

27 HOMI K. BHABHA

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Homi K. Bhabha (b. 1949) was educated at the University of Bombay and the University of Oxford, and is the Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University and Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities at University College, London. His works include *Nation and Narration* (1990), *The Location of Culture* (1993), *Cosmopolitanism* (co-edited with C. Breckenridge et al., 2002) and *Edward Said* (co-edited with W. J. T. Mitchell, 2005).

When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indications of art offer us the image of our psychic survival. To live in an unhomey world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire of social solidarity: I am looking for the join ... I want to join ... I want to join. (Bhabha 1994: 27)

In his epistemological work on colonial and postcolonial discourse, cultural translation, hybridity and ambiguity, Homi Bhabha gives a central place to culture. Bhabha refers regularly to literature and (albeit to a lesser extent) to cinema. Speaking from a profoundly humanities perspective, and influenced by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Frantz Fanon and Jacques Derrida, Bhabha argues that in a postmodern, postcolonial world, art, including cinema, has a very specific political function to show the underlying structures of thoughts of the relationship between words, stories, images and the world, and to call for social solidarity (Bhabha 2006). Theoretically Bhabha's work has made two important contributions in film studies debates. In the midst of academic discussions on sexual representations in *Screen* theory at the beginnings of the 1980s, Bhabha asked "The Other Question" (1983), looking at ambiguous racist stereotypes. And a few years later, in the context of the revival of questions of Third Cinema, Bhabha introduced the notion of Third Space and emphasized a "Commitment to Theory" (1989). In this essay I shall look at these two key interventions of Bhabha in film-theoretical debates by referring regularly to filmic examples and by thus reconstructing a narrative of Bhabha's key concepts. I shall argue that these concepts are particularly relevant for contemporary globalized image culture.

ECHOES IN THE KERNEL OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE

In October 2001 Homi Bhabha gave a video conference at the Documenta 11 in the House of Cultures in Berlin (Bhabha 2001). Because of security measures after the 9/11 attacks Bhabha was unable to travel outside the United States. Obviously affected by the terrible events, he starts his lecture by drawing attention to the underlying political narrative of the clash of civilizations, also expressed in many Hollywood terrorist action films that framed the event, and by calling for other political narratives that can provide us with lessons of empathies. These other narratives, according to Bhabha, are best learned from the colonized and enslaved worlds. He makes a strong case for seeing contemporary globalization in conflictual contiguity with colonization, slavery and diaspora, which are all earlier forms of globalization. Bhabha refers to Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* series of photographs, showing harbours with container ships full of global goods in transnational movements that relate obliquely to the deadly directions of the global economy of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers.¹ These unequal and unjust relations, Bhabha argues, are the antagonisms of the global world that have to be thought as agonizing continuations of old regimes of power rather than in terms of great dialectics of social and political contradictions.² This conflictual contiguity is the reason why, throughout his work, Bhabha frequently refers to colonial history and colonial discourse. Therefore, before introducing Bhabha's intervention into film-theoretical debates, I shall start retracing Bhabha's main concepts and thoughts by looking at another important text on colonial discourse from *The Location of Culture*.

In the chapter "Articulating the Archaic: Cultural Difference and Colonial Nonsense", Bhabha is concerned with cultural difference and how colonialism dealt with cultural difference at those moments when meaning got lost in translation or even never reached translation (1994: 175–98). Bhabha's starting-points are events described in colonial literature where meaning starts to collapse and that witness "an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate" (*ibid.*). In E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924), Bhabha's main reference in this article, the echo in the Marabar Caves is the "primal scene" for such a non-sensical moment. The story of *A Passage to India* starts when two English ladies, Mrs Moore and her daughter-in-law-to-be Adela Quested, arrive in India in the mid 1920s and are shocked by the racism of the English elite. They try to connect to the Indian people and are invited by Dr Aziz, an Indian doctor, to a picnic at the mysterious Marabar Caves. Here the central non-sensical scene takes place, when Adele gets confusingly overwhelmed by a cave's echo right after she walks into the caves with Aziz. I shall return to this scene, but for now it is important to see that the echo of the cave turns every sound into a non-sensical sound: "Boum, ouboum is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it" (Forster, quoted in Bhabha 1994: 176). "Boum, ouboum" expresses the loss of meaningfulness in cross-cultural interpretations.

