Architecture, hybridities and post-apartheid design

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This chapter develops a methodological discussion on questions of hybridity in architectural theory and design, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Reference is made to differing ideas of hybridity; from early postmodern interest in hybrid architecture (Jencks and Venturi), to postcolonial theory (Bhabha and Fanon), as well as Cultural Studies into syncretic traditions amongst marginalised groups (Gilroy, Shohat and McClintok). The chapter promotes a postcolonial perspective on hybridity, which differs from the usual postmodern architectural perspective, through its emphasis on relations of discursive power (Foucault) that animate specific cultural/political conditions. Analytical distinctions are made between *conscious* and *unconscious*, *momentary* and *sublimated*, as well as *overt* and *hidden* forms of hybridity—distinctions which are particularly useful for an understanding of architecture.
Key Words: Hybridity, Post-Apartheid, Post-Colonial, Pubic Architecture

Ukudweba kwezakhiwo, nenhlanganisela yemcondo yokwakha ekupheleni kwembuso wabe-lungu
Kuze sikhanyelwe mayelana nomehluko emkhathini kwezinto esizenza ngenhloso, nalezo ezenza-kala singakacondi, kulezo ezenzakala esithubeni, nalezo ezizehlekelayo nje, kanye nalezo ezisebaleni, nalezifihlekile ekudwebeni kwezakhiwo, kumele sibe nendlela yokukwenza loku. UJonathan Noble usikhomba indlela yokwenza loku ngokuthi acwaninge imicondo eminingi evela uma sikhuluma ngekudweba nekwakha kwezindlu kulesikhathi senkhululeko entja. Ubuka izindlela ezehlukene maye-lana nenhlanganiso yemicondo evezwe ngabantu kusukela ku Jencks no Venturi, kuya kuBhabha no Fanon abakhuluma ngemicondo yokwakha evele emva kwekuthola inkhululelo, kuya kuGilroy, uSho-hat no McClintok abakhuluma ngenhanganiso yemicondo evela ezifundweni ezihambisana namasiko ehlukahlukene mayelana nokwakha. Kuleliphepha UJonathan uphakamisa umcondwo wenhlanganiso evela kubantu ekupheleni kwembuso wekucindezela kunaleyo evela kubantu abakhuluma ngenhlan-ganisela yemicondo ephakamiswa uFoucault ezedwadini zakhe.
Amagama abalulekile: Inhlanganiso yemicondo, siphelo sembuso wekucindezela, siphelo sombuso wabelungu, ukudweba kwezindlu zomphakathi

Interest in architectural hybridity arose form the author's research of public architecture of the post-apartheid period. Recent public designs, in South Africa, have initiated imaginative dialogues with subjugated histories. In many cases, this imaginative process has meant the inclusion of craft, tectonic and sculptural elements – as tropes of formerly denied history. This layering can be spatial or material. Facades are commonly thickened with decorative motifs that open a dialogue with multiple narratives, spanning across different time scales, from pre to post-colonial times. Architectural representation is being hybridized, and this hybridization allows, or at least attempts to allow, for new dialogues, both actual and imaginative, across divided subject positions: black/white, white/black, both, neither, and in-between.

Figure 1 is intended as a visual précis of this phenomenon, and is submitted as the general context (not wishing to dwell on specific buildings, at this point) to which this theoretical paper is addressed. In order to facilitate research on these matters, I began to search for theories and histories of architecture that deal with questions of hybridity in design. I discovered that whilst there is a fair body of literature that deals with architectural history from post-colonial perspectives, there is inadequate theoretical discussion as to how hybridity might inform contemporary criticism and practise. This submission evolved out of an attempt to clarify certain points of overlap and difference that occur between the idea of hybridity as it is conceived in 'literary' post-colonial theory, and forms of hybridity that are useful for architectural study. The paper hopes to make a theoretical contribution to a post-colonial conception of architectural hybridity, set in relation to post-apartheid design. It will be argued that the word 'hybrid', in the general meaning of the term, is somewhat too vague. In responding to this observation, the paper proposes a set of analytical distinctions, between *conscious* and *unconscious*, *momentary*

and *sublimated*, *overt* and *hidden* forms of hybridity. The author submits that these distinctions are useful for a more nuanced understanding of hybridity in architectural terms.

Figure 1 (photographs by author)
Row 1, left to right. First three images are the Constitutional Court of South Africa, Johannesburg, 1998, by OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. Fourth image is Red Location, Port Elizabeth, 1999, by Noero Wolf Architects.
Row 2, left to right. First three images are the Walter Sizulu Square of Dedication, Kliptown, 2002, by StudioMass Architects. Fourth image is Metro Mall, Johannesburg, 2002, by Urban Solutions.
Row 3, left to right. First two images are the Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberly, 1998, by Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The last two images are the Mpumalanga Legislature, Nelspruit,1997, by MPTS Architects.

Postmodern hybrid architecture

Concern for hybridity in design is commonly associated with early postmodern theory in architecture, especially the work of Charles Jencks and Robert Venturi. In his essay *The Architectural Sign*, Jencks (Broadbent 1980) observes that architecture has often been defined in terms of some deep essence, be it space, function, or context, and so forth. In contrast to this essentialism of the deep structure Jencks maintains that:

> architecture is irreducibly plural (it is made up of discontinuous codes), its essence is to change the referents of its signification as well as its codes (the ideas, social patterns and language can all change) (Broadbent 1980: 72).

