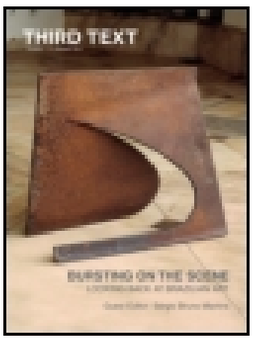

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A New Beginning

Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics

Rasheed Araeen

Art journals are often the products of their times, to represent what goes on around them — such as the art magazine *Frieze* representing young British artists (BritArt) whose success was guaranteed by corporate interests. But the story of *Third Text* is not only different but unusual; it positioned itself against what makes an art journal successful in the contemporary art scene. It came into being not as part of an emerging cultural phenomenon or art movement, to represent and give it legitimation, but to explore, expose and analyse what has been excluded and repressed by institutional power.

The 1980s saw two contradictory and opposing developments. On the one hand, a debate which questioned the institutional policies and attitudes towards artists who were not white, and accused the system of institutional racism. On the other, the emergence of multiculturalism supported and promoted by the establishment which began to overshadow the issues the debate had raised.

The main issue was not just the artists' exclusion from the art scene, but the ignorance and suppression of the whole history of their contribution to mainstream developments. This issue also had an international dimension; many Third World critics and art historians also questioned the way the history of modern art had been perceived and written, including only white artists from Europe and North America.

Third Text took the position that the prevailing situation was not the result of just human neglect or an oversight on the part of those who were involved in writing art history. It represented the very ideology of art institutions. We were encouraged in this respect by the work being done in postcolonial critical theory, particularly the writing of Edward Said.

This issue was, however, ignored by the establishment — which also included those who were promoting multiculturalism — with its usual arrogance and complacency. This prevented any debate taking place within the

mainstream discourse. It therefore became essential for us to take up a critical position in order to explore and debate this issue.

It was with this position that, in the autumn of 1987, *Third Text* came out with its first issue, outlining its specific aims and objectives. Its first editorial, entitled 'Why *Third Text*?', concluded: '*Third Text* represents a historical shift away from the centre of the dominant culture to its periphery in order to consider the centre critically. This does not imply a fixed distance. The movement can be repeated or reversed as long as a critical relationship is maintained. In view of the crisis of Western corporate culture, it appears necessary to develop a constructive international communication beyond the intellectual paralysis which has characterized much of western critical discourse in the '80s.'

The crisis of western culture was caused, in our view, by the inability of the system to come to terms with its colonial past and recognise the reality of the postcolonial world and its aspiration and struggle for human equality, creating intellectual paralysis in its discourse; this paralysis was particularly evident in art history scholarship which was still riddled with eurocentric and racialist assumptions.

It was a formidable stance — to position ourselves against the might of the dominant culture. But, at the same time, we were aware of the difficult task ahead. We didn't think that the journal would last beyond registering our critical position in a few issues. But we have survived. Twelve years and 50 issues on, we have managed to built-up a network of like-minded contributors from all over the world as well as a small but important global readership which aspires and is committed to the radical change we want and have been struggling for. In other words, we managed to establish a global platform for what we consider to be a continuing struggle against colonial structures. This time, it wasn't for the liberation of a particular land or country but against continuing western cultural domination. This domination does not necessarily manifest in suppressing other cultures, or artistic forms of other cultures, but denying other cultures, or peoples from other cultures, their subject positions in modernism.

However, *Third Text*'s mere survival cannot and should not be considered an achievement in itself. What we need now is not a celebration — since the task is not over — but first to look back and examine critically what exactly we have achieved and what have been our shortcomings or failures. What exactly did we mean when we said that we wanted to create 'a historical shift away from the centre'? Did we succeed in this respect? Did we manage to demonstrate analytically the crisis of western culture? Did we go 'beyond the intellectual paralysis... of western critical discourse' and offer something which would free us from this paralysis?

We also claimed that we wanted to represent the Third World and its artistic and cultural achievements. But what were and are these achievements? Are these the achievements now being celebrated institutionally in the West?

These questions are fundamental not only in the scrutinising and evaluation of what we have done so far, but in determining the direction we should now take. It is not enough to enumerate what we have achieved, but to move forward and justify *Third Text*'s continuity; it would be more important to look at what has prevented us from achieving our full objectives.

Of course we faced many difficulties, both internal and external. It was not easy to run an art journal of a professional standard without sufficient financial support and experienced staff, particularly when we had to start from scratch

and without an already defined constituency. It was particularly difficult when we wanted to keep a distance from, and stay in opposition to, the status quo of the academy. Not that we dismissed all that what was being done in the academy, but it was necessary to remind us of its limitations and self-serving interests. We could not therefore expect many mainstream writers to identify with our position, and that is what actually happened. It seems most of them saw us as the 'others' who were engaged in dealing with our own problems, and they wanted to leave us alone.

Our weaknesses and shortcomings *vis-à-vis* art scholarship were compensated by other voices dealing with the problems of culture as a whole in the age of the growing hegemony of global capital, legitimated by the eclecticism of neo-liberal thinking. This has helped us go beyond the limits of art and its hermetic discourse, and look at cultural practices in a discursive manner.

However, our aims of penetrating the historical body of modernism and affecting its central core remain unfulfilled. This was not unexpected. We knew that it would not be possible for us alone to change the institutional structures which protect modernism from the onslaught of those who are considered to be its others. We also realised that there would be resistance from the establishment, but we did not expect most doors of the art institutions and the academy to be closed to us.

THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

These structures are not the bricks and mortar of the modern museums or galleries or the academy, but their ideological underpinning formed by the ideas of modernity. In fact, the concept of modernism in art, its language and history, represents a dominant structure of art institutional power in the West, a bastion of white intellectual supremacy, and this power has been maintained by the exclusion from it of non-whites.

Unlike other discourses, such as literature, modernity of art is closely linked with the philosophical ideas of subjectivity going back to when Descartes declared, 'I think, therefore I am'. This statement was not politically or ideologically as innocent as it may appear; it was made under the shadow of emerging European colonial power and its subjugation of other peoples, which then became a foundation stone of western philosophy. The ideas of subjectivity and aesthetics were then developed by Kant and Hegel, among others, and given a historical function. These were the ideas which would modernise and civilise the world, and which were meant to be carried to the world, according to the ideology of modernity, by whites only. The history of modern art therefore still reflects this function.

