Roland Benedikter · Judith Hilber

The Art of Multiculturalism

Bharati Mukherjee's Imaginal Politics for the Age of Global Migration

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The Art of Multiculturalism

Bharati Mukherjee's Imaginal Politics
for the Age of Global Migration

With a Foreword by Chiara Bottici, The New School for
Social Research New York, and a Preface by Bo Stråth,
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I am aware of multiple contingencies. It is the universe we inhabit.

The trajectory of hate and love would intersect on this field…

He had instructed… to merge the metaphoric with the literal…

<div align="right">

Bharati Mukherjee:
The Holder of the World (1993)

</div>

Critical Acclaim for This Book

"We are witnesses to an ongoing global refugee and migration crisis. This crisis seems a nightmare with no immediate wake-up exit—if we listen to media reports and the rhetoric of politicians. Refugees and migrants embody a multi-cultural world for which despite all attempts we are still mostly unprepared. Hence, the crisis of displacement and place-claiming.

Such multi-cultural world is as much empirical as it is imaginal, as Roland Benedikter and Judith Hilber show us through their masterly examination of Bharati Mukherjee's (1940–2017) early literary works from the 1970s to the 1990s. Benedikter and Hilber exemplify how an 'immigrant' from India to the U.S. like Bharati Mukherjee can become a world-famous literary phenomenon and lay a claim to place-making. Mukherjee's work as a literary and biographical phenomenon shows how one could live in a house where everybody is welcomed to make themselves at home in a cosmopolitan way.

Coming myself from a country where millions are working as migrant workers—and most of them are subjected to exploitation as a way of 'unwelcoming' them—and where at the same time refugees have been welcomed, in my view this book makes an original and timely contribution to a topic whose importance will be continuously increasing throughout the world. It focalizes one's geographical orientation and widens it to encompass the comprehension of the particularity of the problems and potentials of an intercultural world that is the signature of our time.

Concise yet comprehensive, inspired and inspiring, this book engages us to understand both the simplicity and complexity of art and multiculturalism, which runs the risk of being rendered clichéd and facile if not handled with depth, clarity, and heartfelt understanding. Educators, politicians, cultural professionals and the schools should 'use' this book—in the strict sense of the term.

In a world that purports to be global yet undermines this claim constantly by constructing restrictions, I recommend this book precisely to dismantle these restrictions. I strongly recommend it to students, universities, and socio-political networks in hopes that they will use art and multiculturalism as a tool to produce a pluralistic and intercultural world."

—Lorna Q. Israel, *The Asian Center, University of the Philippines-Diliman*

"Benedikter's and Hilber's book, while highly concentrated in length and size, is an outstanding contribution to an increasingly crucial topic of our time. In times of an ongoing global migration crisis, the problem of multiculturalism reflected and conceived as a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted socio-political 'art' is exemplified in this book in exemplary ways. This topic will necessarily grow in interest over the coming years. Most probably, always more geopolitical areas will have to deal with issues like multiculturalism and the politics of the imaginaries behind it to gain access to the deeper, human dimensions involved.

Benedikter's and Hilber's book is a concise jewel in experimentally addressing these issues. It comes exactly at the right time. It is a clear condensation of an often over-complex issue. At the same time, this book is entertaining, while it is analytic and intellectually sharp.

In my view, this book can serve best as an introductory text for a set of questions without which the issue of multiculturalism is hardly debatable on a sound basis: the relation between multiculturalism, global cultural alignment and the role of power; the basics of 'postmodernity' and their (often contradictory) relations to politics; and to what has been called, by leading female theorists in the U.S. and beyond, 'Imaginal Politics' (Chiara Bottici) which will probably become one of the most important 'contextual political' dimensions of the coming years.

We urgently have to prepare ourselves for a new phase of integration by preparing our imaginaries. By exemplarily addressing the work of Bharati Mukherjee's work of the 1970s to the 1990s, Benedikter and Hilber show the full weight of her work for the present. I recommend this book with the utmost conviction."

—Beatrix Aigner, Dott., *C. Professor of Transcultural Educational Sciences, Trilingual Free University of Bozen-Bolzano-Bulsan, Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, Northern Italy*

Foreword by Chiara Bottici, The New School for Social Research, New York City

This book is about Bharati Mukherjee, born 1940 in Calcutta, India, passed away 2017 in Manhattan, United States, an acclaimed American writer of novels on multiculturalism, globalization, and the postmodern condition. It focuses on her imaginal world, as it is disclosed through literature and an interdisciplinary concept of art.

