off virtue as something special and separate, Homiak finds it to be quite naturally interwoven into our quotidian affairs.

Calhoun justifiably claims that the essays in this volume are similar in spirit, if nothing else. The tension between diversity and unity is never resolved, yet it is a tension that contributes to the book’s success. The question of how the category “woman philosopher” operates within the discipline is brought to the fore, and remains very much an open question.

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UnForeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas
RITA DE GRANDIS and ZILA BERND, Editors

The notion of a “pure identity” has dominated cultural and political thought for much of human history. Although we tend to think of it as an ideal, pure identity has two major faults: it often serves as an ideological support for “ethnic cleansing” or some other politics of exclusion, and it assumes as possible what never was, is, or can be: a univocal identity. One’s identity is hybrid: other identities simultaneously transcend and are immanent aspects of it; we intersect each other and yet remain distinct. Bakhtin provides one version of this thesis. He accepts that subjects are not separate from what he calls “social languages” or “voices,” and then shows that each social language always “intersects” or “cites” other such languages: “[A]t any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form. These ‘languages’ of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying ‘languages.’” Because of this linguistic heteroglossia, subjects, like society itself, are hybrids, that is, an interplay of voices including the one that usually serves, or is taken as, the subject’s “true” identity.

Most of the authors in Unforeseeable Americas refer to Bakhtin and his notion of hybridization. But they also draw from a tradition of thinking about hybridity that precedes Bakhtin and has developed largely independently of him. Since the conquest, Latin American thinkers have always seen “mestizaje,” that is, their mixed Amerindian, African, and European legacy, as characteristic of the countries south of the U.S. border and as that which, in a positive manner, distinguishes them from Europe and the imperialistic power to the north. Indeed, Mexico’s Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924, José Vasconcelos, wrote a famous book, La raza cósmica (The Cosmic Race), in which he valorized the integration of races in Mexico and Latin America. Through individual miscegenation a fifth cosmic race would replace the four existing ones. Most Latin American thinkers have taken this biological hybridization as only a symbol for what they consider a more important cultural and linguistic hybridization.
Besides Vasconcellos, some of the most cited Latin American writers on hybridity are the Cuban poet José Martí, the Peruvian novelist José María Arguedas, the Peruvian scholars Angel Rama and Antonio Polar Cornejo, the Cuban anthropologist and public intellectual Fernando Ortiz, and the Mexican intellectual Néstor García Canclini. All these figures are discussed in *Unforeseeable Americas,* some, like Martí, extensively, and Polar is even one of its contributors. This discussion includes the major notions that these writers introduced or are developing, such as "transculturation," "mestizaje," "migrancy," and other versions of what we can refer to collectively as "hybridity" or "hybridization." The editors of *Unforeseeable Americas* note that the "new' idea" of hybridity has already reached its "boiling point" and is now revealing some of its limitations. They have therefore collected papers that address these limitations, especially as they have evolved in the past decade of "literary and cultural hybridity in Latin American literary and cultural criticism." Their discussion of these limitations is enriched by frequent reference to and use of such postmodern thinkers as Barthes, Bhabha, Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Geertz, Said, and Taussig.

Although the papers focus on "the multitemporal heterogeneity that characterizes [the] modernity [of Latin America]," two deal with the "unforeseeable Americas" of Japanese Canadians and Oriental Québécois. Moreover, a number of the papers illustrate or support claims concerning hybridity though extensive analyses of works of art, literature, film, and various examples of popular culture and religion. Most of the fifteen papers published in the volume are authored by scholars who have lived and taught in both South and North America. Moreover, each of the authors has an interdisciplinary background encompassing such fields as history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and literature—a grab bag necessary for dealing with a topic like hybridity. The volume seems aimed at scholars already involved in the field. Although the history and variety of the different versions of hybridity in Latin American thought are discussed, it is not done in an introductory manner. Nonetheless, the intellectual richness of the papers makes them interesting to initiates and veterans in the field alike.

I shall concentrate on the theoretical positions taken up in the articles and restrict myself to those articles that I find the most useful in illustrating these positions. More specifically, the author of the first article in the volume, Sabine Mabardi, sets out the two "trends" manifested in the work of the thinkers she reviews in her paper and in other papers of the volume: "one celebrating the hybridity of culture and, the other, skeptical of it". In the opening paragraph of this review, I have already indicated reasons for celebrating the notion of hybridity. These are reiterated frequently and added to in the papers that comprise *Unforeseeable Americas.* I will therefore concentrate on the suspicions raised in the volume over the role of "hybridity" in contemporary thought. I will then suggest some ways in which one might reply to them.