If modernity is constructed by and carries with it the universal spirit *à la* Hegel, what is this spirit, and why has it been imposed on the world? Does this spirit only define and construct the European subject, or can it also represent a complex body of ideas — no matter how they have been formulated— which can go beyond the initial objectives of their producers and can be taken up by humanity as a whole? If we stick to the former — which has been the problem — we face the dire consequences of the Holocaust,[1] and the many other human catastrophes of the 20th century. But if we accept the latter, that is, modernity must not remain confined or trapped in the European body, then this could pose a challenge and threat to the former.

This challenge was in fact the cornerstone of the anti-colonial struggle:

1 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Holocaust*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1991.

liberation from colonialism did not mean a return to precolonial structures but a redefinition of modernity, and a Third World claim to its own modernising and progressive ideas, empowering the liberated in their journey to full freedom and self-determination.

When modernity, and with it modernism, was imposed on the colonised world, the colonised accepted it at its face value, its progressive and enlightened ideas, and equipped themselves to get rid of colonialism.[2] This process or struggle is still continuing not only at political and economic levels but also within cultures. In art this struggle took the form of challenging the prevailing concept of modernism and redefining it. It was not just a question of finding a place for oneself within modernism, but redefining the world — through a symbolic practice — which was free from eurocentric structures.

The end of colonialism also liberated artists from their colonial bondage, and when they began to arrive in the West about fifty years ago they wanted to test and prove, as they were no longer the colonial subjects, that they had the same freedom to express themselves as their white/European contemporaries. Being the product of western art education, which infused them with the ideas of modernism, artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean were now prepared to claim a central place in modernism. Their story is therefore the story of struggle between what these artists wanted to do and what was denied them by the dominant culture.[3] While these artists struggled to place themselves at the centre of what was then going on within modernism, they were constantly pushed out on the basis of their Otherness — which was invoked both racially and culturally.

THE REAL ISSUE NOW

Over the last decade or so the exclusion of these artists (henceforth 'the other artists') from the contemporary art scene has been widely discussed, and as a result many artists of younger generations have now been recognised and promoted by the system. But this is a red herring, if not a mask which tries to hide the real issue. There have always been many 'other' artists who were not only highly successful but have been celebrated in the West. If we don't have information about them, it is because they are not included in the mainstream discourse or the history of modernism.

The exclusion of the other artists from this history is in fact the logic of eurocentric modernity, constituted by the notion of difference between the Self and the Other. The former constitutes history (occupying its central dynamics), and the latter its margins. This division between the historical centre and its periphery is formed not only by what separates the powerful from the powerless but is also legitimised by cultural and racial differences. The consequence of this is that one is not defined or recognised by what one does in art, but one's position as an artist is predetermined by these differences. In other words, the framework of both the Self (white artist) and the Other (non-white artist) is already fixed. This not only prevents any dialectical exchange between the centre and periphery, but maintains the exclusive central position of the white artist in the dynamic and construction/writing of the history of modern art.

The issue is therefore not about the exclusion of others from the contemporary art scene and their recognition. Although there have been deliberate exclusions, the real issue is the way others are accepted and accommodated by the dominant culture. It is the supposed Otherness of the other artists which

2 In the Indian subcontinent, the debate about modernity *vs* traditions started at the end of 19th century when the westernised middle classes began to demand the implementation of the Enlightenment's ideas and a share in the colonial administration, which, among other things, led to the emergence of Indian modernism with incorporated indigenous elements.

3 On the struggle of AfroAsian artists, see Rasheed Araeen (main text), *The Other Story*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1989. See also the special issue of *Third Text*, no 8/9, Autumn/Winter 1989; and Rasheed Araeen, 'The Other Immigrant: The Experiences & Achievements of AfroAsian Artists in the Metropolis', *Third Text*, no 15, Summer 1991.

attracts the dominant gaze, so that their exclusion from the dominant history becomes an act of historical rationality. It is therefore not just the exclusion from history which is an issue but also what rationalises this exclusion. However, this rationalisation is not carried out openly and overtly, because the rationality on which the notion of dominant art history and its historiography was based has now collapsed; with the demise of the West's colonial empire, its underpinning philosophy now has no validity.

If the discourse which constructs and rationalises the dominant history — based on a particular human agency, an agency which is constructed on the basis of difference between the European Self and the colonial Other — has now become invalid, how come it still forms the basis of art historical scholarship which privileges the white/European position in history? The answer to this question is only possible when we accept the fact that the other is no longer the Other: not only because we cannot attribute Otherness to those who have abandoned their Otherness by their struggle against colonial structures in general but who have also penetrated modernism and have redefined it through its own logic of innovation and historical breakthroughs. The only way the dominant discourse can therefore still prevail and maintain its legitimacy is by closing its eyes to those who have challenged its eurocentricity; and by pretending that either such things have not happened or what has been achieved by the other artists cannot be authentic.

Postmodernism, which seems to be concerned with the active place of others in contemporary culture, seems to be unaware of the achievements of others in modernity or modernism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the discourse of postmodernism is also based on colonial assumptions and ignorance.[4] Its critique of eurocentricity does not take into account that eurocentricty had been challenged by others before the advent of postmodernism; and there is no need for it to show some benevolence towards those whom it perceives to be the victims of modernity. The victims of modernity are countless; but it is also a fact that others have been able to adopt the progressive elements of modernity or modernism and to use them not only for their own liberation but also for the liberation of modernity from its eurocentric clutches.

My discussion of modernity and modernism is highly over-simplified, and I am not sure this would lead to the understanding I want to convey. What I am trying to say is that if we abandon the idea of modernity, because of its colonial connections, eurocentricity or all those things which postmodernism is critiquing, there is little left with which to challenge the disturbing aspects of modernity. The world is still dominated and controlled by the eurocentric structures of modernity, despite all the rhetoric of postmodernism. The difference between earlier modernity and the present structures of modernity is that these new structures are camouflaged by the spectacles of postmodernism to which everyone is allowed to enter and play their own games. These games are now being played on the assumption that this has given us the freedom to express ourselves; but what we are in fact doing is only targeting the camouflage, leaving behind the structures of domination almost totally intact.

