

Rethinking hybridity: Interrogating mixedness

Abstract This article discusses definitions and debates about the terms 'hybridity' and 'mixedness' across the natural and human and social sciences, including the work of the cultural theorist Homi Bhabha. Using the argonomic idea of homology, that refers to correspondences in both the quality and the states of a thing or phenomena, insights are offered into how we might think of the layers and processes of mixing that can be involved in the event of hybridity. This is particularly important because discussions of mixedness in the social sciences, and in everyday life, can run together different phenomena, strata, states, their sensual traits and their relative maturity or in/stabilities. In the process, different modalities of mixing can be subsumed or collapsed. The article also provides a summary of the key ideas and arguments made by contributors to the issue. *Subjectivity* (2014) 7, 1–17. doi:10.1057/sub.2013.16

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Everything begins by referring back (*par le renvoi*), that is to say, does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partition divides, from the very start, every *renvoi*, there is not a single *renvoi* but from then on, always, a multiplicity of *renvois*, so many different traces referring back to other traces, and to traces of others.

(Derrida, 1982, p. 324)

As if displacing purity was not enough, hybridity also asks that we do not begin with origins.¹ Without origins where do we begin? Who are we? And so it is that hybridity in its main contexts of use – as a metalanguage for biological, ethnic and cultural mixing – seems to undermine the subject from within and without. Bodies as singular and fenced-off are unfeasible. They become instead unfinished work-in-progress, constituted by their generous encounters with, and indebtedness to human and non-human others, an intermingling that can be prereflective, skipping subjective awareness altogether (see Diprose, 2002; Gunaratnam and Clark, 2012). The subject/object binary is also decoupled in the recognition that 'the material and the

social intertwine and interact in all manner of promiscuous combinations' (Whatmore, 2002, p. 4). And to the extent that hybridity connotes intimacy and the breaching of boundaries (see Anim-Addo, 2013), it is profoundly ambivalent, a phenomenon of many projections, affects and enthrallment. It can operate as a sign of violation and unwanted upheaval (Beckles, 2003), a synecdoche for a hopeful or 'happy' politics (Lionnet, 1991; Papastergiadis, 2005; Nava, 2007), and a site of suspicion and anxiety, subject to increasing biopolitical surveillance and administrative monitoring (see Aspinall, 2012; Edwards *et al*, 2012a). Yet, for all the disturbance that comes with it, at times, hybridity in its 'quotidian normalcy' (Werbner, 1997, p. 4) is not a big deal. It is banal, unremarkable, everywhere (Pieterse, 2001). As du Coudray (2002) notes, hybridity is not new, despite the contemporary celebration of it 'as a response to the demands of a fragmented, multi-dimensional, postmodern world, one in which shifting boundaries and a multiplicity of subject positions make it impossible to assume a homogeneous or stable subjectivity' (p. 1).

In this special issue, we take up these provocations and paradoxes of hybridity, and its vernacular counterpart mixedness, to examine the play of boundary making, testing and breaching for the subject as she makes and takes shape in her relations with others and changing biocultural arrangements and flows. 'If subjectivity is relational and metastable by reference to the material, discursive and psychological conditions that constitute it', Venn (2009, p. 4) muses 'it would follow that dislocations provoked by displacement occasion mutations in subjectivity and identity'. He continues:

The problems for theory concern finding ways of understanding the mechanisms and the means that enable subjects to explore and express dissident or disjunct identities, and/ or that provide the supports for the critical distancing which is integral to the process of disidentification. (p. 5)