In short, the architectural sign is heterogeneous, hybrid, and complex. Jencks' interest

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is to support what he considers to be popular architecture (good and democratic) against the elitist purity of modernist design. Jencks' discussion of popular architecture would be welcome, were it not for the fact that he pays scant attention to questions of hegemony and power. This serious omission means that his theory of postmodern design ultimately supports a fashion system propped up by an equally elitist designer culture which endlessly re-dresses itself. This fashion system also feeds architectural theory, granting critics the right to a near endless array of theoretical legitimations, texts which rarely illicit socio-political interests. Similar observations hold true for Jencks' suggestive notion of 'double coding' in design: "The primary strategy [postmodern] architects have created to articulate the pluralism of culture is that of double-coding: mixing their own professional tastes and technical skills with those of their ultimate clients" (Jencks 1991: 12). This interesting and potentially radical idea of the double-code, is however, carefully neutralised by Jencks who privileges the all-knowing wisdom of the architect. Double-coding becomes another word for mixing my ambition with your preference, and getting away with a would-be smile on both sides of the divide. Disconnected from any real concern for social politics, Jencks' brand of double-code-play, potentially, white-washes the antagonism that emerge between divided subject positions. A pejorative dualism persists here, as Jencks' double code seems to placate the common folk with popular idioms, whilst simultaneously ennobling the 'A'rt by adding the 'higher' forms of the architect intellectual. For all his emphasis on semiotic heterogeneity, cultural plurality and double-coding, Jencks' thought circulates, almost exclusively, around an architectural re-reading of nineteenth century eclecticism (i.e. an architect's perspective). An abstract elitism of the moderns is replaced by an equally sealed and stubborn elitism of fashion as style.

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi (1972) highlighted the complex and irreconcilable relations that exist between billboard, facade and structure, in the architecture of the Las Vegas strip. A modernist heresy – which promotes the 'functional' prominence of sign and facade set against the assumed 'deep' significant of structure and formal integrity – is celebrated by Venturi with abandon. These duplicities of sign and structure develop a theme of hybrid duality that was central to *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (Venturi 1966). In this earlier book, Venturi declares his preference for complexity and contradiction in design. His "gentle manifesto" states, "I like complexity and contradiction in architecture […] I speak of a complex and contradictory architecture based on the richness and ambiguity of modern experience, including that experience which is inherent in art" (Venturi 1966: 22). As is the case with Jencks, Venturi's aesthetic preference is motivated by a disdain for the purism of modernist design.

Venturi develops his aesthetics of complexity and contradiction (Venturi 1966) across a series of historical works which demonstrate aspects of architectural ambiguity, concern for the both-and, double-functioning elements, convention and adaptation, juxtapositions and inside-outside relations. Towards the end of this book, Venturi's preference for the hybrid in-between, the both-and rather than the either-or, is ultimately resolved around a formalistic "obligation toward the difficult whole" (Venturi 1966: 89). Venturi's hybridity emerges as a mixing and matching of complex differences to enrich the flavour of architecture. Like Jencks, Venturi pays scarce attention to social discourses, to questions of power and dominance and, as such, his concern with hybridity, potentially, masks a politics of the anything-goes-formalist – an architecture of mere style-play. Despite this observation, the author contends that postmodernist representation (i.e. complex representation) is the kind best suited to expressions of postcolonial hybridity – and we must move beyond formalist criticism if we are to understand the deeper significance of architectural hybridity, in postcolonial terms.

Postcolonial hybridity

The post-colonial conception of hybridity differs from the anesthetised preoccupation with hybrid styles that feature in early postmodern architectural theory (Jencks, Venturi, et al.). A key difference in this respect concerns the way that postcolonial perspectives confront the hegemonies, and dominant discourses that animate specific cultural/political conditions. For Michel Foucault, a discourse is a body of knowledge and practice that is distributed throughout the social field (Foucault 2002).[1] Discourses are a regularity in dispersion, a sameness in difference. Discourses are linguistic in the enlarged sense of the word, and in a sense that parallels Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of socially embedded language games (Wittgenstein 1972). Social discourses are also normalising and exclusionary in that they regulate the normality of what can and cannot be said, what can and cannot constitute valid practice (Foucault 1980). In this sense, discourse is prior to what may be call the 'objectivity of things' (we may include here the supposed objective character of buildings) – *discourse produces the potentiality of things*.

To illustrate this important point in architectural terms, we may consider the conversion that occurs between an architect and her/his client. Our architect and client sit to discuss the making of a new house, with so many square meters, to accommodate this and that, to be situated over there, and with spaces that are distributed in such and such a manner. Clearly, buildings are always produced through the discussions and practices that inform their making. But, architecture is also produced, in a more intellectual sense, by histories and theories that inform our understanding of it. It is not the case, therefore, that architecture merely exits in some objective sense prior to the interpretations of language and practise, but rather, it is interpretive discourses that produce the significance we associate with the architectural object. I am suggesting that it is not the case that 'functionality in design' (or for that matter 'honesty to material') are notions that issue from the inherent nature of the architectural object itself, but rather it is the modernist discourse on architecture that produced our sense of attachment to these supposedly good (or bad, depending on one's theoretical point of view) attributes. Using Foucault's notion of discourse, we can say that histories and theories of architecture are normalising and exclusionary in that they regulate the normality of what can and cannot be said about architecture, what can and cannot constitute valid practice. Modernist imagination, for example, by and large, placed a ban upon decoration. Notably, in the case of Adolf Loos, surface decoration was associated with savages and degenerates (Loos 1998). In Loos' discourse, the savage and the degenerate stand in a relation of 'otherness' to the privileged status of the modern rational subject – the savage is a subjugated subject *vis-à-vis* the modernist ban on decorative practice in design. Indeed, theoretical support for the 'modern' has commonly relied upon pejorative notions of the pre-modern, just as the colonial has tended to silence histories of the pre-colonial.