The reason I highlight the struggle of the other artists within modernism is because this struggle is fundamental to bringing about a shift in institutional structures. In challenging eurocentric modernity or modernism, by locating themselves within its central space and decentring the exclusive privilege of the white artist in it, AfroAsian artists were not only redefining modernism but also helping the institutional structures liberate themselves from their colonial

4 See Ziauddin Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, Pluto Press, London, 1998.

past. This task was not an end in itself, confined within the hermeneutics of art practice and its institutional legitimation, but part of a historical process the dynamic of which was the liberation of humanity from oppressive structures so that it could achieve full freedom to express itself. [5]

One can now see why this challenge, which was a genuine and authentic challenge within the tradition of the avantgarde, was seen by the dominant culture and its institutions as a threat. It was a threat not because the system was not used to the avantgarde challenges, but because this challenge came from those who threatened its basic assumptions, not only about itself but also about whom it considers to be the Others. It was our aim in *Third Text* to challenge these assumptions, to show that these assumptions were formed not only by the colonial discourse but also by its racist views about others.[6] But when this challenge became openly political and ideological, and the art institution began to come under pressure, the system began to deploy its liberal tactics to deflect and displace this challenge. This was achieved through multiculturalism, among other things, drawing in many ideas of postcolonial cultural theory which helped the institution to legitimise its neo-liberal agendas.

THE TYRANNY OF POSTCOLONIAL CULTURAL THEORY

As I have already argued, the main problem here is not about the inclusion or exclusion of the other artists from the contemporary art scene, but of the prevailing institutional structures of the dominant culture which not only deny the historical achievements of others in modern art but have been able to suppress them. These structures have been involved in predetermining, controlling and containing the artistic practice of those who may be a threat to these structures, and this is now being achieved with the help of some of the ideas of postcolonial cultural theory.

In this section I want to show that postcolonial cultural theory, which is supposed to be challenging dominant assumptions, has in fact reinforced these assumptions. I am concerned with those ideas which articulate the experiences of postcolonial mass migration, and which then prescribe and legitimate the art practice not only of those who are presumed to have undergone these experiences but anyone who has migrated to the West. These ideas are based on an assumption that every postcolonial migrant has suffered displacement, loss and is now exiled from his or her original culture or home.

It is true that many have suffered this displacement and loss, and there are many living in the West who feel exiled. I am not disputing this. What worries me, and what is disturbing, is that a new postcolonial subject is being created, socially, culturally and ontologically, on the basis of this displacement and loss, with the result that this subject has been made less capable of dealing with the modern world than the white/European subject.

Edward Said's exile is a genuine exile, and his articulation of the experiences of this exile is part of the struggle of the Palestinian people. What is most significant here is that Said has used these experiences to look at the system which has caused this exile, and has then developed a profoundly critical position which exposes the inhumanity of the system. When Said talks about displacement, he is not indulging in the rhetoric of loss but reveals a condition of modernity, which is both negative and positive. If modernity creates a disjunction of an individual from the whole — an exile — it also provides the individual with an insight which goes beyond one's experiences

5 In the US, eurocentric modernity was challenged by the Harlem Renaissance in the '20s and subsequently by African American artists such as Norman Lewis and Adrian Piper, among others, but this challenge is still not fully recognised by the mainstream and integrated into its history.

The challenge of Latin America in this respect is also historically important. But my concern here, as the question of race is implicated in it, is only with the artists of African and Asian origins. The case of Japan, however, is specific and exceptional, and needs a different approach to discuss its relationship with modernity.

6 Rasheed Araeen, 'The Art of Benevolent Racism', *Third Text*, no 51, forthcoming Summer issue, August 2000.

of exile. It is this transgressive insight which empowers the individual, not only to compensate the loss but also to position him/herself critically in the world. The exiled subject therefore does not operate from a position of loss or as a victim, but from a position from which he/she can locate him/herself in the world as a free subject and change it. Said therefore speaks not as a victim but from a position of power which he attains as a subject; he does not expect any sympathy but he puts the sympathiser on the spot so that he can critically engage him/her in a process of change.

Said's achievement in this respect is unique, and I have great respect and regard for him. What bothers me is that his articulation of the experience of *his own exile* has not only been universalised, through its institutional appropriation, but has become a basis from which to look at the non-white immigrant in the West. It is not necessarily Said's fault that his ideas are being misused, but the problem is that the idea of exile has become a fundamental pillar of postcolonial cultural theory; and Said is often quoted to justify facile art practices on the basis of exile. The condition of exile is no longer a loss from which one necessarily suffers, but it is now used by many to elicit sympathy which in turn allows the ruling system to define and construct them as postcolonial Others. I do recognise Said's difficulty here: he cannot respond to this appropriation by the art institutions (which include both the art promotional institutions and the academy) because he is not concerned or sufficiently engaged in the discourse of art. One does not expect him to be engaged in every discourse, but his lack of seriousness in this regard and his apparent uncritical acceptance of whatever is being done institutionally in art today is a matter of concern. He gives an impression that there is no serious ideological struggle in art.

Homi Bhabha takes up the cue from the idea of exile and constructs his Other on the basis of displacement and loss. This Other is a hybrid. Many writers have objected to his use of the word 'hybrid', suggesting that the hybrid should be replaced with the syncretic.[7] But these writers are mistaken; they have not understood that the hybrid in Bhabha's discourse is a specific form of the syncretic whose premises are *predetermined and are fixed by racial and cultural differences*. The hybrid does not stand for a process of all cultural interchanges or inter-mixings and what results from them in the contemporary global world; it is something specific which results only when a non-western culture enters western culture. This entry also takes place through specific carriers, artists from other cultures who must carry identity cards showing their cultural origins and must locate themselves within a specific space — an in-between space — in order to enter or encounter the dominant culture. It is assumed that the enunciation of difference — racial or cultural — is essential in empowering these artists. The result is the power of the mule which always carries the burden and the sign of its breeding.