Bhabha relates this scene to Lacanian alienation of the Subject in the Other, who can never be known entirely and is always based on a kernel of non-sense, mystery and ambiguity (which makes the Other at the same time strangely unfamiliar and

desirable). This position of undecidability and confusion of the "ouboum echo" in the caves in *A Passage to India* is foreshadowed in an earlier scene, where Adela, freshly arrived in Chandrapore, discovers by accident the hidden ruins of ancient temples in the tropical forest. In the very faithful and much-acclaimed filmic adaptation of *A Passage to India* (1984), director David Lean breathtakingly shows how Adela is fascinated by the erotic postures of the God-statues that we see as her points of view. Her face tells us she is deeply affected and confused by these statues as she begins to discover the sexuality within herself. Then all of a sudden a group of monkeys discovers her and aggressively chases her away. Shocked and scared, Adela gets away and returns home. In an earlier scene she had announced to her English fiancé that she would *not* marry him; now she suddenly changes her mind and asks for his protection in marriage. In an allegorical way the scene shows how confusingly desire and fear operate in colonial discourse in order to sustain the colonial order.

The cave scene shows a similar ambiguity between desire and normative cultural codes. During their climb to the caves Adela starts asking questions about Aziz's wife and love life; she clearly finds Aziz attractive (and conveys her desire to him). Aziz is clearly shocked by her questioning and needs some time to get himself together. Adela thinks of her own loveless engagement with her English fiancé that she has just agreed on (binding her to normative cultural codes). When Adela enters one of the caves she gets frightened, as in the earlier temple/monkey scene. In the next scene we see her in panic running downhill. Back with the English, she seems to hallucinate (she complains of an echo in her head) and accuses Aziz of sexual assault. It is only in court that she acknowledges that she actually does not know what happened in the cave, thus clearing Aziz of the charges against him, a deed that is considered by the English as a betrayal of her race. This rare and courageous acknowledgement of undecidability and not knowing the truth (or the sense) of an event is an example of a general (but mostly disavowed) epistemological structure in colonial discourse that Bhabha describes as "the enunciatory disorder of the colonial present ... [that] lies in the staging of the colonial signifier in the narrative uncertainty of culture's in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other, neither sexuality nor race, neither simply, memory nor desire" (1994: 180).

The "in-between" in this quote should not be regarded as a dialectic synthesis or higher merging between two oppositions, but should be understood as a Derridean *entre* that "sows confusion between opposites and stands between oppositions at once. The colonial signifier ... is an act of ambivalent significations, literally splitting the difference between the binary oppositions or polarities through which we think cultural difference" (*ibid.*: 182). In this sense Bhabha is not saying that in the echo of the cave the oppositions between the English and Indians become confused and are therefore sublated. According to the Derridean implications of the "in-between", the "ouboum" that confuses the opposition between the English and the Indians at the same time sustains them. It is this uncertainty at the heart of the colonial project, the uncanny and traumatic problem of the untranslatable that haunts cultural authority time and again, that Bhabha distinguishes as one of the legacies of colonial discourse that in contemporary global culture is still operative. I shall return to this point at the end of the chapter.

AMBIVALENCE OF COLONIAL STEREOTYPES

Bhabha's seminal article "The Other Question", which appeared in *Screen* in 1983, introduces his ideas on colonial discourse and knowledge construction into film-theoretical debates. Following Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), film-theoretical debates focused for a large part on questions of gender and sexuality. In "The Other Question", Bhabha introduces his particular angle on the emerging debates on race, colonialism and cinema in screen theory.³ Bhabha again emphasizes the importance of recognizing ambiguity and confusion at the heart of colonial discourse but here he focuses on racist stereotypes: "the stereotype [is] an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power". One should not understand the stereotype normatively as negative or positive, nor as a fixed and secure point of reference, Bhabha argues, but as "the process of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (1994: 95).

