Essentially Constructed

On Anti-Essentialism and Social Constructionism in Contemporary Anthropological Theory

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Introduction

Essentialism is an unpopular word in contemporary anthropology. One would probably be hard pressed to find an anthropologist who would adopt any traditional essentialist position. Indeed, uses of the word "essentialism" occasionally seem little different from the uses of a derogative. Anti-essentialism is the norm today and several forms of contemporary anthropology make it a basic tenet as well as a goal of inquiry. Essentialism, however, is not universally rejected beyond the confines of anthropology. Furthermore, essentialisms and anti-essentialisms alike come in various shapes and sizes. Thus, one cannot simply reject essentialism and adopt anti-essentialism, without considering what essentialism one is fighting and what anti-essentialism one is prepared to endorse. But in the case of many anthropologists such awareness seems little elaborated. This situation, I think, warrants some inquiry. The overall theme of this thesis, therefore, is the exploration of the current anti-essentialist climate in anthropology with a look towards its implications, its potential, and its limitations. This will be done through an elaboration of the essentialism/social constructionism dichotomy and its relations to anti-essentialism, which will be placed in a further relation to certain trends in anthropological theory past and present.

The first chapter will deal with essentialism as a philosophical position. Its purpose is to clarify, what different people are talking about when they use the word essentialism. The second chapter, in a similar vein, will look at the word social constructionism especially as it can be seen in opposition to essentialism. In the third and fourth chapters the focus is shifted from the broader philosophical discussion to its specific incarnation within anthropology. First, this will be done trough a reading of certain contemporary anthropologists and their usage of social constructionist ideas. Second, a reading of two classical anthropological texts will be made in order to show how they imply an essentialist understanding of culture. The next two chapters deal with hybridity theory including its basic positions, its theoretical vocabulary and the metaphorical underpinnings of this vocabulary. Hybridity theory is perhaps the most adamantly anti-essentialist position found in anthropology today and therefore it furnishes a useful point of departure for discussing both its potential and its

limitations. The thesis will then proceed with a chapter discussing essentialism in relation to hybridity theory and then end with a conclusion relating the departure of chapters 6, 7 and 8 to the preceding sections of the thesis.

This is a thoroughly theoretical thesis. There is little reference to events or phenomena beyond the realm of discourse. In that respect its method is thoroughly literary, although method is perhaps to strong a word to use. What this thesis consists of is readings of books, parts of books, articles, and parts of articles. These are delineated, juxtaposed, put into play, made to serve a common cause. The most frequently used representational trope used is synecdoche. A single or a couple of works by an author is used to stand in for a larger body of work. I thus make no claim to comprehensiveness in any sense of the word. The amount of material covered is large and not all of it has been covered with the detail one could wish for. It is however not the purpose of this thesis to give thorough histories of the development of essentialism, anti-essentialism, social constructionism, or for that matter of anything else. What I hope to deliver, instead, is an outline of these positions, their implications, and their consequences for anthropology as a discipline.

While there is no formal method from which I set out to investigate these positions, one word of caution is needed before proceeding. A recurring word throughout this thesis is "vocabulary". There will be much talk of the vocabulary of disciplines, of perspectives and of individual scholars. The word, however, is used in a specific sense derived from the philosopher Richard Rorty. A vocabulary in this sense is to be seen as a language game for describing (part of) reality, which does not mean that it represents or corresponds to reality. Nor is there any overarching meta-vocabulary to which all other vocabularies can be translated. Rather, different vocabularies coexist describing the same (parts of) reality because they are for some reason more useful to the purposes of particular people. This means that analysis must shift from the evaluation of individual statements and sentences to the evaluation of vocabularies in their entirety (Rorty 1989: 3-22). Vocabularies defined thusly, form a guiding thread throughout this thesis.

Essentialism as a philosophical position

Essentialism as a philosophical position can (as is usual) be traced back to Plato[1] and it has remained a part of the philosophical landscape ever since. Exactly how the position has been defended and opposed has varied over the centuries, but nonetheless it is an enduring member of the philosophical vocabulary. Here, I shall discuss two variants of philosophical essentialism: the Aristolean and the Kripkean. These have been chosen because they are generally considered the most influential versions of respectively classical and modern essentialism.

The Aristotelian formulation of essentialism, although it was set forth in the 4th century BCE, continues to have adherents to this very day. However given the immense influence of this formulation, as well as the considerable distance in the historical position of Aristotle and his present day exegetes it is unsurprising that the interpretation of his account is not entirely clear. There is in other words still considerable dispute among scholars as to what exactly Aristotelian essentialism entails, as by the way is the case with all of Aristotelian philosophy (Robinson 1995: 8-9). This of course means that the account given here is on somewhat shaky ground, but I shall try to be as uncontroversial in my reading as possible.

The basic premise of Aristotle's essentialism is that the things we perceive as we go about our lives are divided up into discrete object prior to our perceiving them. Each object we perceive is of a certain kind with its own essence, which uniquely makes that type of thing into that type of thing, or in modern philosophical jargon: "The world falls into natural kinds with their own essential properties" (Charles 2002: 348). That is to say that for each object in the world, we can divide the total set of properties, which that object possesses into two categories, those that belong to the object because of the kind of object it is, the essential properties, and those that are merely contingencies of the fate of that particular object (Robinson 1995: 22-30). For instance a human being can have the property of having black hair, but this property is not essential to humanness, since the person in question would be no less of a human being if she

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[1] The idea (*eidos*) represents the underlying essence of apparent phenomena; the true reality beyond the realm of appearance.

bleached her hair. On the other hand, were she lacking the capacity for rational thought then on the Aristotelian account she would probably not qualify as a human being at all, since the Aristotelian definition of the essence of humanity is that "man is a rational animal" (Robinson 1995: 27). This definition points to an important aspect of Aristotle's essentialism namely the relationship between genus[2] and specific difference. Aristotle uses a taxonomic approach when classifying objects. This means that when he defines a new category he does so by locating it within a pre-existing category higher in the taxonomical hierarchy and then determining what uniquely discriminates this new subcategory from the parent category (Robinson 1995: 29). Each species is separated from its genus by a specific difference. To continue previous the example, the property that uniquely discriminates human beings from other kinds of animals is rationality and therefore the essence of humanity is rationality. The essence of a thing should not be conflated with the nature of a thing (what that thing is meant to be; the direction and purpose of the thing); as Mary Louise Gill puts it: "Although in some cases the nature and essence coincides, in most cases they do not" (Gill 1989: 115). The nature of a thing in Aristotle may consequently include more than its essence (Gill 1989: 114-120). Thus for instance one should not read the "man is a rational animal" as an account of human nature, but only as an account of his essence. A thing's essence, then, is more or less whatever we have to say in order to uniquely define it as the sort of thing that it is or to put it more succinctly the essence of an object is whatever that object is in virtue of being that particular kind of thing and no other kind of thing (Robinson 1995: 28).

This briefly stated is the position of Aristotelian essentialism. The account given here is lacking in important respects, since it does not make reference to the important interconnections between essence and other terms such as cause, form, substance or matter in the Aristotelian metaphysical vocabulary[3], but for the purposes at hand it should suffice. Although this position is not terribly common in contemporary philosophy there are still people who adopt it. For instance Baruch A. Brody has made an argument for what he calls "an unabashed traditional theory of Aristotelian essentialism" (Brody 1973: 351). Philosophical essentialisms today however have generally moved away from the Aristotelian

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[2] In the biological sense.
[3] Aristotle is a highly systematic philosopher whose vocabulary is often co-definitional. Therefore a full understanding of any word of Aristotle's vocabulary requires an understanding of related words in the vocabulary.

position and towards a focus on necessity and necessary properties (Charles 2002: 18). I shall now briefly examine the most famous of the works dealing with these matters, Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

Naming and Necessity is easily one of the most influential works ever published within analytic philosophy. In a recent discussion of the text in an anthology on the history of analytic philosophy the author, Sanford Shieh, feels confident enough to open with the following paragraph:

> It is a platitude that Saul Kripke's Naming and Necessity occupies a central position in contemporary analytic philosophy. Just about every philosopher educated in this tradition nowadays knows that in this book Kripke argued that proper names are rigid designators. And nearly as many would know that Kripke's arguments put into question two doctrines central to the period of analytic philosophy dominated by linguistic analysis: the Fregean account of meaning in terms of the sense/ reference distinction and the logical positivist alignment of the a priori/a posteriori distinction with the analytic/synthetic distinction. Moreover, the notion of rigid designation, and the arguments that involve it, have been subjected to such thorough investigation that they are now thought of as a standard part of philosophy of language, routinely taught from systematic presentations such as that found in Nathan Salmon's Reference and Essence. Thus, the fundamental concepts and arguments of Naming and Necessity appear to be such completely familiar ground that it is difficult to imagine how anything about them might not be fully understood (Shieh 2001: 368).

Kripke's account, thus, is central to contemporary analytic philosophy, has been thoroughly analyzed and integrated into the tradition, and although the validity of its arguments is still debated, in contrast with Aristotle there is little discussion about what the arguments in fact are. Furthermore, it is clear that the way Kripke makes his arguments is by putting into question certain venerable doctrines of the tradition going back to Frege and Russell. So far so good, but how does this translate into a modern form of essentialism?