For us, as contributors, the intensifying attention to hybridity and mixing marks an unfolding exploration of the bio-psycho-social that brings with it possibilities for imaginative thinking and empirical investigation of the energetic networks and forces in which the 'mechanisms and means' of subjectivity are enmeshed. While all the essays deal with race and its intersections, the range of topics and conditions of subjectivity that we engage shows something of the diverse interests of the wider field of what might be called hybridography. Whether it is through the hybrid figure of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991), the monstrous (Mittman and Dendle, 2012), 'trans' media platforms (Hay and Couldry, 2011) and intertextuality (Mabardi, 2000), the body that pulses with a 'foreign'-transplanted heart of another (Nancy, 2002), or the mixed-race child ruminating on the painful and comforting make-believe of narrative identity (see Kay, 2011; Ali, 2012), the contributors to this issue are interested

in examining and figuring out when and how mixture matters for the subject, even when the repression or suppression of mixing and hybridity is a tacit, normative baseline. There are tentative lines drawn that you will notice between hybridity/mixedness as a ‘thing’ and hybridisation as a process involving traversing, intermingling, testing, leaking, incorporating, dividing, irruption, dissolving, transacting, intra-acting and the such-like. In the realm of subjectivity and experience, this is most often a conceptual rather than an empirical distinction.

In thinking with both the phenomenon and process of hybridisation each contributor engages, in one way or another, with taxonomies and the disruptions that mixture signals. And so they all come up against matters of correspondence or what has been called homology. Homology is a botanic concept that is used in the field of plant morphology, which is concerned with the form and evolution of plants.² Homology is about categorisation and refers to correspondences in both the quality and the states of a thing or phenomena, *what* it is and *how* it is. As Emma Uprichard points out, quoting Sneath and Sokal (1973), homology, a pre-Darwinian idea, is the basis of all taxonomies:

Homology may be loosely described as compositional and structural correspondence. By compositional correspondence we mean a qualitative resemblance in terms of ... constituents; by structural correspondence we refer to similarity in terms of (spatial or temporal) arrangement of parts
(p. 77)

Homology is helpful as a heuristic device in thinking about hybridity because it prompts deeper thinking about the layers and processes of hybridisation that can be involved in the ‘gathering’ of the event of a thing (Ingold, 2010) that are so often glossed over in social science discussions. For example, in classical morphology, the basic and mutually distinct features of a plant are root, stem and leaf (Sattler, 1996). Roots draw up water and nutrients from the soil; a stem is a part of the vascular system of the plant, bearing shoots and leaves; leaves are photosynthetic organs. It is through these distinct qualities and their clear-cut functions that we can identify a plant. But this is not always so. In contrast to the assumption of categorical distinctions, ‘fuzzy’ or ‘open’ morphology recognises continuums and intermediaries where the arrangement of parts or ‘structural correspondence’ in a plant – such as the root–shoot distinction and the stem–leaf difference – are more open and unstable, resulting in intermediary features and functions (see Rutishauser and Isler, 2001), ‘queering what counts as nature’ as Haraway (1994, p. 59) might see it.

Crucially, as Sattler suggests, the assumed continuum does not have to be linear in its organisation. It can be heterogeneous and dynamic, reminiscent in some ways of Grosz’s (1994, p. 23) insistence that the multiplicity of bodies is best imagined as existing within a ‘discontinuous, non-homogenous, nonsingular’ field.

What this means in the world of plants is that a feature of a plant such as a leaf, as well as where that leaf appears and what it does, is potentially insecure; a lively and unfolding ‘process combination’ where a leaf can be partially or wholly replaced by an axillary shoot, that may or may not correspond in its functioning as a leaf, that is, as an organ of photosynthesis (see Jeune *et al*, 2006; Hirayama *et al*, 2007). Crucially, Sattler notes, the assumed continuum is heterogeneous and dynamic, similar to Delanda’s (2002) ‘state space’ that both plays host to and is a vital part of the process of interrelations. As Sattler (1996) describes it, ‘the structural continuum is a continuum of process combinations’ that can evolve and change over time with maturation (p. 578). A recurring theme in fuzzy morphology is the need to hold process and quality together so that intermediary or compound qualities and states can be acknowledged alongside categorical distinctions.