Mabardi introduces one of the graver of these suspicions right after her comment on the two trends concerning hybridity. She begins by reminding us that "the declaration of liberation from the subject, the death of the subject/author" came about "just when feminist groups were joining the debate." In other words, just when women needed to appeal to a collective...
subject or feminine identity as both oppressed and now ready to defend itself, these notions are cast aside in postmodernism’s eschewal of individual and collective subjects. Mabardi then shows how other authors have pointed out that hybridity seems to serve the interests of “Euro-American hegemony” just when subaltern voices are increasing their audibility around the world. For example, the mega-exhibition *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* celebrates hybridity and rejects returning to an “essentialized past” at a time when indigenous people “feel they must go back to their lost origin for reasons of survival” (12).

In concert with the skepticism highlighted by Mabardi, Jerry Zaslove, in his “Memory’s Children and Redressing History: Critical Reflections on *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa—The Case of a Northern ‘Hybrid’ Novel,” sharply criticizes “hybridism” for muting voices of resistance. For example, he declares that black-white hybridism in the Americas “is a reactive formation to the traumatic domination of white over black” (161). More generally, he argues that the aesthetics of hybridization is ineffectual in relation to the cultural hegemony of the dominant classes: “The Canadian multicultural policy is the public sphere institution that effectively transforms ethnic identity into an ideological pattern where the creative character of social life... is sacrificed to legal and technical applications of identity. Put differently, hybridization became a structural feature of the bourgeoisie’s success in institutionalizing and managing the polyphonic discourses that were released with the spread of peoples and, at the same time, with the need to assimilate peoples through reading, literacy, numeracy, universal education and marketplace values” (180). Zaslove argues that Joy Kogawa’s novelistic account of the internment of the Canadian Japanese during World War II preserves a sense of the historical time that undermines the postmodern promotion of multiple heterogeneous times and the myth of a harmonious multicultural society. In her article, “Pursuing Hybridity: From the Linguistic to the Symbolic,” Rita Oe Grandis adds support to Zaslove’s objection to (and contra Cancini’s affirmation of) hybridity by referring to Robert Young’s work and affirming his fear that the celebration of cultural hybridity risks elevating a non-racist ideology to the level of myth, thereby ignoring actual ethnic, racial, and class conflicts.13

A second suspicion that revolves around the popularity of hybridity and its ties to multiculturalism concerns the status of the notion of the subject or self. According to Zaslove, the notion of hybridity and the “new [Canado-Ameri­co-Northern] market world order” create “a world of multiple identities without integral ‘selves’” (191). He valorizes, and feels the novel *Obasan* illustrates, “the historical person whose hybrid self is not simply made of the pastiche of fragments tattooed on the self” (192). The type of hybridity that Zaslove fears is dramatically “fantasized” in Vicente Sánchez-Biosca’s article, “Metamorphosis as Fantasy of the Hybrid: Postmodern Horror and the Destiny of the Human Body in *The Fly*” (David Cronenberg, 1986). When a fly enters the scientist-protagonist’s human-transporter machine, the result is an “impossible narcissism” in which the scientist, also in the machine, is converted not into a fly but into something “that never existed” and a “degradation of the flesh” (297), or, as De Grandis and Bernd put it in their introductory essay to the volume, a “dissolved identity” (xxviii). This tale of an uncanny metamorphosis and dissolved self appears to capture the worst fears that we have about the postmodern idea of the self or
about a possible effect of postmodernity itself. In her essay, Mabardi points out that Canclini also notes the prevalence of this type of fear. He suggests, she says, "that subjects themselves create rituals because there is a limit to the amount of hybridization that they can bear."

Despite the suspicions of hybridity articulated in many of the articles in *Unforeseeable Americas*, most of the authors represented in the volume are favorably inclined toward the notions of hybridity and postmodernism. Their intent, for the most part, is to encourage us to find means of overcoming these limitations. None would appear to want to return to modernist totalizing doctrines, univocal identities, autonomous subjects, or other views contrary to the seminal idea of hybridity provided by the Latin American social reality and its intellectual tradition. In order to contribute to the construction of a more viable notion of hybridity, I would like to propose that we consider two aspects of hybridity that may be helpful in this regard.