The theory of hybridity is not based on a recognition of the reality of the historical encounter between the peoples of non-western cultures and western culture, and what this encounter *historically* produced and achieved. The theory of hybridity negates this history, because without this negation this theory cannot seek legitimation from the system which has suppressed this history. And when we look at the art produced by the so-called artists from other cultures in this century, the bogusness of this theory becomes clear.

The encounter of the other artists with western culture took place not recently but long before Mr Bhabha was born. This was, in fact, an encounter with modernity which produced modernism in the colonised countries. This

7 See Marcos Becquer and José Gatti, 'Elements of Vogue', *Third Text*, nos 16/17, Autumn/Winter 1991.

modernism suffered from all the problems of colonialism, its lack of resources and underdevelopment, but when it entered the mainstream of modernism, both in the metropolis and its so-called periphery, it transformed itself into a critical force to challenge its established premises. Bhabha always cites examples from literature in order to validate his theory, but when it comes to art he has no examples to quote because he cannot use them without demolishing his theory. If the theory of hybridity rests on bogus ground, how come it has been accepted by the art institutions and the academy in the West?

Stuart Hall has made a significant contribution to the understanding of popular or mass culture, and its importance in the development of a multicultural society (which is different from neo-liberal multiculturalism). His emphasis on the importance of not sticking to one ethnicity, so that one is not *essentially* attached to one particular cultural identity, is extremely important. But, on the other hand, Hall does not dismiss or sufficiently problematise the use of one's ethnicity in the formulation or articulation of one's experiences, as part of a cultural process which can empower those who have been displaced from their cultural roots. Although he is not interested in cultural roots, he has emphasised the importance of different *routes* different people or artists take to enter modernity. He often cites the difference between Joyce and Woolf; the former is supposed to have taken an Irish route while the latter enters modernity with her Englishness. This may be true, particularly in literature whose structures must constitute some kind of narrative, but this does not resolve the confusion between the subject matter and content of the work. The implication of Hall's position seems to be that the route one takes must be transparently apparent in the work; he seems also to imply that the appearance of this route is important in the understanding of the work. The problem here is not the cultural identity of one's work, but within the context of multiculturalism and its ideology the idea of a culturally specific route leads to a celebration of the Other. My criticism here is not about the route, but seeing the route as an essential content of the work.

Picasso, Mondrian, Brancusi, for example, come from different cultures. One can also say therefore that they took different routes to modernity. But what exactly are these routes and how do they show up in their work? Were these routes determined by Spanish, Dutch and Roumanian cultures respectively or was there something else which lead them to the routes to Paris? I do not deny the influences of their cultures on their works. Their works are also different and they look different — but is this difference the result of their cultures or the different routes they took? Do we invoke their differences when we look at or evaluate their work? How do we explain the disappearance of the difference between Spanish and French cultures in one of the most important and pioneering developments of modernism early this century, Cubism, when Picasso and Braque worked together? It can be argued that there is really no difference between the different cultures of Europe; they are all parts of the same whole. Their movement from one place to another was within the same culture.

Using this argument, I would like to assert that the movement of artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean to the West was also not between different cultures but a movement *within the same culture defined and constructed by modernity*. In the early twentieth century, modernism travelled from Paris to other countries of Europe, triggering other movements in many countries (Futurism, Constructivism, Suprematism, etc), and to the Americas, but it also moved to the colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean (as well as to the

countries of Latin America, which are not being considered here). When AfroAsian artists from different parts of the world arrived in Europe, they were not entering another culture but a different level of the same culture which they had left behind.

It can also be said that Picasso, Mondrian, Brancusi, among many others, were exiled from their countries. But if they felt that they were in exile why did they not go around beating their chests and saying that they were in exile? Because they knew that their exile was not important to the work they wanted to do. They had something *much more important* in their mind. They knew they had to be in exile, not for the sake of being in exile and celebrating it, but it was essential for them to be at the centre of modernism in order to produce new ideas. It was essential for them to transgress not only the cultures they left behind but also their experiences of exile. We can say the same thing about the earlier generation of artists from Asia, Africa or the Caribbean.

It is in fact a fallacy to presume that migration in itself creates displacement, loss and exile. If some people feel that they are in an exile, because they happen to be in a different country than their own, then there must be other reasons for them to feel like this. The first generation of AfroAsian artists in the West did not consider themselves to be in exile, despite the fact that the new environment they encountered was not all that hospitable.

Their ambitions were no different from those of Picasso, Mondrian or Brancusi. This is something postcolonial cultural theory does not understand, or does not want to understand, because it has a different agenda. The apparent rhetoric of many postcolonial intellectuals may be against the system, and they are good at producing very complicated texts, but in reality they want to be part of the system. Careers cannot really be made by confronting the system. This is not a contradiction. After all, we all came here to be successful, and it would be silly if we threw away the opportunity to be successful. I remember a famous radical, postcolonial intellectual approaching me after I had finished my paper at a conference and laughingly saying : 'Well, it is alright for you to make this statement, but I'm an academic. I have to earn my living'.

I am not implying that postcolonial cultural theory *per se* is tyrannical; its tyranny is located in some of its ideas which have very little to do with the specificity of art and which have now been appropriated by art institutions that use them to reinforce their colonial idea of the Other. This has helped them redefine postcolonial artists as the new Other, but also predetermine their role in modern society. With the result that any art activity which does not conform to or defies this new definition is looked upon as inauthentic and is suppressed.

THE POSTCOLONIAL CELEBRITY

Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall are not just important postcolonial theorists but also important celebrities. I particularly mention these names not only because some of their ideas are influential in what is called 'multiculturalism' but also because they have occasionally participated in art conferences and projects, providing them with some kind of legitimacy. I am not critiquing their celebrity status. I am glad that we have some intellectual voice in the West, and I particularly admire the way Said has used his celebrity status to voice the true nature of Palestinian struggle. What I am critical of is the ambivalent and uncritical attitude of these postcolonial intellectuals towards art institutions and their multicultural projects. Unlike the academy, particularly in its cultural studies and literature departments, where

there have been radical changes in thinking leading to a critique of eurocentric or colonial discourses, there has been no such development in art institutions or the art academy.