In the following discussions, contributors take up some of the questions, conundrums and queering that arise in the implicit homologous relations that ideas and discussions of hybridity and mixedness can assume. For instance, when we talk about hybridity and mixing, are we referring to the crossing of categorical ‘either-or’ Aristotelian distinctions *between* classes of qualities and properties such as ethnicities or religion and/or are we thinking about continuums as Groszian ‘fields’? Can correspondence be total (as in a 1:1 correspondence) and/or partial? (see Hall, 1994). And might the temporality of structural correspondence be reversible, so that hybridisations can peel back on themselves with prior distinctions re-emerging with changing circumstances, such as when dementia rearranges migrant sensibilities (Gunaratnam, this issue)? In investigating the manifestation and extents of various border crossings and alliances, all of the essays make explicit the demands that hybridity and mixing make upon analytic frameworks, politics and daily life.

The articles will be of particular relevance to those who are interested in the hybridisation of disciplinary approaches to subjectivity. Underpinning the various contributions, authors are engaging with a series of common and interrelated questions: What counts as hybridity for the subject? What techniques and idioms are employed/deployed to achieve the representation of hybridity and mixedness across a range of experiences and sites? Do our analytic categories, methods and ontologies lock hybridising phenomena and processes into a false problematic? Where do our conceptual categories and language falter and/or cease to signify? What analytic, methodological and political challenges does receptivity to mixture and the breaching of boundaries suggest? How is a marked hybridity lived?

The innovation of the contributions that follow are achieved in three main ways. First, by discussing the subjects and phenomena that signify hybridity and considering them with regard to specific forms, processes, extents and effects. Second, through a hybridising of disciplinary perspectives (see also Pieterse, 2001), including work from psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural studies, geography, sociology and social policy. And third, by bringing together authors working with novel materials – archives, neurology, narrative and autobiography – and in different sites.

Discussions and Terms

If hybridity forewarns us that we need to think more carefully about the ontology, politics and circumstances of subjectivity, it does so from a semantic field that is itself pluralised and wandering, with a to-ing and fro-ing between material and cultural definitions, and attempts to transport terms from one domain to the other (Yao, 2003). Discussions weave between the empirical, theoretical, technological and experiential and are spoken through the languages of the natural, social and human sciences, autobiography, fiction, literary criticism, art, activism and social policy. Not surprisingly, the vocabularies used to convey ideas, modalities and the differing circumstances of hybridity are varied – creolisation, *métissage*, introgression, bricolage, *mêlée* and transculturation are some of the terms used.

As Erasmus (2011) has pointed out in a historical investigation of creole, its cultural formation has been differentiated by varying heritages and contexts of use. The term has been deployed to connote vernacular linguistic fusions, colonial populations and relationships to the metropole. Comparing its use across three sites: in postcolonial literary and cultural theory in the Francophone Caribbean; as part of an anthropological ‘mestizo logics’ (Amselle, 1998) in West Africa; and its signification in political theory in South Africa, Erasmus writes:

Creole as a designation has repeatedly been through the discursive washing machine. It was bleached by those for whom the dividend of whiteness was significant It was dyed by those who, in the ‘looking’, genealogical and social regimes of ‘race’, could not recreate themselves as ‘white’. It was and is dyed by those who attempt either to reclaim Africanity, or to imbue ‘mixed-ness’ with coherence. (p. 646)

The shifting semiotic and geosocial freight of vocabulary is especially relevant in making sense of the contemporary suspicion and antipathy towards the use of the term hybridity in the social and human sciences. At its root *hybrida* has genetic meaning (Easthope, 1998), signifying the offspring of a tame sow and wild boar that as a result of crossbreeding have enhanced traits, known as *heterosis* or hybrid vigour. In the more recent past, hybridity has been used to denote human intervention in the life of plants.