Foucault also argues that discourse is prior to the subject (Foucault 1980). The human subject is discursively constituted: we are the body of knowledge and the nexus of practices that make up our everyday lives. Likewise, *the marginalised subject is her subjugated discourse*. The marginalised subject is her subjugated body of knowledge and practice. This thought has clear implications for the meanings attributed to social representations, because individuals and groups can and do identify themselves in stories, films, artworks, and in works of architecture as well. We may study the political implications of these representations, to see which forms of subjectivity are dominant and which have been denied.[2] In the case of colonialism and apartheid, we had a situation where white was radically divided from black, such that black cultural capacities were silenced and subjugated beneath the cultural impositions of 'white'. An important question therefore emerges in the post-apartheid era as to how African identities and narratives should gain expression in architecture – especially so, given the fact that virtually

all our theory, history and modalities of practice issues from the architectural discourses of the West. This is precisely where ideas of hybridity become useful.

In contrast to the classical texts of early postmodern theory in design, contemporary interest in hybridity in postcolonial theory is motivated by political interest in the subversion of dominant, homogenising practises. Cultural hybridity is inevitable and it occurs, often quite unconsciously, at the meeting of seemingly incommensurable worlds. In Frantz Fanon, the confrontation between the colonial and the colonised, at times, leads into a danger zone of unfathomable difference. The 'colonised other' may well be dominated by colonial power, but there are moments were this order appears to break down – desire mixes with dread.

> Look at the nigger! [. . .] Mama, a Negro! [. . .] The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (Fanon 1986: 114).

In this passage the little boy and the Negro appear to look past each other, each misrecognising the other. In the Negro the boy sees a savage image of 'quivering rage', whilst in the boy the Negro sees his image as despised humanity. And yet despite the discursive divide, a hybridization begins to take place. It is not clear whether this is productive in any concrete sense, but hybridity does linger, momentary, in the confrontation with the other. For a brief moment, the Negro, conceived here as an animal, is not so easily fixed on the outside of white power. The bodily presence of the Negro breaks through the discursive devices that attempt to put him in his place. The repressed subject returns to haunt the boundaries of white imagination, and we notice that a disturbance occurs on the surface of an exclusionary discourse. In postcolonial theory, and especially in the work of Homi K Bhabha, this disturbance of discourse opens a new realm of opportunity: the disturbance of exclusionary discourse allows the marginalised subject to position herself. Bhabha explains that, "[h]ybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition" (Bhabha 1994: 114). Hybridity is a breach in the exclusionary power of discourse.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) develops a postcolonial politics which works dangerously across the fissures and ruptures that occur within colonial power. Hybridity occurs at the limits of exclusionary discourse, in the mutations and subversion of power that happen, often inadvertently, between divided identities. Bhabha provides a deconstructive reading of these ruptures in colonial discourse to displace their exclusionary logic. Hybridity is an on-going process of mutation and subversion, as Shohat eloquently explains:

> [o]ccupying contradictory social and discursive spaces, then, hybridity is an unending, unfinalizable process which preceded colonialism and will continue after it. Hybridity is dynamic, mobile, less an achieved synthesis or prescribed formula than an unstable constellation of discourses (Shohat 1994: 42).

Here we see that the focus is placed upon process rather than product, and for this reason Bhabha's politics of hybridity cannot be reduced to stylistic, or aesthetic categories (although it may certainly include these categories). When different cultural patterns collide and hybridize, the result may well, and quoting Venturi, result in forms that are "distorted rather than 'straightforward,' ambiguous rather than 'articulated', perverse as well as impersonal" (Venturi

1977: 16). It is not, however, adequate to merely appreciate these forms, or to reproduce them in the name of art. The crucial point here is not complex form for its own sake, but the subversion of dominant and dominating modes of cultural representation; and the inclusion of subjugated narratives.

Much of our theory and practice in contemporary architecture, and indeed the substance of certain imaginations in design, is narrowly informed by autonomous, professional, in fact Western histories of architecture. In contemporary South Africa, this situation may well lead to exclusionary forms of practise. Yet, fortunately, in the post-apartheid period, we see attempts to engage with social narratives that lie beyond the reach of conventional theory of design, as well as dialogues with subjective perspectives that were formerly denied. In many cases, this new sense of openness has involved a conversation with pre-colonial narratives.

F**igure 2**
The Mpumalanga Legislature Complex seen against its natural surroundings, by MPTS architects, Nelspruit, 1997 (photograph by author).