The key notion that Kripke introduces with his book is the rigid designator. This term is first and foremost introduced as a new account of how proper names, like "Aristotle" or "Saul Kripke", get their reference. The traditional account, espoused most prominently by Frege and Russell[4], of how the reference of proper names is obtained is that proper names are stand-ins

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[4] Kripke actually discusses and argues against several other variants of the tradtional Frege-Russell view, which will not be dealt with here since such internal disputes within analytical philosophy are probably of relatively

for or abbreviations of definite descriptions; descriptions that uniquely pick out the referent of the name. That is to say the name "Aristotle" for instance could be an abbreviation for the description "The Stagarite teacher of Alexander the Great" (Kripke 1981: 28-30). Kripke rejects this view of reference and instead argues that proper names are rigid designators. A rigid designator is something that refers to an object across all possible worlds[5] for a given linguistic community. Initially the rigid designator is given its reference by description or by ostension, but after this initial baptism the reference is fixed and does not change based on changing descriptions (Kripke 1981: 56-57). To use one of Kripke's examples once the reference of "Nixon" has been fixed to refer to the former president of the United States of America, it stays fixed (for us) even when we consider counterfactual situations, in which Nixon were never president or in which his last name were Johnson (Kripke 1981: 40-49). Kripke extends this account of rigid designation to include not just proper names but all singular terms, in particular "natural kind" terms such as table or gold (Kripke 1981: 116-119). These terms then function like proper names and hold their reference across all possible worlds.

The notion of rigid designation turns out to have some rather interesting implications for the notion of necessary and thereby essential properties. The main implication is that the properties we scientifically discover to be true of the object referred to by a rigid designator are necessarily true and thus essential (Kripke 1981: 123-125). Even if we can imagine counterfactual situations, in which they did not hold, that has no significance for the reference of the designator since we would in talking of the counterfactual objects not be talking about the same thing. For instance, say that the reference of "gold" has been determined as the metal, which we find when digging in certain mountains. If we then discover that gold has the atomic number 79 (as we indeed commonly believe that it does), then in any other possible world where we find a metal in the very same mountains that share almost all the other characteristics of gold but does not have the atomic number 79, that would be a possible world, in which something other than gold were embedded in these mountains. Having the atomic number 79 is therefore an essential property of gold (Kripke 1981: 125). This may

little interest to an anthropological audience and my concern here is to give a simple exposition of Kripke's basic position.
[5] The doctrine of possible worlds describes a position going back to Leibniz that the world in which we live is just one among an infinite number of logically possible worlds. A statement is thus said to be necessary if it holds in all logically possible worlds. This position is called "modal realism" in the philosophical literature.

seem somewhat esoteric but the cash-value of the argument for our purposes is fairly straightforward: The world is divided into natural kinds and these have certain properties, which are necessary and therefore essential.

As should be evident from the previous accounts, there are both similarities and differences between the Kripkean and the Aristotelian versions of essentialism. Both agree that there are natural kinds, which have certain properties that are essential to them being the kind of thing that they are. Furthermore they both share the position of scientific realism, that is to say they hold the belief that science discovers things about the world, it doesn't create them. On the other hand the focus in Kripke's essentialism is entirely on necessity; the necessary properties are the essential ones, while Aristotle makes an explicit distinction between necessary and essential features. While human beings have rationality as an essential property, their capacity for having culture, for instance, is only a necessary property of humans in Aristotle's view (Charles 2002: 18). For Kripke this distinction makes no sense at all. Nonetheless it should be apparent that essentialism is a position as old as philosophy itself that is still very much a part of the philosophical tradition as it exists today, without being particularly controversial.

Even though essentialism is still a common position in analytic philosophy, it is also true that throughout the 20th century the criticism of essentialism has accelerated. Within analytic philosophy both Popper and the later Wittgenstein adopted anti-essentialist positions. Popper rejected essentialism on the grounds that it implies a quest for ultimate explanation in science, which he considered decidedly "obscurantist" and in conflict with his falsificationist account of science[6] (Popper 1963: 139-144). The later Wittgenstein rejected the notion that it is properties, which determine category membership introducing instead the notion of family resemblance. It is not the fact that a table has certain properties such as having legs and a surface to put things on that makes it belong to the category table. Rather, the reason is that it looks close enough to something else we have previously learned to call a table. Thereby the notion of essential properties loses its meaning (Husted 2000: 116-122). This insight, by the way, has led to the creation of the prototype theory of categorization in cognitive semantics,

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[6] The falsificationist account of science holds that science progresses through the creation of theories that make a set of predictions, which are then subsequently subjected to rigorous testing. No theory can ever be fully tested and established as true for all time, but the more thoroughly a theory is tested the greater confidence we can have in it.

which has been rather widely accepted (Rosch 1978). Furthermore Quine has argued explicitly against both Aristotelian and Kripkean essentialism, as they occur above, arguing that the notions of natural kinds and essential properties imply untenable logical positions. Against Aristotelian essentialism, Quine asks us to consider the example of a cyclist mathematician. If mathematicians are essentially rational (but not essentially two-legged) and cyclists are essentially two-legged (but not essentially rational) is this person essentially rational and contingently two-legged or the other way around? There is no way to tell (Quine 1960: 199). Against Kripke, Quine argues that the notions of the "rigid designator" and of "possible worlds" are simply a paraphrased vocabulary of modal logic, which he has long since rejected (Quine 1981: 173-175).

In continental thought existentialism and structuralism can both be seen as attacks on classical essentialism. Sartre's insistence that "existence precedes essence" turns classical essentialism on its head by arguing that whatever is essential to a person is essentially a matter of that person's choice, but of course still implies that humanity is a natural kind whose essential property is freedom (Sartre 1956: 289-292). Equally structuralism by emphasizing the underlying systemic level beyond the realm of surface phenomena eliminates the search for individual essence and instead looks for the positioning in a system of differences that give them their meaning. Properties thereby become relational and thus not essential. An example can be found in the structural study of myth. Levi-Strauss argues that myths should not be interpreted as they stand. Instead the interrelations between all the different variants of a myth and the individual atomic parts of the myth (the "mythemes") should be the point of departure for understanding them. The properties of individual myths and "mythemes" are therefore only understandable when considering their relations to the larger system of which they are a part (Levi-Strauss 1963: 205-234). This strategy is sometimes placed in binary opposition to essentialism and in this context is normally referred to as relationalism (Fuchs 2001: 16).

In the current philosophical climate, however, the term essentialism has received a much wider extension. The positions charted above that were intended as rejections of classical essentialism are now quite often seen as themselves being essentialist. Any theory that includes stable categories or distinctions is a ripe target for an anti-essentialist critique these

days. Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa offer the following explanation for this development:

> We all know, at least dimly, how we have arrived at this state of affairs. Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism includes within it not only an argument against essentialism but also against nonessentialisms whose distinctions lie with the telos of essentialism. So, for instance, a thinker who agrees that one may never achieve full clarity about the meanings of one's assertions but who nevertheless writes as though one may approximate such clarity would count, for Derrida, as writing within the telos of essentialism or logocentrism. And the consequences of such thinking are taken to be inimical to recognitions of difference as is full-fledged essentialism (Spinosa and Dreyfus 1996: 736).

The implication of this development is that being nonessentialist isn't sufficient anymore. Neither is being anti-essentialist in any traditional sense. Obviously not every anti- or nonessentialist would accept Derrida's conclusions and even if one does, Spivak in her deconstructive reading of the historiography of the subaltern studies group has suggested that there might still be room for "strategic essentialism" serving particular political purposes[7] (Spivak 1988: 13-15). But with the incredible influence of deconstruction it is apparent that anti-essentialism today often means anti-essentialism in the Derridean sense although other forms are still frequently adopted by non-postmodernists. In general, then, when people today speak of essentialism they are speaking of it in the Aristotelian, the Kripkean, or the Derridean sense and when they speak of anti-essentialism they are speaking of it in either a traditional or a postmodern sense. What sense is used, furthermore, has a big effect on the extension of the terms, and thus on what one considers essentialist or not.

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[7] Some anthropologists, such as Michael Herzfeld, have argued for treating all essentialisms as strategic, thereby evading the metaphysical question of essence (Herzfeld 1997). While this approach may be useful for the study of social practice, from a philosophical point of view it does not successfully dodge the problem. Instead it amounts to either essentializing essentialism as essentially strategic or to begging the question.

Social Constructionism[8] and Anti-Essentialism

There is no hard and fast way to define social constructionism. It would be somewhat ironic if there where such "essential" properties to be found among the different perspectives sharing the label. Instead what is shared is a certain attitude of approaching knowledge and the social world (Burr 1995: 1-16). First, there is a general scepticism towards the received categories by which we interpret our world. It is not evident that the way in which we experience the world and the categories can be taken at face value and social constructionism therefore changes the question from "how is the world in and of itself?" to "by which processes do we come to experience the world as we do and how are the categories by which we understand it inculcated and maintained?". The social world is not taken as given reality but is instead viewed as processual, a place where knowledge and truth are continuously under negotiation, always positional, context dependant and subject to the vagaries of power, conflict, and rhetoric. The insistence on the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge claims is furthermore a basic tenet of social constructionism and it is claimed that most of the things we have in times past taken as basic such as reason, emotion, truth, and identity are in fact not basic but elaborate constructions specific to our own time and place (Gergen 1985: 266-269; Burr 1995: 1-16).