Although the nature of the conceptual distinctions between hybridity and mixedness are somewhat vague, for some theorists, especially in the social sciences, the distinction is political: the racist biologism of hybridity remains irreconcilable with its re-appropriation as a critique of monologic nations, cultures and language. ‘The major difficulty with the concept of cultural “hybridity”’, Ifekwunigwe (1999) contends, ‘is the way in which it has been appropriated by mainstream academic discourse without recognition of its problematic origins in nineteenth century “race” science fiction’ (p. 9). This divesting of race of anything reminiscent of biological or material underpinnings reflects a prevailing social

science response to the damaging history of raciology and racism (see Gilroy, 2000). In order to subvert the violations and essentialisms of race thinking, race has been treated as a wholly symbolic venue, a venue at which biology is not welcome.

Ifekwunigwe's mistrust of the semiotics of hybridity in this broader context signals its second use in critical race studies, where it refers to the mixing of racialised identities and to those 'whose cultural referents originate from a range of sources and places' (Fortier, 2008, p. 39). Framed within analyses of histories and enduring practices of racialisation, the supranormality of hybrid vigour has been seen as supplemented by the pathologisation, exoticisation and the commodifying of inter-ethnic mixing, yielding a multiplicity of subject positions and identifications. The metaphors of spies, tricksters, flies-on-the-wall and ambassadors in use among Canadian politicians, journalists and social scientists convey some of the discursive registers used to signify mixed-race subjects in contemporary circulation (Mahtani, 2005).

Because of the biological etymology of hybridity and its nineteenth-century manifestations in scientific racism, and also with respect to vernacular self-identifications (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002), *mixedness* and *mixing* have been the preferred terms of address and of empirical investigation (see Edwards *et al*, 2012a, b). Mixed-race studies are now a recognised multi-disciplinary field, where, in addition to theoretical discussions, empirical research has included the interrogation of census categories and questions (Aspinall, 2012); ethnographic research (Ali, 2003) and the qualitative investigation of identifications among mixed-race young people (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Song and Aspinall, 2012); and autobiographical explorations of faith mixing (Lester Murad, 2005). Despite a recoiling from hybridity's genetic referents, the questions of genealogy, inheritance and the upheaval to binarism that the original formulation of hybridity connotes have been taken up in the social sciences. In these discussions, the challenging assumptions about purity have led to a sturdy analysis and critique of the discursive playing out of colonial legacies, where the ambivalence and ambiguity of hybridity have been theorised as interrupting racial hierarchies.

Homi Bhabha's account of cultural hybridity, developed from the influences of Marxism, Bakhtinian philology and psychoanalysis, is probably the most well known of such critiques. The hybridity that Bhabha proposed, over two decades ago, is discursive and liminal, entrenched in the discursive trouble between the I and the You. 'The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement', Bhabha insists. Rather, the acts of proposition and enunciation require an intervening 'Third Space' because 'there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of its positionality; no way that context can be mimetically read off from the content' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 53). Therefore, Bhabha's 'Third Space' is one within which novel meanings and subject positions can be manufactured and

performed in the communication and interpretation of meaning. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford (1990), Bhabha explains:

I try to talk about hybridity through a psychoanalytic analogy, so that identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness. But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (p. 211)

There are two points to note here in Bhabha's conceptualisation of cultural hybridity and how his ideas have been taken up by some of the contributors in this issue. First, the essays dislodge the prominence given by Bhabha to identification as 'analogy' that does not treat identificatory processes and practices as embodied and sensual. Second, we all engage with Bhabha's suggestion that cultural hybridity gives rise to 'something different, something new and unrecognisable'. For example, using a psycho-social approach to qualitative data gathered from first-time mothers, Hollway and Elliott examine narrative and observational accounts of how cultural identifications were enacted in the transition to becoming a mother for one Bangladeshi mother 'Liyanna'. They describe the relation of subjective becoming and meaning making as a complex and precarious business, accomplished over time and within particular constraints. Hollway and Elliott theorise this process as involving not only internalised identifications but also experimental bodily excursions 'outwards', replete with affect and conflict and reassembled within the intersubjective exchanges of the interview.

