

BHABHA INTRO

- Bhabha's work develops a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory: hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence. These concepts describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer, a power that is never as secure as it seems to be. This emphasis illuminates our present situation, in a world marked by a paradoxical combination of violently proclaimed cultural difference and the complexly interconnected networks of globalization. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. The authority of dominant nations and ideas is never as complete as it seems, because it is always marked by anxiety, something that enables the dominated to fight back.
- Bhabha's work emphasizes the active *agency* of the colonized.
- There are two things to keep in mind -

that, how rigid distinctions between the colonizer and colonized have always been impossible to maintain.

Second, through its conceptual vocabulary Bhabha's work demonstrates that the West is troubled by its 'doubles', in particular the East. These doubles force the West to explain its own identity and to justify its rational self-image.

- The meaning of culture is not simply imposed by the colonizer. The colonizer's cultural meanings are open to transformation by the colonized population: like any text, the meaning of colonial text cannot be controlled by its authors. When colonizer and colonized come together, there is an element of *negotiation* of cultural meaning.
- Bhabha's work explores how language transforms the way identities are structured when colonizer and colonized interact, finding that colonialism is marked by a complex economy of identity in which colonized and colonizer depend on each other.
- Bhabha is interested in a psychoanalytic approach to that power, and his work suggests that colonial discourse only *seems* to be successful in its domination of the colonized. Underneath its apparent success, this discourse is secretly marked by radical anxiety about its aims, its claims, and its achievements. So, we might ask the question, 'What does colonial discourse want?' The answer seems to be, it wants only domination of the colonized. This domination depends on the assertion of difference: the colonized are inferior to the colonizers. However, colonial authority secretly—rather, *unconsciously*—knows that this supposed difference is undermined by the real sameness of the colonized population.
- This unconscious knowledge is disavowed: sameness is simultaneously recognized and repudiated.
- Importantly, the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness leads to anxiety. Indeed, for Bhabha colonial power is anxious, and never gets what it wants—a stable, final distinction between the colonizers and the colonized. This anxiety opens a gap in colonial discourse—a gap that can be exploited by the colonized, the oppressed.

This emphasis on agency is Bhabha's originality, as his close readings seek out moments when the colonized resisted the colonizer, despite structures of violence and domination.

- According to Bhabha, Said minimizes spaces of resistance by producing a picture of the West endlessly and brutally subjugating the East. We should listen to the subaltern voice—the voice of the oppressed peoples falling outside histories of colonialism.

None the less, Bhabha is following Said's thought very closely: Bhabha's post-colonial criticism merely shifts our focus, so we see both colonizer and colonized.

Like Said, Bhabha suggests that traditional ways of thinking about the world have often been complicit with longstanding inequalities between nations and peoples. His work operates on the assumption that a traditional philosophical sense of the relationship between one's self and others, between subject and object, can be very damaging in its consequences— something we see too often in the encounter between different cultures.

If you know only too well where your identity ends and the rest of the world begins, it can be easy to define that world as other, different, inferior, and threatening to your identity and interests.

If cultures are taken to have stable, discrete identities, then the divisions between cultures can always become *antagonistic* but Bhabha establishes that they are rather *agnostic*.

- Bhabha's writing emphasizes the *hybridity* of cultures, which on one level simply refers to the mixed-ness, or even 'impurity' of cultures—so long as we don't imagine that any culture is really *pure*.

This term refers to an original mixed-ness within every form of identity.

- In the case of cultural identities, hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness.

Many literary writers have taken an interest in expressing hybrid cultural identities and using hybrid cultural forms—for example, novelist Salman Rushdie. Additionally, many non-literary writers like sociologists and anthropologists have explored this emphasis. Their writings undermine any claims to pure or authentic cultural identities or forms.

- Bhabha insists on hybridity's ongoing process. In fact, for Bhabha there are no cultures that come together leading to hybrid forms; instead, cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities.

Instead of beginning with an idea of pure cultures interacting, Bhabha directs our attention to what happens on the borderlines of cultures, to see what happens in-between cultures. He thinks about this through what he calls the *liminal*, meaning that which is on the border or the threshold.

The term stresses the idea that what is in-between settled cultural forms or identities—identities like self and other—is central to the creation of new cultural meaning.

To give privilege to liminality is to undermine solid, authentic culture in favour of unexpected, hybrid, and fortuitous cultures.

- It suggests that the proper location of culture is between the overly familiar forms of official culture. Because Bhabha focuses on signification (the creation of meaning) rather than physical locations (borders between nations), his position has been dismissed as idealistic and unrealistic.

However, when he refers to the location of culture, this location is not metaphorical as opposed to literal. Instead, the location is both spatial and temporal: the liminal is often found in particular (post-colonial) social spaces, but also marks the constant process of creating new identities (their open-endedness or their 'becoming').