The theoretical influences on social constructionism are legion. Sociology has contributed much to the perspectives through for instance ethnomethodology, as in Garfinkel, the dramaturgical study of social interaction, as in Goffman, or the sociology of knowledge, as in Berger & Luckman. Many different branches of philosophy have also contributed ideas. Postmodernists and poststructuralists, such as Derrida or Foucault, or analytic philosophers of science such as Kuhn or Feyerabend have had tremendous influence, and hermeneutics and phenomenology have also contributed important ideas. And this is by no means a complete list (Burr 1995: 1-16; Gergen 1985). Gergen furthermore argues for the position that seen in a wider historical context, social constructionism should be seen on the backdrop of the empiricism – rationalism dichotomy, which has characterized much of the history of

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[8] In this thesis I shall use the term social constructionism to refer to all the variant expressions used to describe the perspective including "social constructivism", "construtivism", "constructionism", etc. In the literature the terms are used interchangingly.

philosophy. Social constructionism from this point of view can be seen as a way of overcoming the pendulum swings between the different sides of this problematic dualism by dispensing with the subject – object dichotomy and focusing instead on the social processes underlying this distinction (Gergen 1985: 269-273).

The sheer number of articles from recent years dealing with social construction is staggering. Ian Hacking on the opening page of his analysis of social constructionism presents a list of 25 different topics ranging from "Authorship" to "Zulu Nationalism" (Hacking 1999: 1) all having a title along the lines of "The Social Construction of X". Hacking argues that the arguments of all such works can be reduced to a standard logical form. First, there is a precondition that: "In the present state of affairs, X is taken for granted; X appears to be inevitable" (Hacking 1999: 12). The precondition is necessary since otherwise it would be pointless to launch a social constructionist attack on it. The precondition is followed by one to three further theses, depending on the level of political commitment of the author (Hacking 1999: 19). The minimum requirement is the thesis "X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable" (Hacking 1999: 6). This may be all that an author wishes to accomplish by exposing a social construction. Frequently, however, authors go on to add one or both of the theses "X is quite bad as it is" (Hacking 1999: 6) and "We would be much better off if X were done away with or at least radically transformed" (Hacking 1999: 6) implying a stronger level of political commitment. Hacking in other words reads social constructionism as a form of critique determined to historicize, demystify or deconstruct the givens of culture and society. He then proceeds to recast the arguments of social constructionism along the traditional metaphysical dimensions of nominalism vs. realism, necessity vs. contingency, and the stability vs. the instability of science (Hacking 1999: 83-99). He even reformulates a case of social construction in the vocabulary of Nelson Goodman's theory of kinds, seemingly to show that construction-talk isn't really necessary (Hacking 1999: 122-162). The overall point seems to be that social constructionism is an intellectual fad, occasionally useful, but not really original. This reading, however, misses (or ignores) the point that from a social constructionist perspective, such translation into a supposedly universal meta-language, whether it is logical reduction, traditional metaphysics or Goodman's theory of kinds, is saying something different altogether. There is neither any content separate from the

vocabulary in which it is phrased, nor any universal meta-language to which all vocabularies can be translated, nor any objective criteria by which we can select the best possible vocabulary to describe reality. In this sense Hacking's reading becomes a defence of the value of a traditional philosophical vocabulary, against the vocabularies of the various social constructionisms, not a serious attack on social constructionism as such.

Feminism was one of the first movements to make use of a social constructionist perspective for its political purposes and it remains one of the prevailing perspectives for contemporary feminists. Two of the most comprehensive uses have been made by Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. In her 1974 article "The Traffic in Woman: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", Rubin tries to outline a theory of the sex/gender system, which will deliver the same kind of analytic strength for the study of gender oppression that Marxism delivers for the analysis of class oppression. In doing this she turns to a reading of Levi-Strauss and Freud. She argues that Levi-Strauss theory of kinship in which women are the signs in a system of signification based on the exchange of females by males shows how women are subjected to a set of relations that produces a situation in which they do not have full rights to themselves or their sexuality. Freud on the other hand delivers a theory of how this situation is inculcated and made normal. Even though neither Levi-Strauss nor Freud are actively against the gender system and do not deal with its oppressive qualities their theories can be used to create a theory of gender oppression in the same way Marx made use of classical political economy (Rubin 2004 [1974]). In a later article from 1984 she expands on this. She analyzes the "sexual value system", the system that constructs our conceptions of what sex is good and regular and what sex is bad and deviant, and shows that it is based on a set of binary oppositions of normal (heterosexual, married, genitial) vs. abnormal (homosexual, unmarried, non-genital) sex. This system is constructed through various discourses of power such as the legal or the psychiatric discourse and shapes the way in which sexuality and gender is perceived and experienced (Rubin 1993 [1984]). Gender and sexuality, thus, for Rubin emerge as harmful constructs and feminism emerges as critique. But, rather than being critique in the sense of criticism, what Rubin aims for is a critique in the sense that Marxism is a critique.

Judith Butler shares Rubin's conviction that gender and sexuality are harmful constructs, but instead of analyzing in terms of the structures that produce them, she shifts the focus to the performance of gender. Gender, Butler urges, can be seen as the compulsory performance of certain acts that signify gender identity. Thus, there is no stable essence to gender identity instead it is created in the act so to speak (Butler 2004). The performances are not arbitrary but aspire to mimic an imaginary ideal of standard heterosexual behaviour. The ideal does not exist in reality of course but still it serves as model for the performance of gender. This however also opens up a space for the subversion of gender through the performance of acts of gender identity where the contexts and actors are not appropriate for its performance (Butler 1993). Butler and Rubin thus share the conviction of gender as constructed entities, but analyze it in very different vocabularies.

Berger and Luckmann's book *The Social Construction of Reality*[9] is concerned with "a sociological analysis of the reality of everyday life, more precisely, of knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 33). They are in other words interested in how knowledge is constructed, how it is inculcated, how it is maintained, and thereby how social reality comes to be seen as ultimate reality by its members. The organizing principle of the book is what they call "the social dialectic", which they state as "*Society is a human product. Society is objective reality. Man is a social product*" (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 79). This of course needs to be elaborated and that in a sense is what the book is about. The three keywords of this elaboration are externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization covers the process by which human beings take something internal to their consciousnesses and project it unto the outside world. The primary example of this is the process by which I look at a roughly square object with four legs and call it "table", but any projection of human meaning unto the outside world will do. Through processes of habitualization, institutionalization, and sedimentation this original externalization becomes objectified and turned into concrete reality. To the man or woman who originally coined the word "table" this externalization is just an externalization, but to people growing up in a society in which the word has been a part of the institution of language for generations, the

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[9] It should be noted that this book was published before there was any academic perspective called social constructionism. In fact it was one of the books that started the perspective. The authors come from a phenomenological perspective, and do not self-identify as social constructionists. However, in terms of the definition of social constructionism given here, they fit the bill admirably.

relative arbitrarity of the original act is lost. The institution has been reified that is to say what was once seen to be a product of human activity now appears as something natural and objective to new members of society. The processes primarily responsible for this internalization of social reality as objective reality are those of socialization. Through socialization a certain world view is imprinted on each new member of society, which shapes the way in which he knows his world, including his ontological and epistemological commitments. But even though these commitments seem perfectly natural to the subject, they are in fact the product of human social activity (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The second book I shall consider is Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life*. Whereas *The Social Construction of Reality* was a book with a very wide subject matter, *Laboratory Life* deals with a rather narrow subject, but one with important ramifications. The book is basically an ethnography based on fieldwork done in a laboratory working in the field of brain peptides. The aim is to provide an account of science as a social activity based on concrete observation and thereby create a new understanding of science that does not involve mystification or glorification of its processes. The authors proceed by redescribing the activity of the scientists as one of literary inscription. That is to say that what the scientists do when looked at from the perspective of an outside observer is take inscriptions from specialized devices (scientific instruments) and turning these into scientific articles fit for publication. This process is not something done in isolation but involves a variety of "microprocesses of negotiation" between the different inhabitants of the laboratory. In a wider context the goal of this activity is to produce statements of facts. This involves the publications of scientific articles, which either make statements or attack the statements of others. These statements have various modal auxiliaries depending on their general level of acceptance within the specialized scientific community in question, and the ultimate end for which this activity is pursued is the production of statements without modal auxiliaries or more precisely statements of fact. This however is a rare occurrence. Most scientific publications are neither read nor cited but instead contribute to generate a field of disorder from which occasionally a new fact may emerge. The activity of science thus involves the construction of facts, which is coordinate with the emergence of order from disorder (Latour and Woolgar 1986). Science thus is an intimately social activity that constructs its objects rather than a voyage of discovery, which relies on individual insights about the true nature of the cosmos.