The first of these concerns the notion of the subject and its identities—its hybrid identity. First, this identity is not a synthesis: the strands or other voices that make up our own are still very much alive; we are an “agon,” a contestation of many identities or voices. Who has, for example, not been surprised to hear a father’s or mother’s voice, or that of some other authority or rebel figure, resounding in their own? Which text or doctrine is not at war with itself, even when one discourse dominates within it? Which institution or economy does not find contrary tendencies emerging from inside? On the other hand, the identity of the self is, except under special conditions, neither “the pastiche of fragments tattooed on the self” of which Zaslove complains nor the “dissolved identity” fantasized in *The Fly*. Subjects do not create rituals in order to withstand their heterogeneity, as Mabardi says Canclini suggests. Rather, subjects are more fully one of their voices than the rest—the one that is most audible among the clamor of the others. But this dominant voice is established in part through its commonalities with and differences from the rest. The subject remains a hybrid of mutually transcendent and mutually immanent voices, but partially stabilized through the voice that developmentally takes the lead in response to the social realities surrounding it. Stabilized or not, the interplay of these voices produces new voices and a permanent sort of metamorphosis of both the individual and the social body.

This view is fairly close to the one that Antonio Cornejo Polar puts forward in his contribution to the volume, “A Non-Dialectic Heterogeneity: The Subject and Discourse of Urban Migration in Modern Peru.” He discusses the adolescent migrant hero of José Arguedas’s *Deep Rivers*—his Quechua and Spanish speaking worlds—and concludes that this subject “manages a plurality of codes which although they join in a single discursive direction are not only not confused but also preserve a good part of their own autonomy.” This dynamic hybridity is true of us all, but stands out more clearly in the case of migrants and others who must conspicuously flip back and forth between disparate living situations.

As for the suspicion that “hybridism” silences minority voices, this is true when multiculturalism is made into a doctrine, what I would call an “oracle,” rather than consisting of the interplay or creative tension of the voices that make up the social body—voices that approach equal audibility under the best of circumstances. In other words, the anxiety of being overwhelmed by the many “social languages” that make up a society and an individual
can be exacerbated in times of war, natural disaster, or other conditions that threaten survival. This can lead to raising one of the voices to the level of an oracle, idealizing and promulgating a strict identity (racism, ethnic cleansing, patriarchy, capitalism), and thereby diminishing the interplay of voices that would otherwise characterize society and the subject. The limitation is not with hybridization, then, but with the social and cultural forces that oppose it and our lack of resolve to counter them. Overall, *Unforeseeable Americas* restores this resolve to us and also provides the reader with a rich set of papers on the topic of hybridity and the forms it takes in Latin America.15

Notes


3. Vasconcelos also saw his “cosmic race” as the basis for a more open and heterogeneous culture.

4. See especially the essay “Nuestra America” (Our America), where he coins the phrase “our mestizo America,” in his *Antología minima*, Vol. 1 (Habana: Instituto cubano del libro, 1972).

5. See his *Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana*.


11. The editors list five of the authors as Canadian, five as American, one as Mexican, one Spanish, two Brazilian, one Peruvian.

12. For example, Amaryll Chanady, “National Reconciliation and Colonial Resistance: The Notion of Hybridity in José Martí,” speaks affirmatively of Martí’s idea of mestizo America as a “heterogeneous and harmonious unity” (32). Sabine Mabardi, “Encounters of a Heterogeneous Kind,” points out that Chanady elsewhere sees this as “an alternative to a nationalist strategy which defines a collective identity in opposition to a ‘foreign’ Other” (11). This reason for affirming hybridity is close to one of the justifications given above; it is a counter to the use of “pure identity” by the advocates of ethnic cleansing. The other point in favor of hybridity that was mentioned in the introductory paragraph—pure identities are impossible—is affirmed in Christopher Chiappari’s article, “Hybrid Religions in Highland Guatemala: Modernity, Tradition, and Culture.” In relation to Catholicism, Protestantism, and Maya religions, he points out that although globalization has led to integration of bits from each to each, “processes [of hybridization] have always occurred,” that is, every tradition is hybrid to one degree or another from the beginning (236). Catherine Poupeney-Hart, in her “Mestizaje: I Understand the reality, I just do not like the word: Perspectives on an Option,” points out that writers from the Francophone areas of the Caribbean, such as Edourad Glissant, think it is absurd to claim a single origin for any human group.


15. I have elaborated these claims in favor of hybridity in several recent publications. See for example “Genealogy and the Problem of Affirmation in Nietzsche, Foucault, and Bakhtin,” Philosophy and Social Criticism Vol. 27, no. 3, 2001; and “Voices of Chiapas: The Zapatistas, Bakhtin, and Human Rights,” Philosophy Today vol. 42, 2000.

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