The new government precinct at Mpumalanga illustrates all these points about dominant discourses, and divided subjectivities rather well. At the Mpumalanga Government Complex a large dome spans the legislature assembly, which is the pivotal space of this scheme. Patric McInerney (one of the leading architects for this project, working with MPTS architects) explained that the primary inspiration for this domed assembly came from the surrounding landscape, with its domed-rock outcrops (figure 2).[3] McInerney had felt confident that this metonymic form gave the design a distinctly African, or at least 'local' identity. His thinking was informed by a notion of *genius loci*, as widely supported in contemporary practice (Norberg-Schulz 1985). Francis Motha from the local town council, and manager for government on this job, however, explained that he was not convinced by this approach, for in Motha's imagination, these intensions failed to refer to historical patterns of African governance.[4] In pre-colonial times, and indeed continuing long into the colonial era, African elders would meet outdoors under a tree to debate political concerns and to administer justice. A village would always have this designated space beneath a tree where the elders would gather, and this provides a spatial type for an African 'court', as documented by much anthropological study. Motha felt that the monumental dome, set in relation to the surrounding landscape, did not engage with an African imagination. Nevertheless he was clear to point out that he and his fellow Africans from the province were pleased to meet and discuss indoors, but that in addition to this modern way,

some symbolic reference to the old African ways should also be recognised, if only to facilitate a dialogue with the cultural roots of an African democratic consciousness. Extensive discussion and a mutual process of respectful learning was established between Motha and McInerney. Their difference of interpretation was eventually remedied by the final design for the public space which fronts the assembly. The civic square of the legislature has symbolic trees, with nearby stepped seating descending into the square and the comforting sounds of a trickling water feature (figure 3).

Figure 3
Public space in front of the Mpumalanga assembly, with symbolic trees, by MPTS architects, Nelspruit, 1997 (Malan 2001: 40).

Figure 4
The Peoples Square, a public space in front of the Northern Cape Legislature, with symbolic trees set in a stylized landscape, by Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects, Kimberly, 1998 (Malan 2003: 49).

Figure 5
Insignia of the Constitutional Court of South Africa (DPW 1997: 1)

Figure 6
Foyer to the Constitutional Court of South Africa with tree like, slanted columns, by OMMUS, Johannesburg, 1998 (photography by author).

The symbolism inherent in this design relies upon a hybridity of two juxtaposed, yet incommensurable symbols: dome and tree. You cannot be under the tree when you are inside the domed assembly, and vice versa. The two symbolic types stand side by side, bearing witness to the divided histories and subjectivities of our past. Other post-apartheid public buildings have exploited a tree motif, with varying degrees of abstraction and inclusion into the accompanying architecture. At the Northern Cape Legislature, the symbolic trees stand in a stylised landscape (figure 4). The 'peoples' square', uses subtle sculptural and architectural gestures to suggest the

sense of a desert landscape, as associated with this region. The peoples' square (a public space in front of the legislature), mixes urban and naturalistic expression, to providing a more mediated setting for the symbolic tree. Yet the tree still remains distinct from the internal space of the assembly. Whilst at the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, the tree as symbol of an African court informs the official insignia of this institution (figure 5). This symbolic imagination has also been translated into the architectural space of the entrance foyer, in front of the court, where slanting, branch like columns, richly adorned by ceramic tiles with leaf and seed like motifs, support a fly-over concrete roof (figure 6). Dappled light filters down from slits in the ceiling, as though beneath a tree. This design attempts to synthesis the two symbolic types, *court* and *tree*, such that it is possible to have the metaphoric sense of being under a tress whist standing in the foyer of the court. Yet the overriding sense is one of layering, of addition and complex inclusion, and not a resolved synthesis. We have a hybrid narrative of court and tree, the one superimposed upon the other to include both into an equally hybridised space. Despite the singularity of this inclusion, complex relations of irresolvable difference remain.
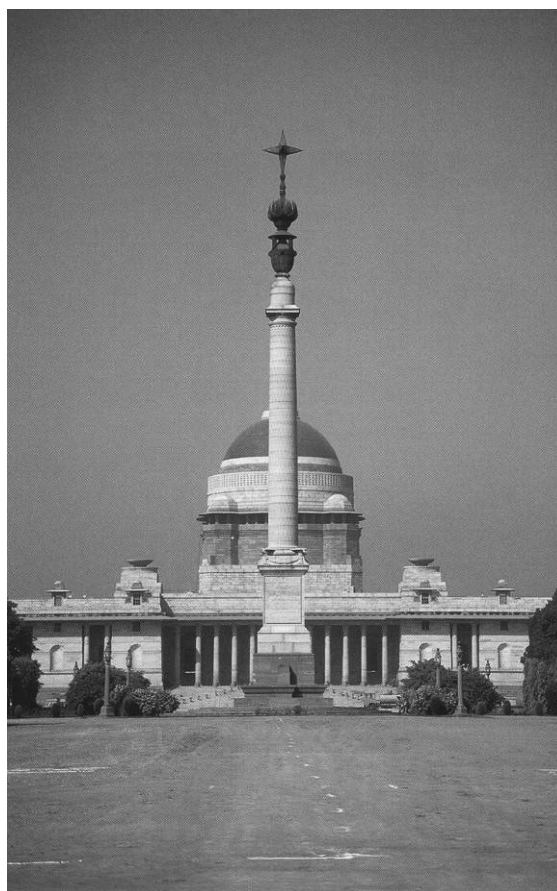

Figure 7
Viceroy's House, New Delhi (Crinson 2003: adjacent to pg. 110)