Now it shouldn't be all that hard to deduce the anti-essentialist implications of social constructionism from the previous paragraphs. First of all both Aristotelian and Kripkean essentialism rely on scientific realism to make their points. Science discovers things about the world. This clearly is incompatibly both with Berger and Luckmann, Latour and Woolgar, and social constructionism in general. Science doesn't discover things it makes them. Also social constructionism puts into question the fundamental assumption that "the world is divided into natural kinds". If so much of our cognition is based on social processes how could a kind be natural? Finally the very notion that a property could be essential is anathema to social constructionism. Properties are something that we project unto the world not something inherent in things themselves. On a side note I should probably mention that there are those who claim that it is possible to unify both a certain kind of realism and a moderate kind of essentialism with a moderate kind of social constructionism (see Sayer 1997 writing from a critical realist[10] perspective), but obviously this implies making compromises to both positions[11]. The case has even been made that social constructionism in a sense implies essentialism, since arguing that X is fundamentally a social construction simply displaces the essence from X to "the social" (Fuss 1989: 2-6). This argument, however, implicates one in a definition of essence, which has an extremely wide extension – wider even than the Derridean version – and that may itself be problematic.

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[10] The position of critical realism states that causal laws are tendencies of structures to produce certain effects rather than the constant conjunction of cause and effect. The position is particularly associated with the writings of Roy Bhaskar.

[11] As a further addendum I should mention John Searle's book "The Construction of Social Reality". The book present a general theory of "institutional" or "social" facts based on collective intentionality, constitutive rules and the theory of speech acts that aims at describing how exactly the social world is possible in the first place (Searle 1996). In that sense it shares something with Berger and Luckmann's book. But in contrast to "The Social Construction of Reality", "The Construction of Social Reality" proceeds from a firm realism both scientifically and epistemologically, and pays sparse attention to historical or cultural specificity. Searle's theory therefore has little family resemblance with social constructionism and should be considered an alternative to this discourse rather than a part of it. Little more than the metaphor of construction is really shared.

Social Constructionism and Anti-Essentialism in Anthropology

How has social constructionism and anti-essentialism impacted anthropology? In this chapter I shall examine three articles: One by Andrew Vayda, one by Fredrik Barth, and one by Marshall Sahlins. These articles do not form a unified discourse although they derive from the same volume, a general assessment of contemporary (1994) anthropology aimed at students, and while they share some general topics the full scope of their concerns is only partially overlapping. In addition, none of the three authors presented here are what would be considered ardent social constructionist. I doubt that anyone of them would accept the appellation without a good deal of qualification. In a sense the three authors presented here have been selected exactly because they aren't particularly obvious candidates. Vayda's intellectual background is in ecological anthropology (Vayda 1994b: 329-330) a perspective that Jonathan Friedman in the 70's described as "vulgar materialist" (Friedman 1974: 444). Barth's perspective was originally focused on political concerns and the acts of actors with a strong emphasis on fieldwork, although he acknowledges that a change has been occurring in his recent perspective towards a focus on meaning (Barth 1994b: 361). Sahlins famously has moved from an evolutionary materialism to a position that combines historicism and structuralism (Linniken 1994: 394-395). The point of this selection is to demonstrate that even among anthropologists nowhere near the postmodern current, the impact of social constructionism and anti-essentialism can be clearly felt. By doing this I hope to underline the immense impact that these perspectives has had on anthropology in all its guises.

In his article addressing the subject of anti-essentialism, Vayda argues that since the seventies an anti-essentialist view has been emerging in anthropology and other fields (Vayda 1994a: 320). This view, he holds, does not attempt to discover the underlying nature or essence of things instead it makes variation the proper object of analysis (Vayda 1994a: 320-322). He writes:

> In his research the anti-essentialist is guided by questions about actual behaviour and its consequences rather than by such questions as "what is the family?" or "what is the state?" or "what is revolution?" or "what is religion?" or "what is Pueblo Indian religion?" or "what is Javanese culture?" Unlike the essentialist, he does not make it his task to ferret out from the different things or events to which one or

another of such terms is applied the "real" or "true" nature of some essence denoted by it (Vayda 1994a: 321).

That is not to say that one cannot generalize or make statements above the level of particulars. But the purpose of such generalizations should be to explain variations not establish some normative cultural whole (Vayda 1994a: 322-323). Particular events of course should be put in their relevant context and that may well include appealing to generalizations in order to explain the particular case but such generalization should not be seen as universal law like regularities, but rather as intelligible connections which usually holds but occasionally doesn't (Vayda 1994a: 323). He contrasts this position with the view that there is some underlying essential structure creating a systematic order within cultures, whether this is adaptivity as in ecological anthropology, capitalist profit as in structural Marxism[12], or an internalized cultural logic as in structuralism (Vayda 1994a: 324-325). This however does not imply however that it is impossible for the phenomena that such structures suppose to actually be present in the cultures we examine, but whether or not they are should be seen as a matter for empirical determination. By adopting such an approach anthropologist can remain true to the naturalist[13] ideal, and still avoid slipping into either into positivism or anti-science (Vayda 1994a: 326-327).

Barth agrees with Vayda that a new perspective has been forming in recent anthropology and that this perspective calls for anti-essentialism, and a detailed focus on particularities and variation (Barth 1994a: 352-355). However, while social constructionist influences are clear enough in Vayda's focus on process and context, Barth adopts a more clearly social constructionist vocabulary. He advocates studying the specific ways in which people construct cultural meanings, and gives knowledge the privileged position in this study (Barth 1994a: 352-355). Furthermore, he makes the from a social constructionist point of view familiar points that all concepts are embedded in practice and dependant on context, that all views are necessarily positioned and that all meanings including those constructed by anthropologists remain contestable (Barth 1994a: 356). The aim however is much the same as in Vayda, which is to say the creation of a naturalistic anthropology, which can deliver robust

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[12] Vayda's reading of structural Marxism is in some ways dubious. Traditionally the mode of production rather than capital itself is seen as the distinguishing element of structural Marxist analysis (see Friedman 1974).
[13] Vayda uses the word naturalism in the classical biological sense as the collection, classification, and explanation of data from the field.

models for cultural processes (Barth 1994a: 360). There is in other words a clear family resemblance between the perspectives of Vayda and Barth. Both adopt anti-essentialism and social constructionism in the service of a naturalistic anthropology and they vary mainly in the extent to which they explicitly use social constructionist vocabulary in their accounts.

Marshall Sahlins instead of focusing on anthropology as a naturalistic discipline instead gives the privileged position to history. Sahlins, in his article, argues against "the invention of tradition" approach to anthropology. This approach argues that the fact that most cultural traditions are invented in the present for the purposes of the present means that there can be no such thing as cultural authenticity, and that the concept of culture is perhaps best replaced by notions of discourse and power. Against this Sahlins argues that cultural change itself contains an element of continuity. Yes tradition is invented, but it is also inventive. There are good reasons why a certain invention is constructed the way that it is within a particular culture and in that perhaps lie the continuity of the culture, the logic of the culture (Sahlins 1994: 377-389). So while culture is constructed and subject to all the usual social processes, there is a cultural logic probably unique to any given culture that structures but doesn't determine the particular constructions of culture. Sahlins in another article calls the cultural logic to a grammar of the culture (Sahlins 1999: 409). This of course is liable to the criticism that it presupposes the existence of bounded cultures that are homogenous and discrete. Sahlins responds to this by pointing out that cultures were never seen as truly bounded objects and quotes Levi-Strauss to the effect that the distinctiveness of a group depends more on its relationship with other groups than own anything intrinsic to it (Sahlins 1994: 387). The upshot of it all is that anthropology must privilege at historical processes and cultural logics as objects of study and put this in the context of the modern world system, but this too includes a study of the specificities of cultural construction only within a wider framework.

Whereas Barth and Vayda were explicit in their rejection of essentialism, Sahlins is more ambiguous on the point. He jokingly refers to "the mortal sin of essentialism" (Sahlins 1994: 379) and his other references to the word are also cast in an ironic mould. The implication seems to be that the critique of essentialism is probably somewhat overdone. Saying that the critique of essentialism is overdone is of course not the same thing as embracing essentialism but nonetheless Sahlins has been so criticized. For instance Vayda criticizes both the notion of

a cultural logic in general and Sahlins' in particular on this point (Vayda 1994a: 326). Now while it is certainly possible to conceive of a cultural logic in terms of an underlying metaphysical essence this is by no means a necessity. It is entirely possible to see the logic as something itself constructed, while still constraining and directing further constructions. Latour and Woolgar discuss an analogous situation in the construction of scientific facts that shows one of the ways in which this is possible. They attempt to give an answer to the question why certain scientific facts seem to be inevitable outcomes of the work of scientists. The point they make is that even if one assumes an initial state of disorder, corresponding to a state prior to the formation of a genuine cultural logic in our analogy, a state of order may come about by a simple process of one random step leading to and constraining the next, a process they refer to as the creation of orderly but unpredictable forms. An analogy is made with the game of Go. Initially a Go board is just a blank space with a bunch of squares on it. The first move is therefore more or less made at random. However, as the game progresses moves become more constrained and some moves will seem to follow inevitably from the present state of the board, thus in a sense constituting a certain logic of the particular game (Latour & Woolgar 1986: 244-252). Now Latour and Woolgar's scientists to some extent at least intentionally seek to create order from disorder, while those initiating and maintaining the construction of a cultural logic may be less intentional and rely more on unconscious processes and external constraints. However the point remains that a construction such as a cultural logic may come about by the simple operation of a sequence of initially more or less random steps leading to a particular kind of orderly but unpredictable shape[14].