The essays by Ahmed and Aragon look into the ways in which the destabilisations and rearrangements of the sensibilities of race signified by mixedness can be recuperated selectively into normativity, so that 'something new' can revivify social hierarchies. For Ahmed, using queer phenomenology, mixed-racedness is an orientation where 'mixed-race intimacies' bear the weight of responsibility for symbolising the overcoming of racism. Should they fail, they become the proof of race's intransigence. In the world of race classification in North America in the first half of the twentieth century, Aragon follows the contradictory managing and accommodation of the *mestizaje*/mixedness of Mexican peoples, to show the schizoid operations of racial hierarchies and the inconsistent mobilisation of phenotype, biology and culture to secure the illusion of hermetically sealed race boundaries.

Materialising Hybridity

The attention that the issue gives to both hybridity and mixedness with regard to longstanding debates in the natural and social sciences is deliberate. Some of the contributors want to capture the substance of encountering and intermixture that hybridity as a biological and botanic formulation first signalled. And some are interested in the contemporary, affective and socio-cultural living-out of all manner of mixing and melding within the flows of multicultural and transnational living. In investigating various practices, forms and degrees of cultural, affective, bodily and spatio-temporal mixing, contributors try hard to avoid another round of pitting socio-cultural and biological accounts of human variation against each other. Instead, we are keen to take seriously the questions that are raised by the history of the idea of hybridity for what Grosz (1994) has called 'psychical corporeality' (p. 22), but we endeavour to do so in ways that de-centre the notion of 'pure forms' (Latour, 1993, p. 78).

The work of the Maori curator George Hubbard and the biogeographer Robin Craw (Craw and Hubbard, 1993) points to some of the creative incitements that can flow from thinking about the material and cultural entanglements of hybridity together and across disciplinary boundaries. Hubbard and Craw displace a Darwinian investment in certain privileged originary centres from which hybridity becomes mobility out from an origin. Instead, they offer a reading of the 'natural' history of Aotearoa/New Zealand as 'a biogeographic/geological composite or hybrid area, an orogenic collage of fragments Its animals and plants are an uplifted, downwarped and tectonically transposed hybrid swarm' (p. 31). In this reading, hybridity as a generative force can emerge from staying in place amidst surrounding commotion and upheaval. Rather than covering over the agronomic referents in hybridity as biologically determining, Craw and Hubbard envisage other possibilities

In botanical nomenclature, to be hybrid is to be crossed. Hybridity is indicated by the use of the multiplication sign X between the names of the parents. The hybrid has no Proper Name or formal identity. It is a multiplication, not an addition – a process of outcrossing by which diversity is increased, difference maximised and the past recycled in differential recombinations.

These events of conservation, decolonisation and recombination are appropriate to this age of inter-species communication, molecular drive and morphic resonance. Earth and life evolve together as a sequence of simultaneous events in which populations remelt, recrystallise and hybridise. (pp. 31–32)

The recognition that assemblages between biology, geology, culture and embodiment can dissipate rather than consolidate essentialism brings to mind

more recent work on the relational materialities of gender and race. Saldanha's (2006) irreverent 'machinic geography of phenotype' is one example. Saldanha suggests that unlocking the hard categorising of racial thinking entails a pluralist ontology that works between the social and other diverse forces, including biology. The result is not so much the elimination of race but its scattering into 'a thousand tiny races' (p. 22) and possibilities. Applying his approach to the understanding of phenotype, Saldanha contends that:

Machinism asks how incredibly diverse processes (such as agriculture and sexuality, religion and property law) interlock, like cogs and wheels instead of signifiers and signifieds It understands entities not as perfectly knowable cause-effect sequences, but as bundles of virtual capacities. Approaching phenotype machinically means being prepared for the unpreparable: phenotype connects in infinite ways. (p. 19)