Methodologically, Bhabha performs a deconstructive reading against the grain of several (film-)theoretical texts in order to articulate more sharply notions of differences of race. Stephen Heath's (1975) analysis of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) is Bhabha's first reference. He draws attention to the elements in Heath's analysis of the structuration of the Mexican/US border that generated the least attention, namely its racial implications and the issue of cultural differences.⁴ Bhabha highlights an underdeveloped passage in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that indicates the relationship between racism and sexuality. Inspired then by Fanon and Freud, Bhabha proposes to see the stereotype in terms of fetishism. Acknowledging the obvious differences between the sexual fetish (disavowing something "invisible") and the racial or epidermic fetish (always visible), Bhabha emphasizes the relationship between fantasy/desire and subjectification/power in colonial discourse. Just as the sexual fetish facilitates sexual relations by disavowing sexual difference, the racist stereotype also "facilitates colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural oppositions in terms of which colonial power is exercised" (1994: 112). The racist stereotype, however, is not based on disavowal value; it has knowledge value. Colonial discourse needs discrimination and the constant recognition of difference in order to create a certain type of knowledge that justifies the colonial system. Freud's assertion that fetishism provides a form of knowledge that "allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret" is important to Bhabha (*ibid.*: 115). It explains how knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure, are so profoundly connected to the visual regime of colonial discourse.

One can look again at *A Passage to India* and see how stereotypes function here. Considering the portrayal of Aziz, it is very clear that he embodies mixed stereotypical beliefs. On the one hand he is seen as a most dignified and docile colonized subject who adapts to the customs and rules of the English. On the other hand Aziz *has* to be accused of sexual harassment because that provides affirmation of the stereotype of the dangerous and sexually uncontrollable black man, which is needed to sustain the colonial authority. In fact, the outcome of the trial was already decided by the English regime before it even started. Hence the subversive and "betraying" act of Adela to withdraw her accusations. Many other examples could be given. And since

stereotypes operate so much within the visual regime, Bhabha's intervention has been important for the critical development of postcolonial film studies.

POLITICS AND THEORY: THIRD CINEMA AND THIRD SPACE

Another contribution that Bhabha has made in film-theoretical debates is his contribution to the Edinburgh "Third Cinema Conference" (1986). In "The Commitment to Theory" (1989), Bhabha warns against a certain rejection of theory among the participants of the conference on political militant cinema: "[It is said that] theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialistic or neo-colonial West" (1989: 111).⁵ Bhabha strongly argues against this binarism of (European) theory versus (developing world) politics and activism. According to Bhabha it is precisely a politics of *cultural* production (such as cinema) that gives depth to and extends the domain of "politics" in other directions than only social and economic forces. Beyond the simplistic opposition of the West and the developing world, Bhabha draws attention to the complex and uneven interplays between developed and developing worlds. The West has great symbolic capital, as is clear from the example of an Indian film that wins a Western film festival, which then opens up distribution facilities in India (*ibid.*: 113). But this does not mean the West and India have a pure oppositional relationship. Rather, this relationship should be seen as a process of (often agonizing and traumatic) negotiations.

In a similar vein, theory and political action are not opposed, but are mutually implicated. In the first place this is because the textuality of theory is not "simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject" (*ibid.*: 115). Rather, the political subject should be seen as a discursive event that emerges in writing and political enunciation. As with the "non-sense" in colonial discourse and the ambivalence of stereotypes, Bhabha emphasizes the fantasmatic ambivalence of the text that infuses the political fact. So for Bhabha the oppositions between appearance and reality, fantasmatic and factual, theory and practice, are false oppositions. They are always already mutually implicated in a process of negotiation. Bhabha calls this the temporality of negotiation and translation. This temporality, to which I shall return in the next paragraphs more elaborately, has two important implications signalled by Bhabha:

First, it acknowledges the historical connectedness between the subject and object of critique so that there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth. ... [Secondly,] the function of theory within the political process becomes double-edged. It makes us aware that our political referents and priorities – the people, the community, class struggle, anti-racism, gender difference, the assertion of an anti-imperialist, black or third perspective – are not "there" in some primordial, naturalistic sense. Nor do they reflect a unitary or homogeneous political object. They "make sense" as they come to be constructed

in the discourses of feminism or Marxism or the Third cinema or whatever, whose objects of priority – class or sexuality or "the new ethnicity" (Stuart Hall) – are always in historical and philosophical tension, or cross-reference with other objectives. (*Ibid.*: 118)

All these different political groups come into being, or make sense in the discourses they construct in relation to specific historical and philosophical references. Each political position, Bhabha argues, is always a process of translation and transference of meaning. No position can claim a natural and timeless truth. And it is this emphasis on the construction of discourses that is the main contribution of theory's vigilance that "never allows a simple identity between the political objective (not object) and its means of representation" (*ibid.*: 119). Bhabha is thus concerned with the knowledge that emerges in the encounter between theory and politics. Theory cannot claim a meta-position that presents a more general or total view, nor is it an elitist perspective outside the political. Rather, it is an actor in the process of negotiation and translation that is never closed, finished or total.