The three examples presented in this chapter support the notion that social constructionist terminology has been incorporated into the standard vocabulary of different "traditional" anthropological perspectives to the extent that the authors really aren't terribly self-conscious about it anymore. This of course doesn't imply an uncritical acceptance of social constructionism and the anti-essentialism endorsed by these anthropologists is of a relatively traditional kind. It is more or less taken for granted that culture is fundamentally constructed

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[14] Levi-Strauss in a discussion of structure has made a similar analogy. If we consider a puzzle cut out by a mechanical saw, the movements of which are controlled mechanically, its composition may appear arbitrary. But this does not mean the puzzle doesn't have a logic or structure, instead it lies in the mathematical formula expressing the movements of the saw (Levi-Strauss 1978: 79-80).

and not the bearer of essential properties in any real metaphysical sense, although this general rejection of essentialism to some might seem a bit overdone.

Mead, Benedict and the Critique of Essentialism

Essentialism was not an unknown word in the human sciences prior to social constructionism. Raymond Aron writing in 1968 defined it as the assignment to all members of a group of certain properties by virtue of their group membership and the inherent nature of the group (Aron 1968: 95). This is simply Aristotelian essentialism transferred to the social world. While he clearly dislikes and rejects it, he ironically also seems to think that "essentialism" is an essential property of human thought (Aron 1968: 94). Classical anthropology at least in some of its guises seems to have had much the same attitude, and with the coming of social constructionism not only has vocabularies changed, but this anthropological tradition has had to be re-evaluated. And it is precisely on the issue of essentialism that some of the hardest criticisms have been levelled against the tradition. I shall in the following paragraphs relate this critique through a discussion of Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*.

Cultures are distinct entities, locally bounded, symbolically integrated, coherent wholes. The people within them embody the distinctiveness of their culture, at least if they have been properly socialized, and act in accordance with its norms and customs. While many elements in a culture may be outside borrowings, the unique system of customs, symbols, norms and habits forms a unique and clearly visible cultural configuration, the distinctive nature of which is evident to the trained anthropological observer, wherever the individual elements might have originated. This is a slightly caricaturized version of the view of culture shared by Mead and Benedict, but it is also a view of culture that has been almost universally rejected by contemporary anthropologists. The reasons for the rejection relate to no small extent to the general critique of essentialism. Moreover, in recent decades a standard critique has crystallized against the essentializing nature of this way of doing anthropology and this critique will now be applied to the texts.

"The Arapesh believe that parents should be able to control their children whom they have grown, and on the same principle they believe that husbands should be able to control their

wives" (Mead 1951: 65), this is a typical quote from *Sex and Temperament*. Here are three more:

> On marriage: "Instead of regarding marriage as a necessary evil, as so many people do, as an unfortunate compromise, which makes it inevitable that a stranger be allowed to enter the house and sit down familiarly within it, the Arapesh regard marriage as primarily an opportunity to increase the warm family circle within which one's descendants may then live even more safely than one has lived oneself." (Mead 1951: 67)

> On sex: "The Arapesh do not seriously conceive of sex outside the marriage bond. The casual encounter, the liaison, a sudden stirring of desire that must be quickly satisfied – these mean nothing to them." (Mead 1951: 77)

> On human nature: "The Arapesh do not reckon with an original nature that is violent and must be trained to peace, which is jealous and must be trained to sharing, which is possessive and must be trained to relinquish too fast a hold on its possessions. They reckon instead on a gentleness of behaviour that is lacking only in the child and in the ignorant and an aggressiveness that can only be aroused in the defence of another." (Mead 1951: 102)

Statements of the form: "The X believe/don't believe Y", "The X are/aren't Y", "The X value/don't value Y", or statements to a similar effect make up much if not most of the book's specific content. The problem with these kinds of statements, however, is that they totalize cultures, reify them, turn them into bounded, integrated wholes, homogenizes the people within them and make them subject to one stable, unchanging essence. This in fact is not a bad way of defining "cultural essentialism". In other words, when Mead begins every other sentence with the words "The Arapesh believe…", she is ignoring that a culture does not exist in a vacuum and that it is not internally consistent either. When faced with the statement "The Arepesh believe X" we must always ask what Arapesh she is referring to. Culture is never a unitary thing, so the criticism goes, it is always distributed, contested, negotiated. All Arapesh are not the same, and cannot be represented as such. Do all Arapesh conceive of marriage as a blessing, are they all untouched by sexual desire, do they all have a Rousseauean view of human nature? Even Mead's own account contradicts this, although she consistently downplays deviance. There can be no authoritative singular account of a culture, only positioned, tentative ones, and by trying to go beyond the bounds of the possible Mead must make use of an essentialist rhetoric that minimizes difference and freezes the fragmentary variability of culture in a monolithic whole.

In *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict uses a similar mode of representation. She famously structures her account of the Zuñi and the Kwakiutl in the book around the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy taken from Nietzche's *Birth of Tragegy*, although (possibly intentionally) she uses it in a very different sense than Nietzche. The Apollonian represents the Delphic axiom "nothing in excess", while the Dionysian represents excess to the point of ecstasy that much is shared (Benedict 1935: 56-57). But to Nietzche the Apollonian represented the principle of individuation, while the Dionysiac represented the loss of self, the primal unity(Nietzsche 2000: 133). (Recall that ecstasy in ancient Greek literally means stepping outside of oneself). Benedict however reverses Nietzche's point:

> "Apollonian institutions have been carried much further in the pueblos than in Greece. Greece was by no means as single-minded. In particular, Greece did not carry out as the Pueblos have the distrust of individualism that the Apollonian way of life implies, but which in Greece was scanted because of forces with which it came in conflict. Zuñi ideals and institutions on the other hand are rigourous on this point." (Benedict 1935: 57)

And conversely the Dionysian comes to represent individuality, the individual's quest for self gratification. More importantly than this, however, is the way in which she turns these labels into unflinching cultural essences:

> "The Dionysian slant of the North-West Coast tribes is as violent in their economic life and their warfare and mourning as it is in their initiations and ceremonial dances." (Benedict 1935: 131)

Everything is integrated and everything conforms to the dichotomy. The Zuñi are entirely Apollonian, the Kwakiutl are entirely Dionysian. They are entirely opposites and are both opposed to us as readers. And if something doesn't fit Benedict will force it into shape as she does when describing Zuñi dance patterns, which on the surface of it hardly seem to fit the Apollonian mold (Benedict 1935: 66-68). Both Mead and Benedict, then, turn the dynamic, processual, negotiated, contested notion that we currently think culture should be into a stable, closed, harmonious, integrated unit. By doing so, they indulge in a kind of essentialist thought, which is incompatible with contemporary anthropological sensibilities.

Essentialism is not the only charge that has been put forth against these texts. James Clifford reads both Mead and Benedict as moral fables ever so much more interested in the moral improvement of the West, than in studying the Other (Clifford 1986: 102). That there is a constant contrasting of Them and Us in these works is clear even from the few quotes in the

last paragraphs, so the point is probably well taken. Similarly, Geertz chooses to read Benedict in the vein of Swiftian polemics. *Patterns of Culture* in Geertz's reading becomes a modern day version of *Gulliver's Travels*. The different cultures discussed are continuously contrasted to our own, made clear and intelligible in order to make us wonder about ourselves and thereby used in the same kind of moral satire as engaged in by the Irish dean, who served as her literary model (Geertz 1988: 102-128). In addition to these points, it is clear that the general critique of ethnographic authority, a subset of which was discussed above, applies very much to both Mead and Benedict (Clifford 1988: 21-54).

In contrast, one should note, Marshall Sahlins has claimed that these as well as most of the criticism of the preceding paragraphs are mainly artefacts of anthropology's own "invented tradition", a creative rereading of past discourse, and not really in accordance with the actual complexity of the anthropological debate of times gone by (Sahlins 1999: 407-415). Nevertheless whether the criticism is fair or not, the general adoption of a social constructionist vocabulary shows it to have been effective, and I would furthermore suggest (as I did in the last chapter) that even Sahlins' own present vocabulary is marked by it. It should also be mentioned that a critique not at all unlike the one, which has been discussed in this chapter is occasionally applied within the relativism/universalism part of the human rights debate. The argument is basically that the notion of cultural relativism turns individual cultures into fossilized, monolithic wholes that first of all do not exist and furthermore essentialize the properties of that given culture (Merry 2001: 32-34; 41-43). The debates on essentialism have a wide scope indeed.

An Outline of Hybridity Theory

This chapter will look at the discourse surrounding the word "hybridity". The word is quite popular in contemporary social science, and has been applied in a large number of contexts. For the purposes of this thesis it forms the central element of a thoroughly social constructionist perspective that is engaged primarily with the formulation of a politics of cultural difference, but more than that it offers a general vocabulary for the study of culture and by extension for anthropology as a discipline. The vocabulary that it has to offer will be the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter, I shall focus on exploring some of the general themes and criticisms of the perspective, and leave more detailed analysis for later. As I will be doing a reconstruction of the texts, based on my own reading, in the next chapter, I have decided to stay very close to the texts here, largely preferring to let them speak for themselves via quotes.