Architecture and hybridities

Bhabha has tended to emphasise the momentary and disruptive nature of hybridity, set in relation to particular social and political circumstances. This emphasis has worked in the context of his literary analyses. Architectural studies, however, are required to work across a wider range of social and material phenomena. The author suggests that hybridity narrowly linked to an interest in the momentary and the disruptive, is somewhat limited for architectural studies. It

should be noted for example, that hybridity in an architectural sense, is not always subversive in character. At New Delhi, Edwin Lutyens designed a quintessential example of British Imperial architecture. Viceroy House, the centre-piece of this capitol complex, shows a mixing of European classicism and various Indian decorative motifs (figure 7). The Indian reference, as noted by Mark Crinson, is pushed to the margins of this composition, where it features only as insignificant decoration (Crinson 2003: 12). These little Indian details do not destabilise the colonial imposition of this classical edifice, but rather, they participate calmly within it. It would appear that reference to India is reduced to the scale of mere detail. For reasons of this kind, postcolonial perspectives do not appreciate cultural hybridity on its own terms alone. Instead, hybrid forms should be read in relation to questions of power and subordination, as Shohat explains: "[a] celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated with questions of historical hegemonies, risks sanctifying the fait accompli of colonial violence" (Shohat 1994: 43).

At the most general level, the words 'hybrid' and 'hybridity' suggest a mixing of different sources to form a new blend. The word hybrid, therefore, tells us very little about a) the nature of the sources that are being mixed, b) the circumstances under which the mix takes place, c) who conducts the mix, d) and what kind of mix results from this process. In each of these instances we may ask some fundamental questions, for example: a) are the sources of the mix 'pure' or were they previously mixed, and if the latter, what is the nature of this pre-mixed source?, b) in what social and political context does the mix take place?, c) is the mix consciously planned or does it come about by chance?, d) is the mix a blend which harmonises, or is it a forced proximity of clashing, discontinuous ingredients? And most importantly, (e) what is the discursive nature of the new hybrid formation? These questions demonstrate that there are many different kinds of hybridity. In its general sense then, the word hybrid is rather too vague.[5] This paper will now attempt to identify certain tensions that exist within the varied, architectural uses of the term hybridity. We shall consider the following distinctions: *conscious and unconscious*, *momentary and sublimated*, and finally *overt and hidden* forms of hybridity. The author submits that these distinctions are useful for a more nuanced understanding of hybridity in architectural terms.

Conscious and unconscious hybridity

A useful distinction can be made between *conscious* and *unconscious* forms of hybridity, as theorised by Robert Young (1995). His point of reference is Mikhail Bakhtin's preoccupation with linguistic hybridity (Bakhtin 1981). According to Young, Bakhtin uses hybridity in its intentional sense, to "describe the process of the authorial unmasking of another's speech, through a language that is 'double-accented' and 'double-styled'" (Young 1995: 20). Here, the author, or designer, intentionally adopts a double code, to speak within and beyond the bounds of a dominant discourse. By contrast, writes Young (1994: 21), unconscious hybridity "gives birth to new forms of amalgamation rather than contestation", which inevitably results in an "imperceptible process whereby two or more cultures merge into a new mode." Both kinds of hybridity are useful for architectural studies. Historians, for instance, may appeal to the less-than-conscious hybridizations that occur within seemingly closed cultural forms. Our historian may wish to show how Western architecture has appropriated non-Western influences. Anthony King (1995) has done important work in this direction. Studies of this kind seek to pluralize Western history from within, to combat the closure of euro-centric thought. But ideas of hybridity may also be used in a more conscious way, as a rhetorical strategy in artistry and design. Numerous studies, framed within and beyond postcolonial perspectives, have described the hybrid and syncretic strategies that inform artistic traditions of marginalized people. Shohat, for instance, discusses hybridity in media and film studies, and rather interestingly 'Third World

Cinema'. She contends that, "[f]or oppressed people […] artistic syncretism is not a game but a sublimated form of historical pain, which is why Jimi Hendrix played the 'Star Spangled Banner' in a dissonant mode" (Shohat 1994: 43). Paul Gilroy (1992), a leading theorist of racial politics, has written extensively on the syncretic forms that are widely adopted by black artists, writers and musicians, and McClintock (1995) theorises the implication of risky hybrids that informed the work of various black South African poets, in Sofiatown and Soweto, and the resistance to apartheid that these works imply. These studies demonstrate that marginalised groups commonly make use of syncretic forms as a way to negotiate their identity in the face of a dominant culture which excludes them. As Gilroy makes clear, "[b]lack expressive cultures affirm while they protest. The assimilation of blacks is not a process of acculturation but of cultural syncretism" (Gilroy 1994: 204).[6] Unfortunately, however, contemporary architectural theory has been largely uninformed by these and other important studies, and therefore questions of hybridity in design are either disavowed as 'pomo', or embraced in a reductive way, as a formalistic approach to criticism and design.

The conscious and unconscious aspects of hybridity that we have identified here are however, not always so easily distinguished. In the case of historical studies into the unconscious hybridization of culture, the point must surely be to conscientise the reader, to show cultural plurality where it was previously concealed. Whilst in the case of artistic production, it should be clear that both conscious and unconscious influences combine in the production of art. In either case the critic or historian who wishes to interpret hybridity in design, must articulate it, theorise it, and consciously so, to assert these practices with weight and political significance.

Figure 8
Street traders, Johannesburg CBD (Bremner 2004: 16).

A fine example of a less-than-planed, less-than-conscious form of hybridity, can be seen on the streets of cotemporary Johannesburg, where street traders set up their wares in front of disused shops. A range of everyday goods such as fruit, shoes, belts, handbags, watches and

knives are displayed on make-shift tables, at times spilling into the busy street and forcing pedestrians to squeeze past on narrowed pavements (figure 8). The urban environment, informed by a rationalised grid of compact blocks and streets, is ill-equipped to accommodate this vibrant scene. The sense of an unintended collision between a colourful informality, and a more subdued urban modernity, is startling.