The most important theoretical concept that Bhabha proposes in "The Commitment to Theory" is the concept of the Third Space of enunciation, "which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (*ibid.*: 129). This Third Space makes meaning an ambivalent process, not a fixed reference. Third Space in itself is not representable; it is not an actual space, but it is caused by the openness of signs, symbols and culture that can be "appropriated, translated, rehistoricised, and read anew" (*ibid.*: 130). It is a space of hybridity in and between cultural differences. Going back to *A Passage to India* once more, we can now see how it is precisely the confusing and traumatic moment of the echo in the cave that allows for appropriation, first by the hegemonic discourse of the English, who want to make sense of this scene by fixing Aziz in the stereotypical place of the sexually uncontrollable Other. But as Adela re-opens the meaning of the mystery of the cave by acknowledging that she does not know what happened, new meaning can be assigned to it and the Indian population turns it into a discourse of victory and possible change. In respect to questions of Third Cinema, Bhabha has clearly given theory a new place, beyond the oppositions between theory and political practice, showing that meaning is always a site of struggle, traumatic negotiation and open transference of meaning, precisely in the act of filming and the (theoretical) production of discourses.

"GHOST STORIES" ON THE NATIONAL SCREEN

As one reads Bhabha's work in total, one is struck by the meticulous coherence of his system of thought. It is as if every article or chapter develops another piece of his reasoning, but always connected to his main principle of cultural difference and the ambiguity of signification and cultural authority. In "The Commitment to Theory" Bhabha indicated that in the process of enunciation there is a split between two different types of time: on the one hand, the traditional cultural demand for a fixed

model, tradition and stable references (mythical time); on the other hand, the space for negotiating new cultural demands, changes, resistances (time of undecidability, time of liberation). Bhabha develops this idea of “double time” with respect to the idea of the modern nation in his article “DissemiNation” (1994: 199–244). Here Bhabha moves from colonial discourse and the imperial situation to the condition of migration and diaspora in postcolonial nation states. Obviously Bhabha plays here in Derridean fashion with the word DissemiNation, completely in line with his argument that the homogeneous narrative of the modern Western nation is displaced and “disseminated” by other narratives, narratives from the marginalized, migrants and minorities.

The nation is constructed in a double time, a double act of writing that splits the national subject. There is a homogeneous time of a pedagogy of the nation that narrates and signifies the people as a historical sedimentation. But at the same time the nation has to construct it itself time and again from the patches of daily life in the performance of the narrative in the present. This performative “introduces a temporality of the ‘in-between’” (*ibid.*: 212). This double temporality of pedagogy and performance of the nation creates a space where minority discourses emerge (*ibid.*: 222). Bhabha refers to the Black Audio and Film Collective’s *Handsworth Songs* (dir. John Akomfrah, 1986) to indicate how a film can function as a performative act that questions the pedagogy of the nation. Dealing with the riots of 1985 in the Handsworth district of Birmingham in England, the film is, according to Bhabha’s analysis, haunted by two moments: “the arrival of the migrant population in the 1950s, and the emergence of a black British people in diaspora” (*ibid.*: 223). The film can be considered as a Third Cinema film that aims at raising cultural and political awareness of British minorities. The archival footage of the arrival of migrants, full of hope and singing the English national anthem, introduces itself between the pedagogical narrative of the sedimented nation and the contemporary reality of the migrant’s minority position. Images of the riots of 1985 demonstrate how times change and how the riots contain “the ghosts of other stories” that are hidden within the national narrative (*ibid.*: 224).

