from the gap between repetitions and finds most appropriate expression in Derrida's sense of the future as a 'to come' (*à-venir*).¹⁷ The 'to come' as an 'absolute opening towards the non-determinability of the future' suggests that this future is discontinuous with, and therefore irreducible to, the present (Derrida and Ferraris, 2001: 20). The gap between repetitions implicit in a temporal understanding of hybridity separates one idealizing act from the next and offers a 'temporal space' for a hesitation – a 'perhaps' – to take hold between affirming repetitions. This 'perhaps', for Derrida, is 'the condition for something to happen' which might disrupt the smooth process of identical replication (1997: 3). Without the 'perhaps', ontological structures, like the stereotype, could be endlessly – and mechanically – repeated. 'The other' as *postcolonial* repetition of a colonial concept, however, does not reproduce stereotypes; it affirms the otherness of the other but not without first passing through the moment of the 'perhaps'.

This moment of the 'perhaps' is the ethical moment. In an interview with Derrida, Alexander Garcia Düttmann summarizes Derrida's position

succinctly by suggesting that the ‘perhaps’ indicates that ‘one is morally engaged’ and that consequently the ‘radical thing is not the affirmation, but the perhaps which makes affirmation possible’ (1997: 17). The ‘perhaps’ therefore has logical and ethical priority over the affirmation for Derrida:

... for the affirmation ... to be an affirmation, it implies the perhaps. I couldn’t repeat or resign the ‘yes,’ I could not say ‘yes, yes’ without the space and time opened by the perhaps. Even more ‘radical’ than deconstruction is the affirmation of the ‘yes,’ and more radical than that is the perhaps, our relation to the other. (1997: 16)

The idea of ‘the other’ as an open comm/unity to come acknowledges the ‘perhaps’ as prior to its affirmation – ‘yes, yes’ – as unity. Each affirmation is separated by a temporal gap that allows for the possibility of the unforeseeable to happen and for the comm/unity to emerge as radically different from itself. This, I suggest, is the promise that the time of hybridity makes. Ultimately, then, the time of hybridity is at the heart of both a politics and an ethics of hybridity. Without *diachrony* – without the gap between repetitions – full ontological presence asserts itself. If, as Derrida suggests, ‘the entirely other announces itself in the most rigorous repetition’ (1989: 113), then only repetition can free the other from ontology. Only in its ‘most rigorous repetition’, then, does the other ever stand a chance of crossing ‘the path of the entirely other’.

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Notes

I would like to thank Chris Prentice and Jo T. Smith for their perceptive comments on this article. Their questions and suggestions have helped me clarify my argument at crucial points.

- 1 It should be noted that Gandhi’s use of the term is distinct from mine. While Gandhi focuses on hybridity’s ethical force in the context of postnationalism, my own concern is with time, specifically with an irreducible diachronicity which, I argue below, is what hybridity shares with Levinasian ethics.
- 2 Don Brash resigned as a leader of the National Party on 23 November 2006.
- 3 It should be noted here that such traditional understandings of ethnicity are found almost exclusively in the discipline professionally devoted to the study of ‘other cultures’, i.e. anthropology. Other disciplines have sought to challenge anthropology’s authority on the topic and devise alternative accounts of ethnicity. Sneja Gunew’s work is exemplary here, as is Stuart Hall’s.

- 4 See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1990: 222–37); Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity' (1992b: 273–325); and Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996).
- 5 A similar point is made by Tzvetan Todorov when he points out that '[t]he word "race" . . . became virtually synonymous with what we ourselves call "culture," and nineteenth-century racialism subsists today in the idea of cultural difference' (1986: 174).
- 6 Werbner herself rejects that view and seeks to rescue a certain form of essentialism which tends to go with conceptualizations of collective identity by distinguishing between 'modes of *objectification* and modes of *reification*' (1997: 229).
- 7 I need to emphasize here that Butler herself, throughout her work, distinguishes between performance and performativity. Performance, according to her, implies that the performer has a certain 'will' or 'choice' whether or not to perform a subject position, or rather, whether or not to play a certain role; performance thus relies on a certain distance between the performing subject and the performed act. Performativity, on the other hand, implies that no such distance exists, that the subject is bound by the subject position and cannot exist outside it: it is the condition for its own emergence and continued existence. The most explicit example of this express rejection of the equivocation of performance and performativity can be found in an interview entitled 'Critically Queer', where Butler states, categorically, that '*The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake*' (1993: 24; original emphasis). However, while it is clear that the more complex concept of performativity should not be reduced to, and misunderstood as, a simple performance, it is less clear why a performance cannot also act performatively. Thus, read in the light of this distinction between performance and performativity, the *performance* of Maori culture in Grace's story might not qualify as performativity in Butler's view. I would defend it as an instance of performativity, however, because, even though she has a 'choice' whether or not to perform the subject position, the protagonist is not, as such, playing a role, but is performing (or enacting) the subject position into which she has been interpellated. For a useful critique of Butler's distinction between performance and performativity, see Moya Lloyd (1999: 199–204).
- 8 It should be noted here that while Derrida might have *popularized* the idea that repetition involves an insertion of difference into identity, the origins of this idea in fact go back to Heidegger's short text *Identity and Difference*, where Heidegger argues that even the identity principle of formal logic, $A = A$, already contains two elements, which means identity is no longer self-identical. The very principle of identity can thus be said to articulate an identity which is dependent on difference.
- 9 I refer to ethics in a very specifically Levinasian sense, and do not extend the claims I am about to make to other approaches captured under the 'ethics' label, be that a feminist ethics, a Kantian-inspired discourse ethics or an Aristotelian ethics of the common good. Levinasian ethics, according to Simon Critchley, 'is defined as the calling into question of my freedom and spontaneity, that is to say, my subjectivity, by the other person (*autrui*)'