What bothers me is the fact that these intellectuals have allowed themselves to be used by these institutions, whose agendas are in contradiction to the radical ideas they themselves have produced within their own discourses. These institutions have been able to lure Said, Spivak and Hall to participate in their activities because these activities appear to be new or critically significant, but which in fact are a facade. Their inability to penetrate this facade is largely due to their ignorance not only of the structures of these institutions and their relationship to art, but also their ignorance of the specificity of art practice and its historical and theoretical underpinnings. It is also because, having the status of a celebrity, they think they can speak about anything. Of course, they have a right to speak about anything they like, but art is not anything. It is a serious discourse and a critical practice. To approach it casually and without an informed and critical perspective is to display an irresponsible behaviour, to say the least.

Homi Bhabha's position is somewhat different in the sense that he has himself pushed his ideas into the visual arts, and has been personally involved in promoting art that confirmed his ideas. It would be no exaggeration to say that his notion of hybridity is most influential today, not only among the young artists of Third World origins but also among art writers and curators, who are now collaborating with art institutions in the West in the promotion of what can be described as postcolonial exotica. So, Bhabha's participation in the institutionally organised art projects is not a contradiction.

Stuart Hall came to prominence, *vis-á-vis* art, with the emergence of the Black Art movement of the 1980s and during the celebration by the Greater London Coungil (GLC) of what it described as 'ethnic minority arts' . The Black Art movement was extremely important in the politicisation of the issues concerning both the practice and legitimation of art, but it ended as a victim of free-for-all eclecticism or 'anything goes'. Everything became Black Art so long as it was produced by black artists — which at the end included artists of both African and Asian origins. Being a committed Marxist, Hall undoubtedly has an ideological position, but when it comes to cultural matters, particularly art, his position is not clear. It seems he has no clear ideological position in this respect, which has often lead him into the liberal tolerance or acceptance of what should be looked at critically. Being a celebrity, Hall is often invited by the art establishment to give keynote speeches, in which he often points to the fact that the establishment has ignored the contributions of black people to mainstream British culture. But his approach is often unfocused, too ambiguous, and ideologically indifferent; and in spite of its forceful delivery, often ends up in a rhetoric which is unable to confront or challenge the establishment's misguided cultural policies.

Let me cite an example, to show his liberal tolerance of what was in fact a disturbing cultural presentation. It may appear to be a trivial matter, but it did raise ideological questions which someone concerned with questions of representation should not have ignored. Before the GLC ended, some black functionaries of the GLC managed to secure funds to continue their ethnic activities afterward. One of these activities, which went under the general title of 'Black Experience', was a large exhibition held at the Commonwealth Institute in 1986. The exhibition was opened with a keynote speech by Stuart Hall, but what followed was not only amazing but highly disturbing. A group

of Zulu dancers, with bare-breasted young black women, began to dance. It was a spectacle not only of exotica but also of luscious sexual display which could only be received voyeuristically. I am not raising an issue of sexual morality, but an ethical and ideological — if not political — question. Who were these Zulu dancers, and what had they got to do with black experience? What were they doing in London in 1986 when South Africa was still under apartheid? What and whom were they representing? Were they representing the apartheid's co-opted leader Chief Buthelezi, and his bantustan, or a cultural struggle against apartheid? I am not sure what Hall could have done in this respect, but his silence in such a matter is tantamount to an uncritical acceptance of cultural spectacles in which the exotic Other is put on display. His lack of critical perspective on cultural diversity in Britain — an institutional euphemism for 'ethnic arts' [8] — has allowed art institutions to get off the hook; and this attitude has somehow hindered the possibility of a structural change in the system.

This brings me to a much bigger spectacle in Paris in 1989, 'Magiciens de la terre'. This was a huge exhibition of historical significance, which not only set the future agenda for the accommodation of other artists in contemporary art scene but also provided a model for many future global exhibitions (this exhibition was also opened with Zulu dancers). It comprised one hundred artists, fifty artists of European geneology from the metropolis and fifty artists from the Third World. The European artists were those who had made their names *vis-à-vis* the mainstream developments in modernism and postmodernism, and they were well recognised and historicised, but the 90% of artists from the Third World were those who were, until then, completely unknown. These were folk, naive, untrained, untouched-by-modernism artists, and artisans. The message was clear: it was the *difference* in which the West was interested. It was not the cultural heterogeneity of modernism from all over the world which they wanted to show, but a difference which separated the Self from the Other: while the Self represented a modern, universal vision, the Other was still trapped in their tribal, folk, naive and innocent worlds. The separation was justified textually (an essay by Homi Bhabha on identity was included in the catalogue) by pointing out that there was no authentic modernism in the Third World. Not even the work of Third World artists living in Europe for the last fifty or so years and who had been part of modern developments (the black South African artist, Ernest Mankoba, for example, who was an important member of COBRA and who is still living in Copenhagen today) was considered authentic. The word 'authentic' was emphasised, on the basis that the modernism of the Third World artists was *derivative*, which raised many disturbing questions. Not because one wants to deny the influence of the European art movements on the work of so-called Third World artists, but the assumption that this influence had only produced derivative works was based on the assumption that the Third World *could have not produced* original modernist works of art. Underlying this assumption was the idea that modernity was an expression of 'European Spirit' which could only be authentically manifested in the work of white artists; and if it had found an expression elsewhere it was a disturbing aberation which should not be allowed to enter a modern discourse.

These questions were in fact meant to be debated in a colloquium, to which I was also invited. The most important presence there, however, was of Homi Bhabha and Gayatari Spivak. I was happy to see both of them, and expected from them a critical intervention. Both Bhabha and Spivak delivered eloquent

8 The idea of 'ethnic arts' was first suggested by Naseem Khan in her book, *The Arts Britain Ignores* (jointly sponsored by the Commission for Community Relations, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976) and then officially recognised by the Arts Council in 1982. Now it is fundamental to multi-culturalism, or cultural diversity, in the UK. Naseem Khan herself now sits on the Executive Committee of the Arts Council and was awarded the OBE last year.