This book achieves multiple goals at the same time: It provides an introduction into one of the most important literary works of the past decades with regards to comparing identities and the textures in which they are expressed; it is an introduction to multiculturalism and "postmodernity" as mindsets; it gives insight into the mutual teachings and enrichments between painting and writing; and it is an exploration of both artistic and political multiculturalism, its limits and potentials. In particular, it explains the intersection between different strands of formal procedures, such as painting and writing are, to achieve one and the same goal which is at the center of Mukherjee's texts: raise awareness about the necessity of "difference in unity", and about the beauty of "the Other".

Benedikter's and Hilber's book highlights the important contribution of Bharati Mukherjee's work for rethinking what contemporary "Imaginal Politics" currently is, and what it could become. I recommend this text to all interested in contemporary writing, in multiculturalism, in contemporary politics, and in the achievements of a great female artist. This book will enrich the reader with its sometimes playful, always original and very accessible style, its great accuracy and philosophical depth, and not least with its dry wit. It is a great introductory text for high school, college, and university teaching, for which I recommend it warmly.

New York City, New York   Prof. Chiara Bottici, Ph.D.
August 2018   The New School for Social Research

Author of *Imaginal Politics. Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary,* Columbia University Press, 2014.

Preface by Bo Stråth, University of Helsinki

When reading Roland Benedikter's and Judith Hilber's book on Bharati Mukherjee and her rethinking of "Imaginal Politics" and the idea of multiculturalism from the viewpoint of fiction and art, and when writing these lines, more than 60 million humans were on enforced move around the world, in Africa and Asia, in the Americas and in Europe, escaping wars, political violence and persecution, poverty and misery in the search for a better and securer future.

While richness has become global and is not restricted to a certain area of the world, poverty and exclusion are growing in what used to be the rich world of universal welfare. Populations in what *still* might be called the rich world are waking up from indolence as to the distress of the world. They, too, look for a better and securer future through protection from what they define as a new threat. Overwhelmed politicians are electrified and try to find an answer to the question of how to react to a rising wave of ethnic nationalism requiring exclusion of those who knock on the door.

This book is about rethinking multiculturalism in new ways through its focus on the literary work of Bharati Mukherjee and about her search for ways to translate the principles of literature and art to the sociopolitical sphere. Mukherjee was an immigrant herself on a transitional voyage from being an "Old World" (Indian) citizen to becoming a "New World" (first Canadian, then U.S.) outsider, expatriated and experiencing racial discrimination and xenophobia. She came to know the no man's land between the country of her past and the continent of her future, homeless and in suspension, searching for firm ground. These experiences permeate her literary work.

The backdrop of her writings—and of the authors who write about her in this volume—is the imagery of postmodernity with the massive questioning of the modernization narrative. Postmodernity is a social critique arguing that no grand narrative and claims of absolute truths are possible anymore. Obviously, imageries

of cultural canons, *Leitkultur*, and absolute values, in particular in their national shape, must be adapted to a globalized world where tolerance and respect for other worldviews are mandatory for a peaceful global cohabitation.

On the other side, the grand narratives did not disappear with the mainstream of the modernization tale. A little after Jean-Francois Lyotard's prognosis of the end of grand narratives in the 1970s and 1980s, a new grand narrative emerged, even more powerful than the previous one: the neoliberal globalization paradigm of the 1990s and 2000s arguing that humans are free-floating individuals in a global market society without borders and without hierarchies.

Part of that narrative was the concept of multiculturalism, which in the neoliberal version, became an instrument for retreat from overall solidarities and political responsibilities for social standards and welfare. Both the goal and the achievements disappeared, and for the neoliberals, multicultural became an ideological instrument to let ethnic communities alone. Ghettos of ethnic communities of poverty emerged in demarcation to other such ghettos in immigration societies all over the world.

With the collapse of the global financial markets in 2008, the neoliberal narrative of economic globalization in a seamless world lost credibility. Instead, new global narratives on the nation and on ethnic demarcation emerged. Eric Hobsbawm wrote about the nation as ethnic community: "But for those who can no longer rely on belonging anywhere else, there is at least one other imagined community to which one can belong: which is indestructible, and whose membership is certain. Once again, the nation, or the ethnic group, appears as the ultimate goal when society fails", he told us. In a somber conclusion he added: "What holds humanity together today is the denial of what the human race has in common".

Against such observations, the perspective that Bharati Mukherjee and this book about her mediate becomes urgent. It is a different view on the concept of multiculturalism, an emancipation of it from its neoliberal prison. It is a new narrative, bottom-up and from the field of fiction and art, from where it approaches the field of politics. Mukherjee's is in many ways an "alternative" approach in a situation which many experience as a paralysis of politics in the face of overwhelming problems. It is an alternative consisting of literature that at the end *becomes* politics. In this emerging view which emphasizes inclusion where exclusion prevails, fiction, art, and politics merge.