Johannesburg's tight street layout was formalised in 1886. This geometry arose from the hard-nosed pragmatism of a mining camp town. Keith Beavon explains:

> [o]n the assumption that the village would prove to be little more than a proverbial nine-day wonder, the state, with its eye fixed on potential revenues, was keen to demarcate as many stands as possible within as small a space as appeared reasonable for a mining camp or a village (Bevon 2004: 22-23).

Today, this uninspired geometry seems especially unkind to the rapid growth of informal street trade. Hawking one's wares on the pavement and at busy transportation nodes, is a long-standing pattern, one which is a commonplace across the continent of Africa. It's an urban form that South African cities are only just beginning to understand (or as the case may be, to misunderstand). During apartheid, city by-laws such as the 'move on' regulations successfully prevented informal black trade in white urban areas (Bevon 2004). Apartheid urban elites did not want their white modernity to be sullied by unruly and competitive black African trade. The city, after all, was laid out for white folk. By the late 1970s, pockets of defiant, informal black traders, were gathered primarily on the periphery of the city, but were curtailed from occupying the white-owned centre. Post-apartheid urbanity, however, now shows a growing informal sector, which has eagerly appropriated the centre of metropolitan Johannesburg, whilst white business disinvests and scatters for neo-Tuscan office parks in affluent northern suburbs. City officials continue to worry about the messy congestion on Johannesburg's streets, yet many young architects and urban thinkers take inspiration from the complexities of these unplanned collisions, in an attempt to understand, or perhaps to emulate, these formerly denied forms of city life.

Momentary and sublimated hybridity

Conscious and unconscious forms of hybridity combine in the momentary practices of daily life. Bhabha, in particular, has tended to analyse hybridity as a dialogical process. The confrontation with the other, as we have seen, often leads to an unexpected break in exclusionary discourse, and a dangerous encounter with uncontained otherness. Hybridity flickers in the ambivalent moment, back and forth, across conscious and unconscious registers of thought, fear and desire. This emphasis on the momentary, in Bhabha, gives his idea of hybridity a certain ever-present and inevitable character. Since architecture exists in time, we can locate hybridity in the momentary domain of use and counter-use. Built structures are commonly appropriated, modified and re-scripted by the unpredictable actions of those who live in them. From the perspective of the user, we may argue that *all* buildings *everywhere*, no mater their style or stature, are open to myriad forms of re-invention. It is primarily in this sense that we can study momentary forms of spatial hybridity. Yet we need to be clear that the radical opportunities provided by these hybrid moments does not mean that all forms of architectural expression are equally valid everywhere. And hence, the need arises to comment on a clear asymmetry that exists between a *momentary* (i.e. due to user participation) and *sublimated* hybridity (i.e. syncretic expression in design).

Bhabha can appeal to hybridity in the momentary confrontation between colonial and colonized subjectivities, because despite the humiliation that is imposed upon the colonized subject, this subject nevertheless exits, and continues to live out her life under the eye of colonial

power. The biological presence of the colonised subject is the danger over which colonial power cannot find complete control. In the case of architecture, however, in what sense did the material presence of African architecture threaten colonial rule? If we look to patterns of town planning and architectural design in the colonial, apartheid and finally the post-apartheid era, we discover a near seamless repetition of Western styles and types. On the whole, African architectures and modes of urban or rural life were thoroughly marginalised to the urban periphery, if not obliterated outright. At the level of architectural and urban discourse, we can agree with Fanon when he speaks of a colonial violence that "has ruled over the orderings of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms" (Fanon 1967: 31). The South African experience in this regard is possibly somewhat unique because forty years of 'successful' apartheid rule produced an almost uncanny marriage of advanced socio-economic modernity joined to a legacy of severe symbolic degradation against black cultural capacities. Decolonisation come slow to South Africa, and this has resulted in wide-spread—although limited—participation in modern freedoms, combined with crippling forms of exclusion. It is hardly surprising therefore, that questions of African identity in design should surface in public architectures of the post-apartheid period. The author submits that these 'difficult' questions are legitimate, and it is encouraging to see recent architectural works that wrestle with themes of African expression.

Overt and hidden forms of syncretic expression

It is the authors contention that the socio-historical problematic that faces post-apartheid public design has brought syncretic practices to the fore. When we raise questions of 'African identity' in design, it becomes clear that there are at least three fundamental ways to deal with the hegemonic legacy of Western architecture. The new South African architecture can: a) appropriate Western architecture, in an attempt to form a new, undifferentiated relation between Africa and the West, b) reject Western architecture outright, attempting to design from scratch, or c) hybridize Western architecture, Africanize it, adapting it to local needs and aspirations. Of the three options presented here, hybridity is bound to emerge as the most sensible way forward. On a literal level, objection may be raised to the first two approaches (that is, appropriation and outright rejection of Western architecture) because artistic creation is always in motion, coming from somewhere before moving on. Varying degrees of appropriation and rejection simultaneously combine in the creation of art. But this is not to say that the first two options have no currency whatsoever, because at stake here are also many more subtle questions of artistic representation. Architecture may well embody a discursive hybrid, but this does not necessarily mean that the work will explicitly make hybridity its primary theme. In other words, we can have *overt* as well as *hidden* types of hybridity in design. An African architecture which seeks a clean break and a fresh start, may cunningly wish to disguise its Western precedents. Likewise, an African architecture which willingly seeks to appropriate Western types, might even choose to hide the inevitable traces of its adaptation. Simply put, there are many shades of choice between the three clear options that are stated above, just as there are many ways to hybridize. Having granted these shades of difference, I nevertheless contend that overt expressions of hybridity must surely come to the fore, in the present circumstances of public design, as indeed they have.