For the relationship between primitivism, ethnic arts and racism, see Rasheed Araeen, 'From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts', *Third Text*, no 1, Autumn 1987.

papers, related to what they were doing in their fields, but they said little about what was in the exhibition. There were some ambivalent allusions to the exhibition, but that was all. Given their different academic background, I should not have expected much from them. But then I asked myself, why were they there? What was their contribution? Since they said almost nothing about the ideas underlying the exhibition, didn't their presence there give *a legitimacy* to the ideology of the exhibition? I am sure if Spivak had understood this, she would have seen her invitation in a different light. But that is not the point. What is questionable is the attitude which betrays an indifference to what was a serious matter and which demanded a critical approach, if not a denunciation of what *Le Monde* called a neo-imperialist project. As for Bhabha, knowing his ideas better now, and having some discussions with him subsequently, it is not surprising that he found no problems with the exhibition. In fact it was an occasion when he saw his own ideas of cultural difference being put into practice.

Gayatri Spivak's major involvement in art was her collaboration with Alfredo Jarr, a Chilean artist who lives in New York and who has made a successful career representing Third World peoples as victims. Why others as victims is attractive to the West is something we know from the pictures of suffering other peoples on TV. But the other can speak back and disrupt the dominant gaze; and this is what happened with the Jarr/Spivak project at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1992. The exhibition ended in a fiasco. While Jarr had put on show his various works, he was also commissioned to do a special piece which occupied the whole ground floor of the gallery. For this piece, he visited some girls' schools in the Asian neighbourhood, taking colour portraits of young Asian girls (aged 12 to 16). They were persuaded to pose with a promise that their photos would be displayed at the Whitechapel Gallery, and it seems that they were told nothing else. The photos were enlarged, with texts imposed on their faces (which I presume were ironic texts written by Spivak), pasted on boards and hung from the ceiling. Spivak's own very large portrait, which moved up and down displaying ironic texts on it, was placed at the entrance. All the girls who were photographed were invited to the preview, and they all came. When they entered the gallery and saw their photos with black texts imposed on their faces, they started shouting and demanded that their photos be removed from the exhibition immediately. It was an embarrassing situation for all those involved in the project, and the gallery had no choice but to remove the photos. A new set of photos was then prepared and hung, but without the texts, before the gallery was opened to the public. During the talk next day, many questions were raised but no satisfactory answers were given; Jarr and Spivak then hurriedly returned to New York.

For many years I have sat on this story. Spivak is a good friend and I did not want to embarrass her. I was also hoping that one day she would herself tell the story so that we would all know what exactly was she up to. But it seems everyone wants to forget the incident, as if it was just a silly mistake. It might have been a mistake, but it is difficult to understand that an intelligent and committed person like Spivak would treat this important matter so lightly. The whole event raised important questions about representation, about the representation of the subaltern, which is Spivak's area of work. It also raises many questions about Jarr's work, which has not been looked at critically. Many radical Latin American critics support him on the basis of Latin American solidarity. But what does this solidarity mean? Should solidarity also

lead us to support Third World military dictators, murderers, criminals, political thugs and economic thieves? The issues this incident raises are important and are still there. How do we represent the other? Is the other representable? Spivak has already answered these questions in many of her texts. But theoretical texts are different from the reality of representing those who can speak back. Can we ignore those who speak back?

Edward Said has also been taking part in some contemporary art projects and art history conferences (where he is inevitably invited as a key-note speaker), despite the fact that he has, by his own confession, admitted his lack of serious interest in and concern for most of the art produced in this century. One therefore wonders why he appeared in one of the talks about Documenta X in 1997. Did he know what the whole thing was about? Did he realise that, despite its rhetoric about the issues of globalism, the Documenta was meant to privilege and maintain the white exclusivity of the avantgarde? Catherine David, the director of the Documenta, dismissing the contribution of Third World artists to the mainstream avantgarde, says that

> the problem of universalism... arises with respect to non-western cultural zones where the object of 'contemporary art' is often a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon, linked, in the best cases, to an acceleration of the process of acculturation of cultural syncretism in the urban agglomeration. [9]

Where are the 'non-western cultural zones'? Don't they exist in the cities of Paris, Cologne, London, New York? What 'cultural zones' is she talking about? Perhaps she meant the remote jungles and deserts of Africa and Asia from where she picked up (as an assistant to the director of the Pompidou Centre, Jean Hubert Martin) her exotic artists for 'Magiciens de la terre'. As I have implied before, many non-white artists were on the forefront of the postwar avantgarde, and to call their work 'recent... epiphenomenon' not only displays her arrogance but deliberately adds insult to injury. Her arrogance was openly displayed when she was asked about the exclusion of Palestinian artists from the Documenta (where there were three or four Israeli artists): she was reported to have replied that 'Documenta was not the United Nations'.

The problem here is really structural and about our lack of intellectual resources. We do not have the art historians, art writers or thinkers of the stature of Said, Spivak, Hall or Bhabha, who are engaged and committed to the struggle I have outlined here. So postcolonial celebrities fill this gap; but because they are ignorant of the subject and are not seriously involved in art they are hindering the struggle. In fact, by their lackadaisical and irresponsible behaviour they are undermining what we have been doing in *Third Text*. If they want to participate in this struggle — and they should — they should make up their mind which side they are on. Are they on the side of institutional power, which is still underpinned by colonial structures and discourses and which is now protected by the facade of multiculturalism? Or do they want to support those who are questioning this power? There is no in-between space to hide. You have to be on one side or the other.