The homogeneous time of the pedagogy of the nation entails a huge “effort” of forgetting, the forgetting of the real origins of the narrative of the Western nation, which excludes the violence of imperialism and the role of “Others” in the creation of the nation. It excludes the fact that large parts of the history of the nation happened overseas, outside the territory of the nation itself. It is impossible here not to refer to another film that precisely raises the ghosts of other stories in the homogenized image of the nation, Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (Hidden; 2005). The film has been widely discussed and commented on, but in connection to Bhabha’s concept of the double time of the nation it is striking to see how this film is almost a literal act of ghostly repetition and doubling of time, expressed at the level of the image. The coherent life of the French bourgeois television presenter and actress is profoundly disturbed by the anonymous video recordings of their house they receive in their mailbox, which literally doubles the filmed image of their house with the more ghostly video recordings of it. In the search for the sender of these images, the largely forgotten or disavowed history of the Algerian War of Independence emerges.

Bhabha ends his essay on the double time of the nation by referring to Salman Rushdie’s evocation of the English weather in the *Satanic Verses*: “The trouble with

the English was ... in a word ... their weather” (quoted in Bhabha 1994: 242). Bhabha explains that the English weather with its notorious rain is the most changeable and immanent sign of national difference. It evokes England, but also “revives memories of its demonic double: the heat and dust of India” (*ibid.*). In that sense *Handsworth Songs* tropicalizes London. And is it also obvious that the English rain at both the beginning and end of *A Passage to India* is closely connected to the heath in India as an allegory of the double temporal inscriptions of the nation.

AGENCY IN THE PERFORMATIVE SPACE OF CINEMA

The double time of the nation raises the question of agency from a minority perspective. This question is addressed in “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” (1994: 245–82), where Bhabha reformulates and extends the times of pedagogy and performance of the nation into a temporality of Casablanca and a temporality of Tangiers. Bhabha now looks at the transformation of the notion of time itself, rather than at the narrative of the nation as in “DissemiNation”:

To reconstitute the discourse of cultural difference demands not simply a change of cultural contents and symbols; a replacement within the same time-frame of representation is never adequate. It requires a radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the “sign” in which cultural identities may be inscribed. (*Ibid.*: 246)

Bhabha emphasizes the importance of culture as a strategy of survival and argues that this strategy is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacements of various sorts (imperial, slavery, migratory, exilic). It is translational because such dynamic histories make the question of how culture signifies, certainly in times of global media communication, a complex matter.

In order to address these questions of transnationality and translationality, Bhabha refers to Roland Barthes’ visits to Tangiers. Tangiers was very instructive for the white French semiotician because it enabled him to open up hegemonic language (French) for transnational and translational revisions. Bhabha recalls how Barthes describes his Tangiers experience: “Half-asleep on a banquette in a bar, of which Tangiers is the exemplary site, Barthes attempts to ‘enumerate the stereophony of languages within earshot’: music, conversations, chairs, glasses, Arabic, French”, when suddenly he feels how the sentence is opened up with the carnality of the voice and the incomprehensibility of language (*ibid.*: 258). “I was myself a public place, a souk; words, small syntagmas, bits of formulations, and no sentence could be formed” (Barthes 1979: 79, my trans.). This is what Barthes calls “the outside of the sentence” and what Bhabha renames the “temporality of Tangiers”, a temporality that is changing and open, full of ambiguities.

Bhabha contrasts this temporality of Tangiers with the temporality of Casablanca, for which he refers not so much to the city itself as, significantly, to the film *Casablanca*

(dir. Michael Curtiz, 1942): "In Casablanca the passage of time preserves the identity of language; the possibility of naming over time is fixed in the repetition. ... 'Play it again, Sam' which is perhaps the Western world's most celebrated demand for repetition, is still an invocation to similitude, a return to eternal verities" (Bhabha 1994: 261). Casablanca could be seen as a sign for a nostalgic time of the pedagogy of the nation; Tangiers is the sign of the "non-sense", the sign that marks the "time-lag" between the event of the sign itself and its discursive eventuality (*ibid.*: 263). In the space of this time-lag, negotiations of meaning and agency are possible. By referring to Hannah Arendt's concept of the intersubjective space of "human inter-est" that are opened by this temporality of Tangiers, Bhabha sees the possibility for agency: "When the sign ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol, it also seizes the power to elaborate – through the time-lag – new and hybrid agencies and articulations. This is the moment for revisions" (*ibid.*: 275).