Figure 9
Building finishes at the Mpumalanga Legislature (photographs by author, except bottom right, courtesy MPTS architects).

Figure 10
Rendered perspective of the Mpumalanga Legislature Complex (courtesy MPTS architects)

Figure 11
Exterior elevations and surfaces of the Northern Cape Legislature (photographs by author).
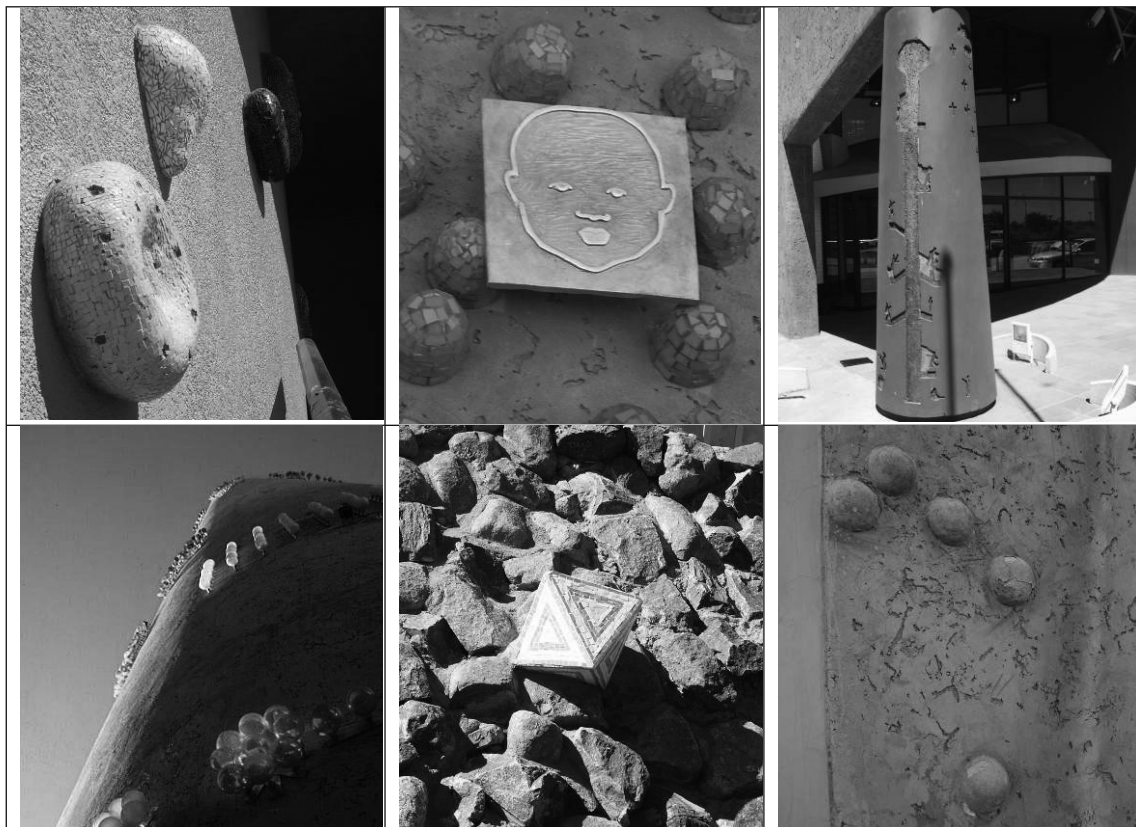

Figure 12
Surface treatments and sculptures at the Northern Cape Legislature, designed and executed by Clive van den Berg in collaboration with local crafts people (photographs by author).
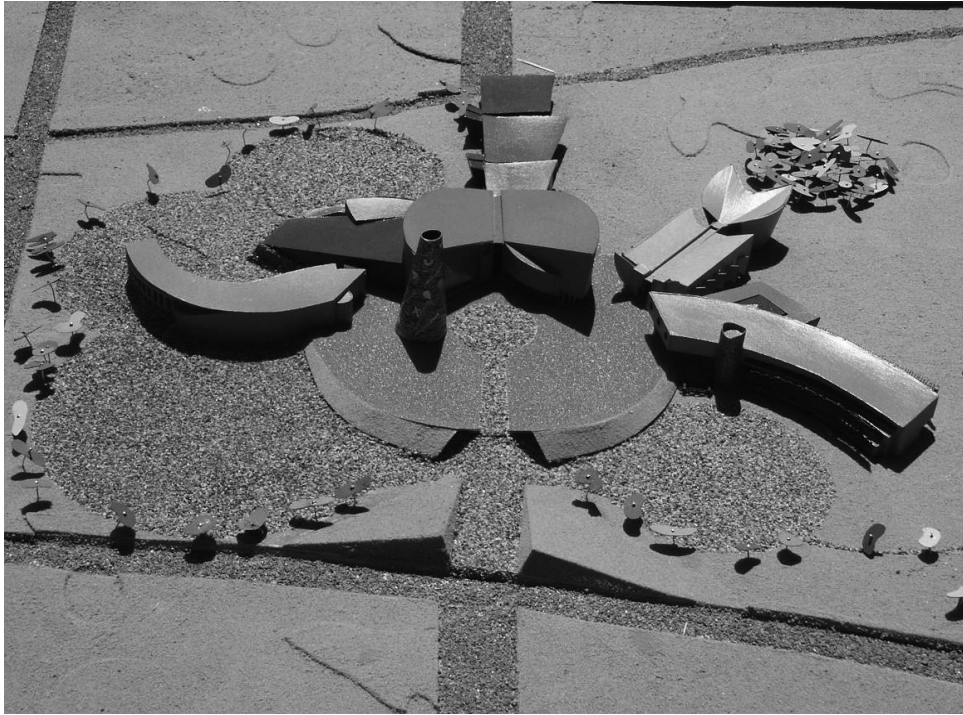
Figure 13
Architects model showing spatial relations to the surrounding landscape, The Northern Cape Legislature, by Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects, Kimberly, 1998 (courtesy Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects).