THE POSTCOLONIAL OTHER

The triumph of the hybrid is in fact a triumph of neo-liberal multiculturalism, a part of the triumph of global capitalism. Many eminent thinkers have criticised multiculturalism as an attempt of neo-liberalism to contain and

9 Quoted in Jen Budney, 'Bam! The Whole World Jumps', *Nka: Contemporary African Art*, nos 6/7, Summer/Fall 1997, p 61.

displace the struggle of the deprived and oppressed; Slavoj Zizek has described it as a new form of racism.[10] There is no point in repeating their arguments, what I want to do here is to disentangle multiculturalism from the idea of a culturally plural society. A culturally plural society is a society in which all its culturally different components are considered equal, not necessarily quantitatively but conceptually, so that they form a heterogenous whole. This heterogenous whole must then define the whole society, without the notion of majority and minority cultures. In a culturally plural society all individuals must have the full right to decide for themselves how and where they want to locate themselves; and the recognition of their creative ability should not be dependent on their identification with the cultures they had originated from.

This may appear to be unachieveable idealism, but if we really want human equality what is the alternative? We have to start somewhere. Either we should be honest enough and give up the idea of human equality altogether — you cannot have equality only for some — or we must lay a proper foundation on which we can build this equality. Multiculturalism does not provide us with this foundation. It is based on a separation of the dominant majority culture from the cultures of the minority population so that they cannot interact to create the change necessary for all citizens in a society to be equal. If the majority dominant culture — it could also be a dominant minority culture as was the case in South Africa — is intransigent in maintaining its dominant identity in such a way that its power structure is not allowed to be affected by minority cultures or their demands for equality, then it leads the minority cultures into a subcategory or a supplement of the dominant culture; and those who do not belong to the dominant culture are thus contained within this subcategory. Multiculturalism represents exactly this subcategory: it is not about the equality of all cultures, but how the dominant culture can accommodate those who have no power in such a way that the power of the dominant is preserved.

Talking about multiculturalism, Homi Bhabha once remarked that 'we are now caught with our pants down...'. Well, what is he going to do now? Is he going to pull his pants up and fight? I doubt it. Does he not realise that his Other can be successful only when his pants are down?

If we examine Bhabha's ideas, which seem to have a direct influence on the development of multiculturalism, then it becomes clear that his critique of multiculturalism is disingenuous. Since his concept of hybridity and in-between space has created a separate space, specified by the cultural differences of non-white peoples, it has created a separation or dividing line between whites and non-whites; the result is that while white artists can carry on what they always did, appropriating any culture they liked and without carrying with them any sign of their cultural identity, non-white artists must enter the dominant culture by showing their cultural identity cards. Even when they interact with the dominant cultural forms, and produce something new, it must display the signs of their Otherness. We only have to look at the contemporary art scene to see what our recognised young artists are doing. It is pathetic: most of them are acting like juveniles, clowning and buffooning, wearing their respective colourful ethnic dresses and carrying cultural identity cards, they are happily dancing in the court of the ethnic King Multiculturalism. Having thus achieved their recognition, and being celebrated with the Turner Prize, the hybrid children of multiculturalism are in no mood to upset the establishment. They don't even want to know that art has a

10 Slavoj Zizek, 'Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no 225, London, 1997.

historical responsibility, that it has a subversive function which can only be achieved if one is able to penetrate the system and challenge its structures. How can they achieve this function when they are held at the door — the threshold of Bhabha's liminality — and are celebrated outside the citadel of modernism in which the power of the system resides?

Celebration of the exotic Other today is not new. What is new is that the Other is no longer just the culturally exotic Other. We also now have a politically exotic Other, who is supposed to be either exiled from or is critical about his/her country of origin. This new category includes, for example, Palestinians, Iranians, Chinese, South Africans; there is also a slightly different category of the diasporic Other, which mostly includes African Americans and black Africans living abroad in various countries of the West. What is common to all of them is either the predicament of their being outside where they long to be or a concern about the countries of their origins. In the name of a political or critical engagement, a Palestinian artist can now articulate his/her experiences of exile; an Iranian artist living in New York can now represent the condition of Iranian women in Iran today in a highly exotic fashion; Chinese artists can now make fun of what is going on in China; South African artists can now show us what happened during apartheid; and so on. All these artists can now be *celebrated* institutionally in the West. *But the buck stops here.* Try to turn your eyes towards the ideological and institutional structures of the system, which is now so concerned with the plight and struggles of peoples in other countries, and you will see how the doors shut on your face.

It would be foolish to deny the suffering of the exiled or those who see themselves as diasporic, or the anguish of those who are concerned with events in their own countries. But it is important to see what this predicament does in terms of artistic discourse, whether it is a critical tool to disrupt the dominant system or whether it merely attracts the powerful to entice sympathy.

The predicament of others has always attracted the powerful, particularly its liberal section, because it is the way for the powerful to show their sympathy and charity towards those who are deprived and are suffering. The victim is important for the liberal gaze, it is the way the powerful prove their humanism, and thus deflect the critical gaze of the deprived from its source of power.

It is not that one should not express one's predicament or use the predicament of the oppressed as part of one's discourse. But the art work which does not at the same time engage critically with the system *from which it seeks recognition,* is simply reduced to a rarefied commodity for the art market. I do not just question the nature of these activities, but also the power of the art institutions which legitimate these activities. What is the basis of this legitimacy? Is it the power of the powerful, or have they a theoretical basis which recognises the work of both white and non-white artists in the same way? How come these institutions never use the ideas which recognise the importance of radical innovations and historical shifts in art when it comes to the work of non-white artists? The ideas of postcolonial theory and post-modernism are not only inadequate but also inappropriate in this respect.

Native collaborators have always played an important role in perpetuating colonial power and domination, and it is no different today. They have always occupied the in-between space, to create a buffer between the ruler and the ruled. The recent globalisation of the capitalist economy, still dominated and controlled by the West, has attained a new power and confidence which is now being translated through the globalisation of world cultures. This has created a new space and job opportunities for the neocolonial collaborators, and with

this has emerged a group of ethnic or multicultural functionaries, in the form of writers-cum-curators from different parts of the Third World. With the rhetoric of exclusion on their tongues and an appeal to the liberal conscience of western society, these new functionaries drag anyone and everyone, so long as they belong to their own ethnic or national groups, to the art market of the West. We thus have Chinese, Africans, Latin Americans, and so on, promoting their Chinese (which could include South East Asians), African and Latin American artists respectively. As for history or ideology, they are no longer needed.

WHAT SHOULD NOW BE DONE?