Whether through the whirring machinery of genealogy and inheritance (Ahmed, Hollway and Elliott), the biocultural (Aargon and Gunaratnam) or the aesthetic-affective and its generous openness to the other (Venn), the authors all push at and question the extents of the relationality at stake in hybridisation. There are two central interests that characterise the taking up of such provocations. First, we are keen to examine what hybridity and mixedness as modes of encounter and technologies of living-with can contribute to our understanding of how, at particular times, and in some situations, certain bodies and inheritances can seem to cohere and/or unravel, to be determining and indeterminate, in the event of being 'mixed'. Here we are in the realm of a vital relationality, a realm with implications for varied conversations about affective capacities (Massumi, 2002), the opening up of matter to emergence (Grosz, 2010) and the dynamism of substance as a displacement of a metaphysics of essence (Barad, 2007) and presence (Harman, 2011). Despite the diversity of approaches and fields of interest, some of which have not directly engaged with social hierarchies, particularly of race, these literatures provoke some common questions for hybridity: What opens up and what might be effaced when we think of mixing without recourse to a beginning and an end? How might we understand the continuing pertinence of the distinctions drawn between purity and mixture? What temporalities are involved in ideas about the closures and openness to mixing of subjects, things, activities and forces?

Second, we are interested in the biopolitical and affective economies of flow, staying put, meeting-up and alliance and what these might tell us about identification, subjection and sociality. And all the while we are conscious of how hybridity and racialised mixing bring us into the realm of the 'treacherous bind' (Radhakrishnan, 1996) of working with racial taxonomies (Gunaratnam, 2003). Here, we run the risk of turning the vitality of relations into a fetishized object and erasing the stutter in the response to the question

that some of us routinely face, but which applies to us all: ‘But where are you from?’ In such instances, the risk is not only one of recentring an unmarked normativity, but of falling back again and again to an origin and a ‘calculus of one plus one, the logic wherein pre-existent identities are *then* conjoined and melded’ (Kirby, 1997, p. 147 original emphasis). ‘Who, me confused? Ambivalent?’ Anzaldúa (1981) once asked, ‘Not so. Only your labels split me’ (p. 205).

Our underlying interest in these debates and conundrums is to illuminate, via the contaminations and breaches of hybridity, what is at stake in the investments in the pure and the unmixed.

The Essays

In her paper on the ‘one drop rule’, Margarita Aragon investigates the historical paradoxes of how the technology of racial classification has been applied to Mexican and African-American peoples. Using archival documents, Aragon discusses the modern classificatory regime of race, whereby individuals with any traceable African ancestry were legally classified as ‘Negro’, whereas Mexicans with a predominance of indigenous ancestry were classified as ‘white’. For Aragon, both categorisations trouble commonly held assumptions that the US regime of racial classification functioned primarily upon the principle of racial purity. The so-called ‘one-drop rule’, which stipulated that any person with even ‘one drop’ of African ‘blood’ was black, Aragon argues, explicitly acknowledged and responded to racial mixedness. If racial boundaries were not indeed porous and permeable, the regulation of racial mixing would be unnecessary. The relationships between monolithic race categories and the mixedness of those they were imposed upon did not entail outright denial or erasure, but a more complex and aqueous biopolitics of differential management, accommodation and ‘forgetting’. In order to understand the varied discursive and legal meanings and status assigned to Mexican and African-American mixedness, Aragon suggests, we need to consider two interrelated geosocialities: the located social circumstances produced by conquest and immigration, and those produced by slavery.

In ‘Race and the Disorders of Identity’, Couze Venn converses with more recent debates. This is a terrain marbled with the tensions of a double-think: how to imagine difference ‘in a way that does not abolish the desire for a sense of belonging grounded in attachment to soil, to the milieu, to the symbolic universe sedimented in language, rituals and an aesthetic world of art, music, writings’, while finding ways of ‘resisting the colonisation of this lifeworld by a power that separates, hierarchises and subjectifies, and ontologises differences by naturalising them’. The ambivalent dynamics of such racialisation, in Venn’s analysis, are