- Hybridity and liminality do not refer only to space, but also to time: one assumption that Bhabha's work undermines is the idea that people living in different spaces (for example, nations or whole continents) are living at different stages of 'progress'.

- The emphasis on hybridity and the liminal is important because colonial discourses have often set up distinctions between pure cultures. Colonial power, for Bhabha, worked to divide the world into self and other, in order to justify the material inequalities central to colonial rule.
- When Bhabha comes to study colonial power, he argues that it is necessary to do something different. In other words, to continue thinking in terms of self and other, but simply to reverse the value of self and other so that the colonizer becomes morally inferior, is not a productive approach and in fact does not offer any real change. For example, to challenge the oppression of women by merely turning the tables and oppressing men instead is not going to offer any long-term solutions for anyone. This is just as true of the legacies of colonialism and racism.
- Bhabha's approach highlights the ways colonialism has been much more than the simple domination of one group by another.

He stresses the unexpected forms of resistance that can be found in the history of the colonized, and the equally unexpected anxieties that plagued the colonizer despite his apparent mastery.

Most often, he achieves these ends simultaneously, by picking on one phenomenon in which both colonizer and colonized participated, such as the circulation of colonial stereotypes.

- Iteration—repeatability or iterability—is one of the processes from which meaning derives. However, this repeatability is not just the simple reproduction of identical marks in other times and places. (without repetition meaning cannot be arrived at)

By deconstruction is meant, among other things, showing how apparently simple binary oppositions—for example presence as opposed to absence, or speech as opposed to writing—are in fact extremely complex. This aspect of Derrida's work is important to Bhabha, who finds that the oppositions of colonizer/colonized or metropolis/colony are also complicated and interwoven.

- Bhabha situates the Derridean idea of iteration in the context of the 'statement'. This is a term with a specific meaning that he takes from the work of Foucault, another great influence. Foucault explored how disciplines, bodies of knowledge and institutions—many of the most important of which have been colonial—developed. His work helps us analyse 'colonial statements'—statements that make up colonial discourse.
- These understandings are, however, always imperfect, as Bhabha remarks: 'any change in the statement's conditions of use and reinvestment, any alteration in its field of experience or verification, or indeed any difference in the problems to be solved, can lead to the emergence of a new statement: the difference of the same.'
- That is, the meaning of a statement can change as its context, or the function it is intended to perform, changes. This is a difference which comes about through iteration, and it is something Bhabha finds in many colonial statements. His reading method is alive to the subtle differences in meaning that colonial authority is unable to control because of the logic of iteration.
- Critical positions do not, on this iterative logic, stand external to the situation under consideration: one cannot simply 'apply' a critical position to a situation like a mathematical formula.
- Bhabha writes of critical thinking as a *process*, rather than the adoption of pre-arranged, pre-determined positions; he refers to 'the boundary and location of the event of theoretical critique which does not *contain* the truth'
- The discourse of politics cannot maintain absolutely self-sufficient and fully representative political actors, acting without division or doubt and with complete transparency. Each actor or subject is divided, and each constructed identity is always split.

- As with much of Bhabha's early work, 'Remembering Fanon' was revised as part of *The Location of Culture*, and what I will say here considers that book's 'Interrogating Identity'.
- The way Bhabha reads Fanon is again literary. He pays close attention to the interplay and juxtaposition of different rhetorical forms in Fanon's text, as the following suggests: 'As Fanon's texts unfold, the scientific fact comes to be aggressed by the experience of the street; sociological observations are intercut with literary artefacts, and the poetry of liberation is brought up against the leaden, deadening prose of the colonized world.'
- Bhabha writes that 'Fanon is the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth. He may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change'

SUMMARY

- For Bhabha, there is more to reading—and to influence—than merely extracting useful information and discarding the leftovers of unfortunate texts. What the reader brings to the process of reading makes it live, makes it 'catch fire'. And the fact that colonial discourse continues to have readers indicates that people want it to live, people believe it has importance for our contemporary lives.
- Reading makes something happen, and in fact reading itself makes history. Such a reading practice looks to the colonial past as part of a process of thought, producing new answers to the problems of how we live now. The colonial is not locked in the past, but is instead located firmly in the present.

From Derrida and Foucault, Bhabha takes an analysis of thought's complexity, and a philosophical approach stressing difference: this extends particularly into discourses, and the ways in which different contexts change the meaning of terms and ideas.

He has also developed a critical thought emphasizing process. Moreover, this thinking is specific to each situation, and cannot offer a 'global' answer to specific problems or issues without understanding specific histories.

In his account of liberalism and of J.S.Mill's essay, Bhabha demonstrates this, and shows that, at the heart of this statement of liberal values lies an ambiguous split which reveals how difference lies at the core of liberal discourse.

- In his account of Marxism, he has suggested that—as Fanon warned—a rush to offer a final and universal answer ignores particular moments of colonial suffering that need to be understood and explored in detail.