Elsewhere I have elaborated on these moments of revision by analysing filmic representations of Tangiers in a double time structure, demonstrating that the time of Casablanca structures nostalgic filmic discourses about the city as international zone. And a temporality of Tangiers can be discovered in both Third Cinema films about boat refugees that hide in Tangiers harbour and the films of French film-maker André Téchiné.⁶ Here I would like to look once more at *A Passage to India* and see whether this film allows agency in a temporality of Tangiers. Clearly, the time of Casablanca is present in the rules and traditions of the English, which are set up to remain eternally the same, keeping the same structures of power and pleasure in place. It is with the arrival of Mrs Moore and Adela Quested that (both symbolically and effectively) a different temporal order is introduced into the imperial nation. Tangiers-like, Mrs Moore and Adela question the lack of intersubjective encounters and inter-est in the Indian people. Mrs Moore opens up this intersubjective space by talking as a friend to Aziz and inviting him to the English club, and Adela by grasping Aziz's hand (in close-up in the film) to climb the rocks. These are moments of transformation of temporalities where India is no longer a fixed signified but becomes openly (and no longer deeply disavowed and hidden) a much more ambiguous space. I have already indicated how on the part of Adela this leads to a moment of "non-sense" and an echo in her head. This confusing moment where signification is suspended is immediately appropriated by the English to re-install the time of Casablanca. But it also opens up the possibilities of agency on the part of the Indians, since it is from now on that the Independence Movement becomes more prominent in the film, which eventually leads to Aziz's empowerment as an Indian, instead of as a colonized subject.

FROM POSTCOLONIAL HYBRIDITY TO GLOBAL AMBIVALENCE

In November 2007, Bhabha gave a lecture "On Global Ambivalence" in the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Here Bhabha directly addressed global image culture. Concerned about the omnipresence of the image, he asked how it is possible to make distinctions in the vast wall of information that keeps on disappearing and yet makes an intervention (Bhabha 2007). In line with his assertion in Berlin that

contemporary culture has to be seen in conflictual contiguity with earlier structures of colonial and postcolonial discourse, Bhabha emphasizes once more the ambivalent moments in culture that ask for critical reflection and commitment in both theoretical and political senses. But yet again, his focus has slightly shifted. Bhabha's concern is now more clearly related to image culture and its relation to memory and memory sites. A personal experience that Bhabha shared with the audience in Eindhoven is very telling of his position. During a visit to the Nuremberg fields in Germany, now completely empty and overgrown with weeds, Bhabha noticed that in this empty space the memories of several films started to replay in his mind; *Judgment at Nuremberg* (dir. Stanley Kramer, 1961) and *Brutalität in Stein* (Brutality in stone; dirs Alexander Kluge & Peter Schamoni, 1961), which he saw many years before in Bombay, brought back the question of the "banality of evil" and resuscitated the voices of Hitler and Himmler. Cultural memory, particularly cinema in this case, exceeds the historical event.

Bhabha has always emphasized the role (location) of culture, but now that everything is immediately translated into images or other digital codes, this fact becomes even more pertinent, complex and full of ambivalences that have to be acknowledged. On the one hand contemporary image culture provides us with an endless digital hall of mirrors and pictures that never go away (Bhabha referred in his lecture to the images of Abu Ghraib in particular), and on the other hand these images call for an ethics of memory, as the cultural sites of memory in image culture are increasingly ambiguous. As there were in colonial and postcolonial times, Bhabha argues for alternative spaces of narration and revisions and for the "right to narrate".

But Bhabha's earlier concepts on colonial and postcolonial discourse are also relevant for globalized media culture. The insistence on a kernel of "non-sense" and "untranslatability" in intercultural relationships should warn us of too simple translations of one discourse into the other. For instance, Western media emphasize the Western values of democracy and freedom of speech and treat them as transparent fixed values. On the one hand, this leads to unbridgeable gaps in creating sensitivities to other political and cultural situations, and on the other hand, this same ambiguity of the terms leads to perverse appropriations of the freedom of speech translated into a political right to insult.⁷

Bhabha's analysis of the ambivalent and double function of stereotypes is just as important today as in colonial discourse. Minorities and (illegal) immigrants are still discriminated and stereotyped in order to sustain certain empowering "knowledges" and justify government policies. And these stereotypes are increasingly created and sustained in images that travel in ever growing quantities and speed across the globe. The temporality of Tangiers that allowed for the revision of history and the re-inscription of subaltern agency in postcolonialism is a process that is continuing in contemporary globalized media culture, where the fight between "Casablanca" (the myth of eternal origins) and "Tangiers" (transformations) is continuous in all societies.