A comparison between the two recent Legislatures at Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape provides an informative example of hidden versus overt hybridity. At Mpumalanga, building finishes make multiple references to African tectonic traditions. Interior surfaces are richly treated with earthy colours, smeared mud-like textures, hand-crafted reliefs based upon local decorative motifs, beautiful mosaics derived from traditional grass-woven baskets, and stainless-steel meshes adorn columns and hang from ceilings, and external facades are thickened by timber posts and woven climatic screens (figure 9). Yet beneath these many references to African tectonic traditions, we have a fairly conventional office-park development, which relies upon a highly modernised concrete frame structure and service cores, controlled entry and exit points, as well as a carefully-considered parking garage, which dominates, in the conventional sea like manner, at the spatial centre of this scheme (figure 10). The architecture wishes to express a sense of synthetic unity, whilst references to African traditions speak a language of sombre 'authenticity'. The cunning of this design is that it carefully conceals a hybrid presence of modern and traditional elements. The Mpumalanga Legislature demonstrates a form of hidden hybridity – this building is wearing a mask. The Northern Cape Legislature, by contrast, consistently plays with differences to liberate a multiplicity of heterogeneous orders. Registers of structure, surface, materiality, space, of utility and fantasy are woven together whilst remaining distinct, complexly layered, and at times are incommensurable with each other. Disorderly geometries juxtapose. Exterior surfaces are treated in a loose and experimental way with various contrasting textures and colours derived from the surrounding landscape (figure 11). Surfaces are narativised by various mosaics and sculptural protrusions, inserts and incisions which tell popular stories pertinent to the people and political struggles of the province (figure 12). Each of the buildings that make up this complex is unique in character. These differing architectures perform sophisticated sculptural games, each set in relation to equally distinct kinds of building technique. The architectures of this complex are arranged like so many rocks, cactus plants and desert insects, around a loosely formed public square. Space gathers momentarily at the centre

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before filtering back through the open gaps between buildings, returning once more to the desert-like landscape that surrounds it (figure 13). This building emancipates a fantastic array of material and symbolic differences. It provides a highly-skilled composition of an overly hybridized kind.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, I wish to highlight the deep political significance of hybrid/syncretic cultural forms, for the present period in South African design. Social mixing, between different racial groups – whites, blacks and in-betweens – was widespread prior to the enforcement of grand apartheid. This legacy of mixed races, and mixed cultures was a severe challenge for the logic of segregationalist thought. Alette Norval (1996), in particular, demonstrates how two fundamental challenges to the discourses of apartheid segregation, emerged from the practice of miscegenation (especially in tight knit urban areas) and the so called problem of the 'coloured community'. An inordinate amount of attention was given to these twin concerns, in the work of apartheid ideologists. The problem was largely a symbolic one: the presence of racial hybridity threatened the entire edifice of apartheid discourse. Questions of cultural hybridity, when read in this context, take on an obvious attraction for the post-apartheid period in design. Ideas of hybridity in design are appealing to contemporary South African architecture because current interest in questions of African identity in design should, precisely, *not* re-run the dismal legacy of closed, racist and puritanical thought that typifies our modern (modernist?) past.

Notes

1. For further elaboration of Foucault's idea of discourse see: (Ashcroft 1998), (Hall 1992), (McHoul 1995).

2. A philosophical matter arises here, in that, to consciously identify with representations of the self, one must theorise some form of subjective agency. It is well known, that in keeping with Structuralist trends of his day, Foucault's discourse analyses wished to eliminate humanistic questions of subjective agency. In later life, however, Foucault famously began to re-examine the new possibilities that his work allowed for, in terms of micro-historical accounts of the human subject, conceived as a contested site of discourse and counter-discourse (Foucault 1979). Contemporary identity politics has built upon this later preoccupation in Foucault. Of particular importance, in this regard, is the political philosophy of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). Laclau and Mouffe develop a sympathetic critique of Foucault, where questions of subjectivity and the limits of human agency return. Their work enables movement beyond failings in Foucault, providing a more flexible and sophisticated approach to discourse analysis – one that takes on board notional ideas of agency and subjective identity.

3. Interview with McInerney, Johannesburg (November 2004).

4. Interview with Motha, Nelspruit (January 2005).

5. Notably, writers such as Bhabha and Fanon are careful to study hybrid forms in their specificity.

6. Gilroy references this sentence to: R Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978)

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