framed by processes of reconstitution in which vernacular affinities and disjunctures are constantly reworked in the day-to-day – sometimes convivial – living out of hybrid or plural identities and cultures. What is needed, Venn believes, drawing from Revel, is a hopeful ‘politics of the commons’ to counteract the proliferation of new racisms, fundamentalism and ethnocentrism. What this means for the subject is a relational space of ‘disidentification’ that breaks with ego-centred ontologies. The onto-epistemological challenge for analysis is to provide an account of the existential operations of being ‘in relation’, whereby a subject is both becoming and already constituted by the affective and material generosity of others. In other words, subjectivity contains both anterior and interior excesses, a ghostly surplus in subject formation. The role of the aesthetic-expressive is crucial for Venn in captivating and channelling affects and desire that simulatenously produce the estrangement necessary for a questioning of the sovereignty of the self, a move with parallels to Rancière’s (2010) ‘dissensus’.

A psycho-social concern with racialised mixing also underpins the article by Wendy Hollway and Heather Elliott that uses data derived from a project on the identity transitions involved when women become mothers for the first time. The study was carried out in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London, an area that has come to epitomise the fast-flowing polyglot cultures celebrated in discussions of globalisation and multicultural conviviality. Not surprisingly, perhaps, several of the mothers in the study had ethnically mixed babies, with other vertical and lateral heritage differences, posing challenges for the retrospective operationalisation of cultural hybridity in Hollway and Elliott’s analysis. In Homi Bhabha’s rendering of cultural hybridity the object of analysis is culture, rather than subjective experience, and the assumption is that cultural mixing leads to the disruption of identity categories and hierarchies. Using an in-depth case study example of a Bangladeshi-heritage mother, Hollway and Elliott use interview interactions with ‘Liyanna’ to examine how mixity is produced and negotiated within the inter-subjectivity of the interviews. The salience of affect and materiality within these processes cannot be preknown they contend, but must be understood in relation to the exchanges between biographical relationships, the contemporary discomfort of racial terminology and how identifications are made through the quality of what subjects do. And when it comes to actual occasions of doing, Hollway and Elliott refuse a ‘hollowing out of the psychological’ (Blackman *et al*, 2008) or a separating out of the personal, the material and the cultural. Instead, they theorise mixing as being characterised by a relentless succession of emergent encounters between desire, discomfort and their limits – that can at times reiterate racial thinking.

The question of whether undecided excess – an in-betweenness flowing between the sensible and insensible – might be a way of generating new insights and anti-hegemonic subject positions is a theme taken up in *Morbid Mixtures* by Yasmin Gunaratnam. From the other pole of the biographical lifecycle to

Hollway and Elliott, Gunaratnam investigates ‘diasporic neurologies’ as they manifest themselves for dying migrants to the United Kingdom. By bringing debility, pain and disease to Homi Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’ of cultural hybridity, Gunaratnam adds bio-semiotic matter to Bhabha’s theorising of the textual play of difference. Through three case examples that show progressively the interrelations and liminalities between the bio and the social, we are invited to consider the uneven coextensiveness of biopathology with social events and how subjective experience can be affected and rearranged in the process. Rather than thinking of such modes of coimplication as necessarily democratic, a more complex relationality is suggested, wherein subjective experience can be constituted by both degrees and kinds of correspondence, with some potential for concatenations to unravel. There are always cultural antecedents to disability, disease and death, Gunaratnam acknowledges, but physical pain, tumours, changed biochemistry and drug regimens can all intervene in and reassemble subjectivity, queering linear temporality and the somatic. Gunaratnam argues that we cannot avoid the materiality of the body in our considerations of racial admixture and how the bio-social can write social histories of race and gendered violation with in and on the body, even when it is fading and depleted.