What does this book teach? The grand narratives have not disappeared, but they have to be critically questioned. Conviction must be separated from seduction. Ideological messages must be made open; and we must exercise in inclusion, transcending societies by thinking of them as multicultural and global. Benedikter's and Hilber's volume on Bharati Mukherjee serves to open up a new inclusive and boundary-transcending view on "Imaginal Politics". This book has an original take and narrative style emancipated from academic jargon. It is an excellent

introduction for undergraduate and graduate classes to the urgent field of new inclusive understandings of multiculturalism where fiction, literature, and art infuse the sociopolitical sphere with new imageries.

Helsinki and Rhodt/Germany   Bo Stråth
August 2018   Prof. Dr. emeritus of Nordic,
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Author of *Europe's Utopias of Peace*, Bloomsbury, 2016.

   Editor of *States and Citizens. History, Theory, Prospects*, Cambridge University Press 2003, and of *Homelands. Poetic Power and the Politics of Space*, Peter Lang, 2013.

Contents

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Summary

This book describes what an "art of multiculturalism" could be—and how in turn multiculturalism could be conceived as a form of art.

The book takes on the example of the early and middle work of Indian-born U.S. writer Bharati Mukherjee (1940–2017), former professor of creative writing at the University of California at Berkeley. Her—explicitly experimental—understanding of the potential "fusion" of literature and painting as a joint artistic tool aimed to inspire the creation of a "new society" through the propagation of "Imaginal Politics". Mukherjee's writing was dedicated to fostering "differences in unity" and "unities in difference" by the creation of joint imaginaries between different stripes of the population, including residents and immigrants. Literature converging with painting was conceived by Mukherjee as a contextual political instrument to help the diffusion of inclusive joint imageries between "the different" in society, and thus improve mutual understanding and integration in a world increasingly characterized by migration, cultural interpenetration and hybridization. Mukherjee's work thus set the example of practiced "Imaginal Politics" for the age of global exchange and interconnection in the field of literary and artistic studies.

The book provides a short introduction into the relationship between literature, art, and a reason-oriented concept of multiculturalism for the present age. It includes, in condensed ways, an explanation of Mukherjee's use of ancient Indian miniature painting techniques for Western postmodern writing.

The book is written in an easy to read style accessible to all interested in the topic: from high school and university students and educators to those generally inspired by the interface between literature, the arts, and politics. It is particularly apt to be used in teaching, e.g., for literary and art studies, sociology, political studies, contextual political analysis, multicultural studies, gender studies, and global and international studies.

Introduction

The introduction provides a short overview of the intentions and contents of this book. It points out that Mukherjee's core intention was an inter- and transdisciplinary integration of aesthetics, social investigation, and "imaginal politics", as well as the humanization of politics through "inner" human experiences provided by literature and art capable of connecting the familiar and the foreign.

The basic question of this book is as simple, as it is tricky: How could a step be taken beyond the current trend of understanding multiculturalism only as a specific policy for the marginalized and the disadvantaged? Can it be more than just a strategic governance technique for pacifying increasingly "partialized" and stratified societies, and more than "social engineering"? In other words: Can multiculturalism be understood, in more inclusive ways, as a form of contemporary "Imaginal Politics" dedicated to building bridges between social cultures, populations and strata, including residents and migrants, by informing—and to some extent converging—the imageries, both public and private? And to what extent would that include understanding multiculturalism as a form of sociopolitical… —art?

As we know since the early days of Pop Art and even since the 1950s, art can be conceived as "Social Sculpturing", for example, in the sense of German avant-gardist Joseph Beuys (en vogue in the 1980s and 1990s, the period of the early and middle work of Bharati Mukherjee that we address in this book). Beuys and others were convinced that art—including literature and in particular hybrid forms of merging literature, painting, and sculpture—can and should be both the expression and motor of social change through the evolution of perceptions and mindsets. However, after decades of artistic and social experiments in that direction, many aspects of such a conception remain to be explored. How could the various specialized forms of art such as literature and painting and their many subgenres and applications, as we have them since the 1990s, both represent and implement multiculturalism as something more complex, touching and inspiring than its reduction to a mere social necessity?

Trying to elucidate these—in our view—contemporary interrogatives in this booklet, the early and middle work of Indian-American writer Bharati Mukherjee (born 1940 in Calcutta, India, and passed away in Manhattan in January 2017) from

the 1970s to the 1990s is discussed against the background of its contribution to "Imaginal Politics". We concentrate on the early and middle work of Mukherjee because in it, the nutshell—and core argument—of how an "art of multiculturalism" can and should be conceived, and what its implications as well as the price to pay are, are exemplified in the most primordial and thus clearest and most essential way. Although Mukherjee's work obviously presents many more facets and phases, we concentrate exclusively on her concept of a new, inter- and transdisciplinary "art of multiculturalism" at the interface between literature and painting within the first period of her artistic biography. We are convinced that the potential of Mukherjee's approach to multiculturalism as "Imaginal Politics" as developed between the 1970s to the 1990s has still to be fully brought to fruition under contemporary conditions.