One could argue that in contemporary image culture the internet, and especially YouTube, has become a sort of symbolic Third Space, where meanings are constantly negotiated and translated into all kinds of other meanings. If Third Space is fundamentally open, it implies that meaning can be transferred in all kinds of directions, not only between the colonial and the colonized, but between many different enun-

ciatory positions and meanings. But this does not mean that everything becomes meshed in a hybrid, happy common space, as the concepts of hybridity have often been considered in critiques on Bhabha's postmodernism.⁸ Things are more complicated and agonizing. Bhabha has always emphasized that the synthetic "merging" view of developed and developing world encounters does not correspond to his ideas. Bhabha is concerned to show how culture is a contested location: an ambivalent place that is open for complex and often agonizing negotiations in which balances are not even and pleasure and power always play confusing roles.

Although Bhabha's conception of cinema is part of a much larger field of artistic cultural interventions, he has made several important theoretical contributions to film-theoretical debates, drawing attention to the ambiguous process of signification in colonial and postcolonial discourses. In today's audio-visual culture his ideas seem all the more important; his continuing call for theoretical reflections from a humanities perspective, especially, seems of a much larger significance. As he argues, scholarly knowledge is not in opposition to the world, but

through a process of conceptualization the empirical world comes to be represented in linguistic signs, scientific formulae, resonant symbols, or digital images. Humanists reflect as much on these processes of mediation as on the outcome of knowledge. They draw attention to the frames, maps, or tables with which we construct our access to reality at one remove.

(Bhabha 2006)

The location of cinema as one of the most influential art forms in contemporary globalized media culture, but also as the basis for political activism of all sorts, asks for reflection on its ambivalent implications for cultural knowledge and strategies of survival.

NOTES

1. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 11, Bhabha also refers to *Fish Story*.
2. Bhabha's concept of dialectic seems to be always very Hegelian in that he conceives it as great contradictions that lead to a teleological synthesis. At several instances, such as in this lecture, Bhabha rejects this kind of dialectic. However, as Fredric Jameson has argued, there are several ways of defining dialectics and Bhabha does seem to be dialectic in a Marxist sense, in that he favours a logic of (changeable) situation or historicity, that he looks for alternative historical narratives and emphasizes antagonist views instead of a unified story, looks for material grounding of analysis and finally aims to "transform the present into future"; X. Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Dialectics: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *New Literary History* 29(3) (1998), 353–83.
3. Bhabha's "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" is reprinted in his *The Location of Culture*, 94–120. Page references are to this edition.
4. The main reading of the border is directed by feminist discourse, to see it as a struggle between the Ideal Father and the Phallic Mother, with Susan as a "good object" that delivers Vargas from his racial mixedness.
5. Bhabha's "The Commitment to Theory" is reprinted in *The Location of Culture*, 28–56. References are to the version in *Questions of Third Cinema*, J. Pines & P. Willems (eds), 111–32 (London: BFI, 1989), which addresses explicitly the conference context.

6. See my "Filming the Times of Tangier: Nostalgia, Postcolonial Agency and Preposterous History," in *Cinema at the Periphery: Industries, Narratives, Iconography*, D. Iordanova, D. Martin-Jones & B. Vidal (eds) (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming) for an elaborate analysis of cinematographic temporalities of Tangiers.
7. I am referring here to the Dutch situation, where an extreme right-wing politician claims the right to make a *film* about the fascistic nature of the Koran.
8. Marjory Perloff, for instance, gives a typical example of this type of critique: "In its general outlines, Bhabha's hybridity paradigm has enormous appeal: we want to believe, after all, that the postcolonial location is one where the binary opposition of oppressor and oppressed, male and female, master and victim, has become irrelevant, that the new playing field is one of performative contestation rather than ethnic or national separation and rivalry"; "Cultural Liminality/Aesthetic Closure? The 'Interstitial Perspective' of Homi Bhabha," *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics* 1(1) (Spring 1999), 109–25, www.epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/bhabha.html (accessed August 2009).