The proponents of this perspective are not exactly modest of its implications: "Without doubt, the three great contemporary prophets of hybridity – Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha – have precipitated a scientific revolution in the study of cultural politics that has compelled us to change the very problems we address" (Werbner 1997: 13). Not exactly a subtle claim. Now, while I shall discuss some of the ideas of Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha as well as a range of anthropologists who have contributed to the perspective's development and use, I am going to take a somewhat less panegyric approach. Instead of treating it as a "scientific revolution" I am going to treat it as a perspective growing out of a range of developments in postmodern anthropology, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies that well demonstrate some central tenets of anti-essentialism and social constructionism.

Homi Bhaba's *The Location of Culture* takes up a place on the reference list of most contributors to hybridity theory. The book contains a series of essays in which topics ranging from literary theory and readings of postcolonial literature to the formulation of a politics of cultural difference are explored. Throughout the book he returns to the theme of hybridity. Hybridity is read as a "Third Space" where the traditional binaries of culture are transcended and put into play:

"It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning of and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew." (Bhabha 1994: 37)

The "Third Space" between established boundaries, which hybridity represents, enables the introduction of alien meanings into reified structure, which destabilizes them and makes it possible to introduce newness into the world. It is however not simply the fact of cultural difference and cultural blending that creates openness to change, but rather it is to be found in the act of cultural translation:

"Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to cultural translation." (Bhabha 1994: 162)

Bhabha accentuates the performativity of these acts of cultural translation. The enunciation of cultural difference not the cultural difference in itself (enoncé) is what gives hybridity its transgressive potential. This transgressive potential of hybridity forces re-evaluations of the givens of culture and creates a different vision of modernity that has immense political potential:

"Without the postcolonial time-lag the discourse of modernity cannot, I believe, be written; with the *projective past* it can be inscribed as a historical narrative of alterity that explores forms of social antagonism and contradiction that are not yet properly represented, political identities in the process of being formed, cultural enunciations in the act of hybridity, in the process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences." (Bhabha 1994: 252)

One final aim of Bhabha's book, then, is the creation of a theoretical vocabulary for a politics of cultural difference, which emphasizes the role of hybridity.

Stuart Hall perhaps most clearly states the implications of an anti-essentialist theory of cultural identity based on hybridity:

"Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning."* (Hall 1990: 303)

Drawing on the work of Derrida, Hall argues that the positionality of hybrid conceptions of cultural identity open up the reified structures of culture and thereby bring them into play. Hybridity thus destabilizes fixed cultural binaries and its deconstructive potential towards

essentialist visions of cultural identity is thus revealed (Hall 1990: 306). This new vision of cultural identity makes itself recognizable in diasporic existence:

> "The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity.*" (Hall 1990: 312)

The diaspora in other words represents the coming into existence of this new vision of cultural identity. The privileging of difference over sameness, mixture over purity, hybridity over essence is here seen as heralding a new conception of cultural politics that has the potential to destabilize and deconstruct reified structures. This new politics in Hall, like in Bhabha, moves the focus from a politics of interest to a politics of difference, which again is the ultimate aim of this theoretical stance.

Paul Gilroy takes a slightly different approach to the notion of hybridity. While he does share the anti-essentialism of Bhabha and Hall he also rejects the notion that there can be nothing distinctive at all to constructed cultural categories. He wants instead to take a position that is at the same time anti-essentialist and anti-anti-essentialist. He does this by linking the distinctiveness of the "black Atlantic", his special area of interest, to the experience of the diaspora:

> "The diaspora idea invites us to move into the contested spaces between the poles that we can identify roughly as the local and the global. It encourages us to proceed in ways that do not privilege the modern nation-state and its institutional order over the sub-national and supra national networks and patterns of power, communication and conflict that they work to discipline, regulate and govern." (Gilroy 1994: 211)

In studying this contested space between global and local we find that it comes to represent an alternative that challenges the givens of western culture. For instance in reading the musical tradition of the "black Atlantic" he comments:

> "I am proposing then that we re-read and re-think this tradition of cultural expression not simply as a succession of literary tropes and genres, but as a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics." (Gilroy 1991: 289)

Gilroy, then, is interested in how the experience of the diaspora leads to new hybrid cultural forms that may serve as a political challenge to the reigning western hegemony.

Among anthropologist the ideas of Bhabha, Hall and Gilroy have been adopted both as analytic tools and as points of departure for further theoretical developments. For instance Marcel Giraud in analyzing the changing political strategies of the Antilese diaspora in France draws upon the ideas of Hall in order to show that these strategies have been increasingly focused on the unique cultural identity growing out of diaspora existence rather than upon connections to a mythical homeland (Giraud 2004). Likewise, Aleksandra Ålund in describing intercultural interactions in Swedish urban centres draws upon hybridity theory in order to argue that such interactions lead to hybrid experiences of 'boundary-crossing' that "…generates closeness and stimulates mutual borrowing, the exchange of stored experiences and pictures of the world, and the common creation of cross boundary cultural symbols" (Ålund 1999: 113). Pnina Werbner has contributed to the perspectives development by outlining the difference between two kinds of hybridities. Drawing upon a distinction made by Bakhtin she argues that it is necessary to dinstinguish 'organic' from 'intentional' hybridities. 'Organic' hybridity is naturally occurring and historically common and represents the unconscious mixing of cultural forms and meanings in a space of intercultural interaction. 'Intentional' hybridity on the other hand refers to the self-identified hybrid that actively combines these forms and meanings in order to challenge the established binaries of culture. It is thus in the 'intentional' hybrid that the transgressive and political potential of hybridity is to be found, but at the same time the 'intentional' hybrid emerges only on the background of 'organic' hybridity (Werbner 2001).

Perhaps the most comprehensive use of the ideas of hybridity in anthropological theory has been made by Ulf Hannerz. He argues that culture today can best be represented as a flow of meaning, distributed through the world system and following asymmetrical patterns of flow. Culture thus is distributed through the world, no longer localized but in some sense beyond the mere level of everyday existence in one particular place. Nor is it even the case that cultures always inhere in a locality instead he claims that culture today can exist in transnational, translocal networks, which are not territorially bounded. The flow of alien meanings from one locality to another leads to a process of negotiation and melding between these meanings and the preexisting ones, thus leading to the "creolization" of cultures as these meanings come to form new hybrid cultural forms. In a sense, then, the view of culture presented by Hannerz is one realization of the ambition to turn hybridity into a general

vocabulary for the study of culture, while at the same time linking it closely to certain contemporary discourses on globalization, something present in but not thoroughly elaborated by the other contributors to the perspective (Hannerz 1992: 217-267) Furthermore, he explicitly links this perspective to a critique of cultural essentialism[15] (Hannerz 1999).

It is however not only positive responses one finds within anthropology. One of the most ardent critics of hybridity theory is Jonathan Friedman. He argues that hybridity is best seen neither as a discourse promising a new vocabulary for the study of culture nor as an emancipatory discourse leading to a reformulation of the political, but rather as a rhetorical device used by an emerging global elite of cosmopolitan hybrids in support of their own project of self-identification. Political yes, but not emancipatory. The discourse of hybridity thereby contradicts the experience of the actual people living in the so-called spaces of hybridity in ways that are inexcusable. Instead of leading to emancipation through hybrid interactions these spaces are more likely to produce conflict and emiseration for the people involved at least when it comes to the vast majority of the presumed hybrids, who are hardly cosmopolitans creating a new cultural order, but rather destitute human beings trying their hardest simply to survive. The discourse is also based on a faulty vision of globalization. Globalization is not a new phenomenon, as (at least some parts of) hybridity theory require(s) but is instead a function of the dehegemonization of the world system, as are the new "hybrid spaces" (Friedman 1997). Furthermore the very notion of hybridity, Friedman urges, especially in the variant used by Hannerz when talking of "creolization" presupposes that once upon a time cultures existed independently and with entirely closed boundaries unconnected to the world beyond. How else could it make sense to talk of the mixture of cultural elements? Cultures, however, were never such monolithic creatures as has been well established at this point in time (Friedman 1994: 208-212).

The criticisms have not been entirely unheeded and there have been systematic attempts to address it. Werbner's distinction between 'organic' and 'intentional' hybridity for instance seeks to address the criticism that hybridity presupposes pre-existing monolithic cultures (Werbner 2001: 134). More thoroughly Jan N. Pieterse has gone through Friedman's criticisms point by point making some concessions but largely dismissing it (Pieterse 2001).

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[15] In this case a particularly strong variant he refers to as "cultural fundamentalism" (Hannerz 1999).

The debate however continues and it is not within the scope of this thesis to explore its details or to attempt any judgements regarding its specific points.

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore certain contributions to the discourse surrounding the word "hybridity" in order to give a general exposition of its central tenets and their relation to the subject at hand. It can be seen that whereas the previously explored anthropological positions did adopt anti-essentialism and social constructionism, there is a clear difference in the degree of their adoption. To the naturalistic anthropology of Vayda or Barth or the historical/structuralist anthropology of Sahlins they are either complements or concessions made to existing theoretical vocabularies, whereas to hybridity theorists they form the sine qua non. The very point of hybridity is to challenge any essentialist conception of culture and cultural essence. With this in mind, I shall now continue by embarking upon a more detailed examination of the vocabulary of hybridity theory and the metaphors upon which it is based.