In ‘Mixed Orientations’, Sara Ahmed approaches subjective experiencing and embodiment using phenomenology – and some tables – to think about mixed intimacies within the mixed-race family. For Ahmed, ‘Mixed intimacies bear the weight of a national fantasy: they either work to demonstrate the overcoming of racism and conflict (a fantasy in which they *must* work in order to show the healing of the nation) or they don’t work and demonstrate the impossibility of that overcoming’. Ahmed turns her attention to two predominant mixed-race imaginaries. In the first, there is the idealisation of the mixed-race body as the incarnation of harmonious, ‘happy’ mixture (see also Lo, 2000): a meeting point between two races, where some originary purity is assumed and where anxieties about interracial relations can be displaced. The second, ‘older’ imaginary situates the mixed-race body within the logic of the double negative: as ‘not’ being white or black, haunted by all that it is not. In the first version, a mixed-race child inherits both lines of her genealogy and brings them together. In the second version, the mixed-race child does not inherit either line and so has ‘nothing’ to follow. She is in effect lost, disorientated and out of time within the lines of ‘likeness’ bestowed by inheritance and heteronormative genealogy. Using a ‘queer phenomenology’ (Ahmed, 2006) and autoethnography, Ahmed examines the political potential of how the very failure of inheritance can provide a means for grasping ‘what’ is inherited and what is forgotten, opening up new possibilities and ‘re-orientations’. Although her focus is primarily upon the spatialisation of race, Ahmed’s discussion of the spoiling of genealogy by racialised mixing and queer bodies disturbs the time of identity as simultaneous and commensurable (see also Bastian, 2011), articulating with broader scholarship on queer (Puar, 2005) and

post-diasporic temporalities (Prabhu, 2007). By reading queer orientations into racial mixedness, one of Ahmed's most compelling incitements lies in the phenomenological tributaries that she opens up between queer and racially mixed subjects.

Process and Purée

The essays in this issue are diverse in their approaches and topics. They articulate important discursive, phenomenological and political challenges for living with, thinking through and investigating admixture. When we think of mixedness in everyday terms, we can sometimes run together different phenomena, strata, states, their sensual traits and their relative maturity or in/stabilities (see also Harman, 2011). In the process we can subsume or collapse different modalities of mixing. Somewhat consistent with 'process thinking' where 'relations and relationality cut through and across all spheres, regardless of the distinctions that are drawn between them' (Fraser *et al*, 2005, p. 3), this running together of phenomena, forces and processes into a conceptual purée can be limiting. It can reduce the opportunities to think about the uneven play of intra-actions across forms and states of hybridisation and how these in turn acquire various powers of signification through the different features of the networks they inhabit and the methods that are used to produce knowledge about them. However, as Stengers (2000) has argued, we must also recognise how certain phenomena can be indifferent to the interventions of the people and tools that are used to study them.

In considering the breadth of the papers in this collection, it is important to reiterate that all of the articles question and intervene in the politics of identity thinking that surrounds the people and phenomena that come to be regarded as being mixed. In approaching entanglement in this way, we hope to open up new ways of thinking and also investigating miscegenous alliances and their histories. Underlying each essay is an implicit question: What if the border crossings and liminality of hybridity might provide novel resources and lines of flight from the violence of social hierarchies? And there is always a 'What if' because, as the authors demonstrate, we cannot know in advance the effects of the undecidability of mixing, given that the context in which hybridity unfolds or enters is itself a part of the process.

About the Author

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Notes

- 1 This way of approaching genealogy also informs Butler's (1990) genealogical critique as one which 'investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (p. ix original emphasis).
- 2 The botanic terrain of unfolding process combinations in homology in the study of plant evolution has another resonance with regard to affect. Recent work by Stenner and Greco (2013) has used a flower metaphor to rethink Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect, positing affectivity as a 'mediating vector' between the duplicating impetus of consciousness and organic processes within the body. They write:

Affectivity, in this account, has its roots in organic processes but its flowers take the form of particular qualities that pervade the imagery of conscious experience, tingeing it with the intensity of value. In patterning experience into priorities of importance, affectivity 'borrows' just enough from material processes to make immaterial processes matter. (p. 53)

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