- (1996: 32). What this ‘calling into question’ involves is an acknowledgement of the other as absolutely irreducible to the categories of the self, and this irreducibility, as I am about to argue, is fundamentally dependent on time or, more specifically, *diachrony*.
- 10 See, for example, Judith Butler, ‘Ethical Ambivalence’ (2000: 15–28); and ‘Conversational Break’ (2001a: 260–4). For a slightly more sympathetic reading of Levinas dating from the same time, see Judith Butler, ‘Giving an Account of Oneself’ (2001b: 22–40).
 - 11 See especially Homi Bhabha, ‘Four Views on Ethnicity’ (1998: 38).
 - 12 For an excellent discussion of the ethical appeal of iterability which goes much beyond what I can discuss in this article, see Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, ‘From Euthanasia to the Other of Reason’ (1997: 115–40). In this article Ziarek points out that, in his more recent work, Derrida’s interest in ethics brings him to extend the scope of iterability beyond the purely epistemological terms of his early work: ‘What is frequently ignored . . . is that Derrida’s later work, influenced by Levinas’ conception of ethics, develops yet another modality of performativity – it rethinks iteration, which already links repetition to alterity, in the context of the ethical obligation to the other and a call for justice’ (ibid.: 131).
 - 13 Marc Guillaume offers a succinct explanation of the distinction between otherness and alterity when he says: ‘dans tout autre, il y a l’autrui – ce qui n’est pas moi, ce qui est différent de moi, mais que je peux comprendre, voire assimiler – et il y a aussi une altérité radicale, inassimilable, incompréhensible et même impensable. Et la pensée occidentale ne cesse de prendre l’autre pur l’autrui, de *réduire* l’autre à autrui’ (quoted in Docherty, 1996: 6).
 - 14 An example of the first line of critique can be found in Albert Wendt, ‘Tatauing *the Post-Colonial Body*’ (1997: 111–12). For examples of the second type of attack, in particular as directed against Robert Young and his enthusiastic embrace of deconstruction/hybridity as an ethical means of decentring Western discursive essentialisms, see Arif Dirlik, ‘The Post-colonial Aura’ (1996: 298), and Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, ‘Cross-currents, Crosstalk: Race, “Postcoloniality,” and the Politics of Location’ (1996: 283–4).
 - 15 For particularly explicit rejections, in Derrida’s and Bhabha’s work, of the idea that deconstruction might seek to transcend binary oppositions through Hegelian *Aufhebung* and thus resolve the contradiction through a third term, see Jacques Derrida (1981: 43–4) and Homi Bhabha, ‘Translator Translated’ (1995: 110).
 - 16 I owe this distinction between ontological and performative hybridity to Avril Bell. See Avril Bell, ‘“Half-Castes” and “White Natives”: The Politics of Maori–Pakeha Hybrid Identities’ (2004: 121–38).
 - 17 The idea of the ‘to come’ is central to many of Derrida’s more recent texts. In a particularly lucid section, he distinguishes the ‘to come’ from more traditional understanding of futurity by emphasizing that it is not part of the metaphysics of presence: ‘I would distinguish between the future and what is to come. The future means something which will or shall be or should be, which will be present tomorrow. . . . The essence of the future is an essential relation to being, to being present. . . . Whereas the event as

such, that is, what is to come [*à-venir, venire*], does not necessarily come under the form of something present, is not something which would fall under the category of being present' (Derrida, 1997: 2).

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