The Vocabulary of Hybridity Theory

Hybridity theory is an active field of contemporary inquiry into the study of culture, it is predicated on a critique of essentialism and it is distinctly political in its mode of inquiry. These were the primary points of the last chapter. But there seem to be some ambiguity as to the scope of the theory. Gilroy, Bhabha and Hall seem interested only by cultural politics. The study of culture divorced from political concerns is antithetical to their projects. On the other hand anthropologists such as Werbner, Giraud, Ålund and Hannerz make use of the perspective to study relatively traditional problems of anthropology thereby implying a more general scholarly ambition for the perspective. Then what is hybridity theory: A theory of cultural politics or a theory of culture as such? Or is there perhaps no difference between the two? There is little doubt that all three of these readings are possible. I, however, shall opt for the third by attempting a construction of a theoretical vocabulary that shows the interconnections and co-definitions shared by the different terms political and otherwise.

Now, a vocabulary such as the one which I am about to create cannot help being an idiosyncratic construction[16]. It is a reading like any other reading that may be useful under certain circumstances. The use I intend to make of it is twofold. First, I want to represent the various voices as part of a (more or less) coherent whole. Thereby I shall of course be doing some violence to all of the participants who will find their complex views reduced to single sentence statements. The gain I hope to achieve by doing this is a greater awareness of what words that are peculiarly redefined for the purposes of hybridity theory. Second, I shall use this vocabulary as a base for further analysis of the metaphorical bases of the terminology and the implications of these metaphors for the study of culture. While such an analysis might be possible without the intermediate step of constructing a vocabulary looking instead at the texts directly, I hope that the added clarity which this intermediate step might bring will be an excuse for going the long way round.

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[16] Hannerz of course in a sense has already made such a construction for his own use, as I argued in the last chapter, but rather than simply make an analysis of Hannerz I find it more useful to make a more generally applicable version, although perhaps somewhat less comprehensive.

Before the analysis proper can start it will be necessary to make some remarks concerning method and presuppositions. First, I shall make use of the phenomenon Thomas Kuhn has referred to as "local holism" (Kuhn 2000: 211) in my construction of the vocabulary. That is to say: the words or at least certain words in the vocabulary are defined in terms of each other and therefore it is necessary to learn these words as a cluster instead of individually. Kuhn's standard example of this is force and mass in the Newtonian vocabulary. You may take either force or mass to be primitive and define the one in terms of the other but neither can stand on its own and neither can be explained without reference to the second law of motion (Kuhn 2000: 211-213). The cash value of this approach to vocabularies is that instead of quibbling about individual words one must evaluate the worth of the entire vocabulary in relation to its domain of usage. Second, the method used to construct the vocabulary has been the iteration of attempted formulations starting with a list of candidate words, which has been gradually narrowed. I have opted for a conservative approach and tried to arrive at a vocabulary, which contains as few words as is feasible. That, however, also means that certain words from adjoining vocabularies such as those tied closely to the globalization discourse such as "transnational" or "cultural flow" have been omitted. The position thus taken is that these words are not necessary for talking of hybridity although they are in practice often juxtaposed. Also omitted are words from anthropology and other human sciences, such as "liminality", "alterity", or "ethnicity", which although figuring in the vocabulary are used either in a traditional sense or without even minimal consensus. The candidate list of words is included in the appendix to this thesis, as is the final list of words chosen for inclusion. Furthermore I have chosen not to give references inline in this part of the text, since the sheer amount of them would be very disturbing to the reader. A list of references indicating the sources for my formulations concerning each individual word can also be found in the appendix. The words of the vocabulary have been italicized in order to distinguish them from other words in the following paragraphs. The style I have chosen for presenting the vocabulary is that of the academic dictionary.

Hybridity is the mixture of elements or meanings from different *cultures*, which leads to the creation of *difference*. *Difference* when used by hybridity theorists generally implies cultural *difference*, but clearly also invokes the standard postmodern uses. The mixture may take the form of juxtaposition, integration, misrecognition, misreading or manipulation, but is always

embodied in the *performance* of a subject. *Performativity* is central to *hybridity* since it is only in the *performance* of an act by a subject that *hybridity* occurs. *Hybridity* is based on *cultural translation* and it is in the act of *cultural translation* that *hybridity* produces *difference*. *Cultural translation* involves the mapping of the signifier of one cultural signifying system to another, but since there is in translation always a certain incommensurability and indeterminacy this at the same time opens up a space for the creation of new meaning through the mixing of elements. *Cultural translation* thus enables *hybridity* through the subject's simultaneous implication in multiple incommensurable signifying systems. *Hybridity* in this way opens up a space between reified cultural binaries that allows the introduction of newness into *cultures*. *Culture* itself has a double aspect. It presents itself as a *bounded* whole embodying a stable structural system of binaries having clearly defined *boundaries*, but at the same time it is liquid and porous overflowing those very *boundaries* and undermining the supposed stability of the system. Traditionally the first aspect has been valorised, but with the coming of the present postcolonial moment a transvaluation of the central dichotomies of *culture* needs to occur, which shifts the focus and value to the second aspect of *culture* and its attendants. Mixture must be privileged over *purity*; positionality must be privileged over *essence*. *Purity* and *essence* in turn are redefined as harmful fictions; things to be opposed. While *hybridity* is as old as *culture* it has gained new importance due to the increasing amount of cultural interaction of the postcolonial world that to a great extent has necessitated the shift in cultural perception. The importance of *hybridity* can be seen most clearly in the *Diaspora*. *Diaspora* as a term, like *culture*, has doubleness to it. It is both a space and an experience. *Diasporas* are spaces where different *cultures* are physically juxtaposed outside any imagined community of "the homeland" or "the nation", and where the tasks of *cultural translation* are consequently continuously *performed*, leading to *hybrid* forms of cultural identity; identities, which are inherently positional and strategic based on their unique location between reified cultural orders and the experiences this brings. This type of identity *transgresses* reified cultural *boundaries*, which are thereby destabilized. *Transgression*, in the form of *hybrid* cultural identities, thus has the same relationship to the binaries of *culture* that deconstruction has to the binaries of discourse. Thereby *hybridity* is inherently political and points the way to a new *cultural politics*. As hybridity results in the production of cultural *difference* the *cultural politics* of *hybridity* is necessarily a politics of *difference*. This implies that the study of *culture* must take into account how the presentation

of order and stability is maintained and supported and at the same time show how this presentation is or can be undermined by the workings of *hybridity*. At the same time these workings must be valorised and their positive nature accentuated. The study of *culture* is thus inseparable from the politics of *culture* and the terminology of *hybridity* theory therefore has within its scope any cultural phenomenon worth studying.

Abstract thought is largely metaphorical. This insight goes back at least as far as Nietzsche, has been elaborated by any number of 20th century philosophers, and has recently been confirmed by findings in cognitive science (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 3-9). Complex metaphors such as those of theoretical vocabularies not only allow us to think of very abstract ideas in terms that are understandable it also structures our experience of them. At the same time it also emphasises some aspects of any given concept while hiding or downplaying others (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 156-158).What metaphors are, then, implied by the words in the vocabulary of hybridity theory, what do they emphasize and what do they hide?

If we start with the keyword culture, this by itself is structured by a large number of metaphors. The fact that the word hybridity can be applied to culture implies an organic metaphor: culture as a living organism. At the same time the dual aspect of the definition of culture implies the further metaphors of one the one hand culture as structure or culture as bounded object, and on the other of culture as a (leaky) container and culture as a fluid substance. The implication of cultural translation is of course the founding metaphor of postmodern anthropology: culture as text. Furthermore the focus on performativity and positionality implies the culture as process metaphor. It seems that when it comes to the concept of culture, hybridity theory makes at least partial use of every metaphor around.

Hybridity itself can (and must) be understood in terms of all these metaphors: hybridity as an organic phenomenon, hybridity as the fissure in the structure, hybridity as the mixing of fluid cultural substances, hybridity as heteroglossia, hybridity as the enunciation of cultural difference. Hybridity can be understood in any of these ways analogous to the various understandings of culture and it is thus structured partly by the general metaphor of "mixing", in the specialized sense given to it by hybridity theory, and partly by the various metaphors structuring the concept of culture. The other terms of the vocabulary largely refers back to

these basic metaphors as well. Transgression, for instance, is clearly based on the culture as bounded object metaphor. It is worth noting that the term boundary (or equally border) has a somewhat special sense that wasn't captured above. It can refer equally to actual borders such as those between countries, symbolic boundaries such as those of the community, symbolically invested physical boundaries such as those of the body, or the boundaries between binary oppositions such as between "light" and "dark". For the purposes of hybridity theory these seem to be held equal.

