

## Diversity or difference – a distinction

In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford (1990), interviews Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha uses the concept *third space* to analyze the distinction between the concepts of cultural diversity and cultural difference.

The attempt to conceive of cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity comes from an awareness that [...] the idea that cultures are diverse and that in some sense the diversity of cultures is a good and positive thing and ought to be encouraged, has been known for a long time. It is a commonplace of plural, democratic societies to say that they can encourage and accommodate cultural diversity.

(Rutherford 1990, 207–208)

A civilized attitude is the ability to appreciate cultures in a way that Bhabha calls *musée imaginaire*, as though one should be able to collect and enjoy them. Bhabha talks about the Western connoisseurship as the capacity to “understand and locate cultures in a universal time-frame that acknowledge their various historical and social contexts only eventually to transcend them and render them transparent” (Rutherford 1990, 208). Bhabha believes that by approving cultural diversity, a solid foundation is created for multicultural education policy (here, he refers to England). He highlights two problems. One is, that acknowledgement of cultural diversity always implies containment and reduction of differences. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grind (ibid). This, Bhabha believes, is the creation of cultural diversity and at the same time a limitation of cultural difference. The second problem is,

[...] that in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests.

(Rutherford 1990, 208)

Bhabha states that his reason for using cultural difference rather than cultural diversity, is to acknowledge that,

[cultural diversity] this kind of liberal relativist perspective is inadequate in itself and doesn't generally recognize the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgments.

(Rutherford 1990, 209)

The notion of cultural difference enables us to see that Western culture, its liberalism, relativism, and potent mythologies of progress, has a cutting edge, a limit (ibid).

With the notion of cultural difference, [Bhabha] try to place [himself] in that position of liminality, in that productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness.

(Rutherford 1990, 209)

Bhabha show that the universal perspective fails to understand how cultural practitioners construct their own systems of meaning (ibid).

Bhabha's reasoning gives me a ground for thinking about dominating norms and about that acceptance of diversity can blur differences and require adaptation in a certain context. It helps me to expose and to meet the dance practice when it is performed, and to challenge the thought that it is possible to include similarities in a meta-discussion where the body is not present.

#### Translation, original, essence

In his discussion about cultural difference, Bhabha relies on Walter Benjamin's theory of cultural translation. "The articulation of cultures is possible not because of the familiarity or similarities of contents, but because all cultures are symbol-forming and subject-constructing, interpellative practices" (Rutherford 1990, 210). There is a resistance to thinking that the act of signification must always – since it is a form of representation – have within it a kind of self-alienating limit. Meaning is constructed across the bar of differences and separation between the signifier and the signified (ibid). The reasoning leads to the thought that no culture is complete in itself.

[...] not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an originary, holistic, organic identity.

(Rutherford 1990, 210)

With *cultural translation*, Bhabha means that, to objectify cultural meaning, there always has to be a process of alienation in relation to itself. In that sense, there is no in itself or for itself within cultures because they are always subject to intrinsic forms of translation (ibid).

Bhabha's thought paths are important in relation to my artistic and dance pedagogical practices. What are the consequences, when thinking about the processes of practice? Practicing and inscribing in the body, in relation to thinking about translation as a self-distancing process and the lack of something that can be defined as a given in itself. What thought paths and practical possibilities are there in research and teaching, when, approaching them to as part of an ongoing movement.

By developing the idea of translation, Bhabha discusses imitation, originality and transference processes. He points out how

[...] the 'original' is never finished or complete or in itself. The 'originary' is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning - an essence.

(Rutherford 1990, 210–211)

This displacement makes it possible to articulate *different* cultural practices and priorities (ibid).

### Hybridity

The discussion about difference and cultural translation makes it possible for Bhabha to oppose the notion of a previously given or original culture. Instead, every culture exists in a process of *hybridity* (Rutherford 1990, 211). Hybridity is a process of identification with and through another object, an object of otherness. Here, the subject is always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness (ibid). The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new field of negotiation of meaning and representation (ibid). Bhabha emphasize that hybridity is not about tracing two original moments from which a third emerges.

rather, hybridity [...] is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives [...]

(Rutherford 1990, 211)

Initiatives that cannot be properly understood on the basis of existing knowledge, or as it is formulated in the interview, “are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (ibid).

The concept of the *third space* has influenced my ideas of power and agency in moments of sharing practice. In the third space I see possibilities to deal with relations to culture and tradition within different discourses. I am interested in what opportunities that might arise when, searching for chorographic practices that must be activated to deal with difference, learning from others, situating and when necessary renegotiating concepts that are ground for dancepractices in contemporary times.

Rutherford, Jonathan. 1990. “The Third Space. Interview with Bhabha, H. K.” In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 207-221. London: Lawrence and Wishart.