A new beginning implies — if not demands — new thinking. It implies that we can no longer continue our journey as we started in the 1980s but must find a new direction. If we have achieved our aims, then we must set up a new agenda to continue the work. If, on the other hand, we have failed in our objectives we must examine this failure and change our approach. The failure might have been due to external factors. In our naivety, we might have underestimated the institutional will and determination to resist, and its power to deploy resources from unexpected quarters to undermine our efforts.

The ground has now shifted, and what we face today is an entirely different situation. The struggle has been hijacked. With the success of the young non-white artists, writers and curators, from the metropolis as well as from the Third World, legitimised with the use of postcolonial cultural theory, the system has now built a thick wall of multiculturalism around itself. This success has also attracted many eminent postcolonial celebrities, who always seem happy to oblige — in contradiction to their own radical positions — and have provided an added legitimacy to and have reinforced this situation.

It is perhaps necessary to clarify here that we are not against what the present generation of artists, writers and curators are doing; neither do we reject any form of art activity. People should be free to do whatever they want to do (including watching Zulu dancers). Nobody should impose any prescription or precondition for human activities. What we are concerned with here are those activities whose success the system uses to camouflage its oppressive structures.

There are peoples all over the world who were subjected to extreme forms of colonial oppression, and whose cultures today are important in their struggle for basic human rights and self-determination. We must support their cultural activities whatever form they take.

The struggle now is not just against what some 'black' artists in Britain used to call 'white institutions', but the system which now also includes blacks, browns, yellows, and whatever, faces. It should therefore be clear that we cannot built solidarity only on the basis of race, culture, ethnicity or nation. Our new alliance should be with those who are committed to genuine change and are prepared to enter into a dialogue. We are not against genuine reforms in the system, but if they do not lead to a structural change we must expose the limitations of such reforms. The legitimacy of the institutions, which are still underpinned by colonial ideology, cannot be left to the institutional power or taken for granted. If the colonial discourse has lost its historical validity, on what basis are the institutions operating and legitimating art today? The prevailing art education system and its resources is another important issue to which we should give serious consideration. Are these resources — both

intellectual and material — appropriate and adequate for the educational needs of a multiracial society?

The question of human agency is extremely important. The agencies of white and non-white artists have been historically formulated and formed differently and oppositely by the dominant culture. Can one's individual stance now, based on self-identity, be enough to provide an agency? Is this individualism not based on the bourgeois myth of the autonomous self?

We must recognise that what we face today is the most disturbing period in the history of modern art. It is the end of a historical period which began after Hegel's historicisation of art. Someone, somewhere has said that modernism is dead but dominant. But it is not modernism which is dead but only western modernism. It is this dead body of western modernism that has become a highly desired and precious commodity. The dominant culture is celebrating the collapse of its enlightened foundation. But this collapse has lead to an art scene in Britain where nihilism, cynicism, exhibitionism, pornography and self-mockery are spreading like a poison in the body of art and destroying its critical and affirmative potential.[11] It influences not only the young non-white artists in Britain but also artists around the world. Artists in China today want to be more sensational than the sensation of BritArt.

It is easy to critique what young artists, both white and black, are doing today. But what choice do they have, when their only ambition is to be successful? The only choice they have is the commodity market; for which they can only supply commodities. There is not much we can do in this respect except to look at this development critically. But it is also important to expose the art institutions, which are funded by public money, for their dependence on, and alliance with, the art market which is not in the interest of the public at large.

In order to deal with this difficult situation today, we need radically new ideas, new strategies, and a new discourse not only to produce art but how to recognise and legitimise it. We should interrogate the whole history of ideas — theoretical and art historical — which has built the edifice of eurocentric discourse. But we must also develop an alternative radical scholarship which can penetrate and expose the true nature of these ideas and how they are camouflaged by humanism.

I have only outlined some of the issues here, but they need to be looked at in some detail and depth. The ideas about art in philosophy are not as simple as I have presented them here, and we should persuade those who have better expertise in this area to contribute to the debate. The ideas of postcolonial critical theory also have many different aspects, and we should expect postcolonial theorists to come forward to clarify these ideas *vis-à-vis* art. We cannot accept the ideas of literary theory for the structurally different discourse of art.

There is no point in us representing what is already represented by the system. *Third Text* should not be considered a 'black' art magazine; neither are we representing what is geographically described as 'Third World'. It was perhaps a mistake our trying to represent what was no longer definable in geographical terms. It should not be our responsibility to represent artists just because they are from the Third World. However, we should continue to publish critical material about artists whose work has been neglected and suppressed.

For us, 'Third World' was an ideological position, in solidarity with the oppressed people. The artists, art writers and curators from the Third World

11 This development reflects the crisis of western culture I spoke about in the beginning, but this reflection is turned into a celebration. See Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, Verso, London, 2000; see also Rasheed Araeen, 'Hello Giuliani, We Love You!', *TwoNineTwo*, no 1, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh, Scotland, March 2000.

are not the ones who are now excluded from or oppressed by the system. The oppression is now concentrated somewhere else; it is the masses of the Third World which are now bearing the brunt of the economic, political and military oppression of the globalised economy and its New World Order.

It would be naive to think art can offer a solution to this oppression; nor can we deal with the problems of economic, political and military oppressions in the pages of *Third Text*. Art as a specific formation of culture has its own structural problem, and to ignore this problem in favour of representing the oppressed would lead us into a sentimental solidarity. However, our job should not just be critiquing the prevailing system, but out of this critique we must also develop a positive vision of the future. This new vision must include the liberation of the world masses.

Clearly *Third Text* alone cannot develop this vision. We need radically new thinkers (including postcolonial theorists and intellectuals), philosophers, visionary politicians, economists, artists and writers to set a new direction, not just for the peoples of the Third World but for the whole of humanity — a humanity not divided by race, colour or cultural differences.

This statement is not a collective voice of the Editorial Board, or necessarily the views of the International Advisory Council. It is a discussion paper on the future direction of *Third Text*. We invite our contributors and readers to take part in this debate. Contributions, not exceeding 1500 words, will be published together in the near future.