The metaphorical richness of the vocabulary allows a great flexibility on the part of hybridity theorists and what metaphor is used is largely dependant upon the point that is being made. When making a negative point the bounded object or structure metaphor is usually applied, when describing a positive development the fluid substance metaphor is largely used, and when calling for or praising political action the processual metaphor is commonly used. This allows hybridity theorists to strategically hide or emphasize aspects of the phenomena studied in line with political objectives, which of course is perfectly consistent, if one accepts the inseparability of cultural politics and the study of culture. The reading found in this chapter has focused on "coming to terms" with hybridity theory; that is to say picking out keywords and key metaphors. It has therefore not seemed appropriate to introduce much in the way of discussion or criticism here. There are however certain criticisms that can be made on the present background and it will be the purpose of the next chapter to develop some of these.

Essentialism and Hybridity Theory

The ostensible purpose of this thesis is to explore the potential and limits of anti-essentialism and I would now like to return squarely to this theme. In the last two chapters, it was argued that hybridity theory furnishes a general vocabulary for cultural politics as well as for the study of culture. This theory furthermore is predicated on anti-essentialism to the point where it has been described as being meaningful only as a critique of essentialism by both supporters and critics alike (Pieterse 2001: 224). But essentialism is slippery try to eliminate essence from one place in your theory and it may well simply find another place to hide. This I shall argue applies to hybridity theory as well. In this brief chapter, then, I shall try to show some ways in which hybridity theory fails in its goals; how in spite of all its anti-essentialist intent it still ends up making use of essentialist conceptions.

The first point has already been touched upon. The notion of hybridity as the mixture of cultural substances has the implication that there are or have been pre-existing cultures from which to mix the hybrid cocktail. Likewise the notion of culture as a bounded object to be transgressed imputes to these cultures a fundamental wholeness, and isolation of existence. This, however, is exactly the kind of essentialist conception of culture, which contemporary anthropology has rejected (Friedman 1994: 208-212). It may be objected however that the culture as bounded object metaphor is meant to invoke the discourse of essentialism not represent the actual state cultures at any point in time, whereas the fluid substance metaphor is meant to invoke the discourse of hybridity rather than representing any concept of culture. The metaphors can be held to deal with discourse and not the world, in other words. Furthermore Bhabha's incessant stressing of enunciation over énoncé, does place the emphasis squarely on the act of hybridity rather than the origin of the elements hybridized. It may in other words be an avoidable predicament for (at least some) hybridity theorists, but one requiring concern nonetheless.

The second point concerns the uses of the words essentialism and hybridity. Hybridity is to be valorised, but are all hybridities equal? Essentialism is to be countered, but are all essentialisms the same? If so what essential properties do they share that make them so? And

how does it fit in with the fact that essentialism is often a part of the repertoire of resistance of supposedly hybrid communities? Put simply, if we assign to certain desirable qualities to hybridity and other undesirable qualities to essentialism, we have at the same time given essential properties to these categories. Not an entirely coherent proposition given the foundations of hybridity theory. This point has not gone unnoticed. Werbner has warned both against "essentializing essentialism" (Werbner 1997b: 249) and against treating hybridity as inherently good and cultural essentialism as inherently evil (Werbner 2001: 149-150). The problem however is that if hybridity theory is based on a generalized anti-essentialism, it may turn out that a generalized anti-essentialism based on hybridity is only possible by essentializing the notions of purity and mixture. Otherwise the generalized anti-essentialist critique might have to be dropped, which would be problematic to the political aims of the theory.

The final point concerns the theories of meaning compatible with hybridity theory. There is a sense in which most of the metaphors of hybridity theory require an intensional account of meaning. The fluid substance metaphor does seem to embody meaning in the substance. The culture as text metaphor does seem to place meaning in the signs of culture. The culture as bounded object metaphor does seem to give inherent significance to the boundary. This however can easily be subjected to criticism. Quine in his classic paper on "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" aligned the intension/extension dichotomy with the analytic/synthetic distinction of post-Kantian philosophy, which he then proceeded to destroy by undermining the logical bases of the concepts of analyticity and synonymy (Quine 1963: 20-46). The implication is that intensional meaning is nothing more than classical Aristotelian essentialism transferred to linguistic forms: "Things had essences for Aristotle but only linguistic forms have meanings, meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word" (Quine 1963: 22). This of course applies only to intensional accounts of meaning, and it is of course not entirely impossible that one might be able to construct a suitable theory of meaning that would be both non-intensional and compatible with hybridity theory. Such a theory, however, does not seem to be available at the time of this writing. It seems then that even the theory, which most aggressively has set out to combat essentialism, can be criticized on like grounds. Even though some of this criticism might be alleviated or countered, the ghost of essence remains even here.

Conclusion

It has now come time to bring this thesis to a close. Let me start by summarizing some of the main points. Essentialism is an ancient metaphysical position that has been almost universally rejected by anthropologists, but is still respectable in other domains such as analytic philosophy. It comes in various flavours with the standard philosophical variant being the belief that the world falls into natural kinds that posses essential properties, but can be stretched to the point where any stable binary represents an essence to be opposed. A main reason for the rejection of essentialism in anthropology is the pervasive influence of social constructionist perspectives. This influence is so great that it can be felt clearly even in the vocabulary of theorists who would hardly think themselves ardent social constructionists. The rejection furthermore has led to a critical engagement with classical anthropology and the culturally essentialist foundations upon which it was built. Some anthropologists, drawing on hybridity theory, have taken the project of anti-essentialism a step further and turned it into the foundation for a new way of studying culture and the politics of culture. But even though this perspective does succeed in supplying a vocabulary suitable for the study of culture based from the ground up on anti-essentialist sentiments, it does not succeed in its goal of eliminating essentialism. Given a sufficiently wide definition of essence even hybridity theory falls prey to an anti-essentialist critique. It may well be that any coherent project, even one that acknowledges that its distinctions are made for political reasons, will fall within the "telos of essentialism".

What, then, should we make of the anti-essentialist project? If all attempts to counter essentialism eventually ends up being subjected to a next generation anti-essentialist critique, what are the values of such a project? If signification is only possible on the basis of a system of differences, however unstable and indeterminate such systems might be, then if we dismantle all distinctions in the name of anti-essentialism, we at the same time dismantle the very possibility of signification. Now, obviously there is nothing to prevent one from wishing such a complete deconstruction of some or even all signifying systems, some might even find it desirable, but it does beg the question of whether a human science such as anthropology has any legitimacy without the capacity to signify something about its subjects of study. And if

we cannot construct a system of differences for the purposes of scientific or even just political inquiry then that is exactly the position we shall be left in. For anthropologists, anti-essentialism taken to its final destination implies silence. From a purely pragmatic point of view, then, there is a limit to how far anti-essentialism can be taken, without anthropology (or for that matter any other human science) deconstructing itself. This does not imply that anti-essentialism should be dropped. The vocabulary of social constructionism is an inescapable part of contemporary anthropology and social constructionism requires an anti-essentialism that includes as a minimum the rejection of natural kinds and essential properties in the social world. That, however, leaves a fairly wide spectrum of possible positions for anthropologists to adopt. The important point, however, is that we can neither disregard anti-essentialism, nor make it the summum bonum of our theories. Equally we cannot simply treat essentialism as a derogative to throw at someone we dislike given any excuse, but must instead critically consider just how far it is wise for us to go in our anti-essentialist sentiment. Anti-essentialism, while it is a useful methodological presupposition, is not something we should make into an end in itself. If we do so, we end up trading the ability to make useful distinctions, for the rather limited pleasure of being momentarily in a politically safer position than our opponents.

Appendix

Candidate Words

Hybridity	Cultural flow	Mixture
Liminality	Newness	Politics
Transgression	Otherness	Globalization
Boundary	Alterity	Deconstruction
Border	Heteroglossia	Post-colonial
Culture	Politics of difference	Creolization
Third Space	Cultural translation	Global Ecumene
In betweeness	Cultural construction	Transvaluation
Enunciation	Purity	Identity
Difference	Positionality	Doubleness
Transnational	Boundedness	Binary
Translocal	Performance	Cultural Politics
Transcultural	Performativity	Nationess
Essentialism	Ethnicity	Diaspora
Essence	Race	

Selected Vocabulary	References
Boundary/bounded	Bhabha 1994: 4; Bhabha 1994: 99-100; Bhabha 1994: 206-208; Werbner 2001: 134; Ålund 1999: 113; Pieterse 2001: 220-221
Cultural politics	Bhabha 1994: 25-31; Pieterse 2001: 219; Werbner 1997a: 13
Cultural translation	Bhabha 1994: 226-229; Bhabha 1994: 164-170;
Culture	Gilroy 1991: 6; Bhabha: 135-137; Werbner 2001: 134; Hannerz 1992: 261-262; Hannerz 1999: 401-402
Diaspora	Hall 1990: 225; Hall 1990: 235; Gilroy 1994: 207-212;
Difference	Bhabha 1994: 162-164; Hall 1990: 229; Hannerz 1999: 401-402
Essence	Hall 1990: 226; Gilroy 1991: 5;
Hybridity	Hall 1990: 235; Bhabha 1994: 4; Bhabha 1994: 207-209; Werbner 2001: 134; Ålund 1999: 111; Pieterse 2001: 220-221
Performance/performativity	Bhabha 1994: 36-39; Werbner 2001: 144;
Purity	Hall 1990: 223; Ålund 1999: 114
Transgression	Werbner 2001: 145; Pieterse 2001: 239; Werbner 1997a: 1

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