Following this conviction, we discuss Mukherjee's four novels: *The Tiger´s Daughter* (1971)*, Wife* (1975)*, Jasmine* (1989) and *The Holder of the World* (1993); as well as two collections of her short stories: *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988).

All of these works are *first* and foremost about elaborating a contemporary—i.e., "mature-modernity"-adequate—notion of multiculturalism as "Imaginal Politics" by artistic means. *Second*, they are dedicated to building artistic and political bridges between India and the United States, and in doing so to set concrete examples of culturally relevant "bridges between the imaginaries". Mukherjee's overall attempt is to provide avant-garde pieces on how to move towards an age of "ripe" multiculturalism enabled to reach the quality and level of art—with all human, both individual and collective, comedy, bizarreness, and tragedy inbuilt in such an endeavor. That includes, in particular, the relation between multicultural-ism, global transcultural alignment of imaginaries, and the role of power.

In examining these strands, we give particular attention

– first, to Mukherjee's feminist departure point and basic access to the topic;
– second, to one short story in the collection *Darkness*: *Courtley Vision*, since in it the main procedures of Mukherjees literary technique and the core motives of her artistic aspiration about evolving "multiculturalism" towards a form of art are concentrated in a nutshell.

Nevertheless, most other works of the period between the 1970s and the 1990s are also discussed in core aspects, although in a somewhat more eclectic manner that illustrates the main aspiration.

Overall, we try to give a short impression of Mukherjee's "proto"- and "para"-political work on expanding the notion of multiculturalism in interdisciplinary ways. Mukherjee's later works don't treat the issue of multiculturality in the same way as the "bloc" of her early and middle works, making the latter a different phase of her development. We therefore do not take into account recent Mukherjee texts such as *Miss New India* (2011), which would certainly provide a great deal of additional material for looking at the ways in which Mukherjee engages with contemporary popular culture.

In order to focus on the core, we also do not include the highly specialized literature on the theoretical relation between painting and literature, nor in-depth

discussions on Moghul painting which per se would fill whole books. The secondary literature we use is widely confined to the critique and reception of Mukherjee's work from the 1970s to the 1990s, and willingly so. We further make no attempt to include the last decade of critical material on Mukherjee, although without doubt there is a lot of it ranging from monographs to recent journal essays, as well as more recent interviews with the author.

What should the reader expect from the following pages?

The focus of our analysis is laid on Mukherjee's main concern: The relationship between traditional cultural heritage, its "nullification" by "decentered" globalization and postmodernity, and the resulting need for a new balance between the global, the national and the local conceived as a mix between heterogeneous and ambiguous forces meddled by migration. In this framework, we interpret Mukherjee's literature of the 1970–1990s as being dedicated to two main questions, which seem to have gained even stronger relevance after the events of 9/11 and the subsequent global systemic shift:

– *First*, of how the new, rapidly multiplying "hybrid" identities on the globalized stage can, should, and may evolve.
– *Second*, of how to build an exemplary multicultural society through what Mukherjee calls the potential "New America": from a unified (but often unidentifiable) "open space" to one that also contains more specific "places" or "localities" of multicultural traits. Erected on foundations often, if not always, dislocated from their origin—like the Indian heritage of Mukherjee in its transfer first to Canada and then to the United States -, a new pluralistic society that fully accepts its polymorphic and multifaceted identity in addition to unraveling towards individualization should justly house the heterogeneity of all its citizens —not as a *melting pot*, but rather as a *multitude of local and partial identities* with the right to inhabit, to express it with a notion of philosopher Jacques Derrida, their specific "circumcisions" while taking part in a greater joint space and imagination.

This both simple and complex agenda gained temporarily in importance and momentum in the U.S. during the charge of the first nonwhite president of the United States, Barack Obama, from 2009 to 2017, which led to a new push towards diversification and ethno-social inclusion. Paradoxically, Obama's charge has been simultaneously characterized by repeated new waves of racial, cultural, and social upheaval. The taking of office of his successor Donald Trump in January 2017 gives Mukherjee's concerns particular timeliness and relevance in the eyes of many.

In the *first* and *second* parts of the following pages, we discuss the contemporary conditions relating to the connection between the global, the national, and the local. Our argumentation oscillates between a general analysis of topical questions and issues, and Mukherjee's own personal experiences and confrontations with them.

In the *third* part, we explain Mukherjee's central concept of individual and collective transformation which should reconstruct national identity as an, as much as possible, interactive and inclusive patchwork of non-identic identities.

The *fourth* and *fifth* parts are dedicated to a closer investigation of the literary texts with regard to Mukherjee's model of sociopolitical commitment and her agenda of "restructuring identities" through "Imaginal Politics". Her appeals in this direction are a recurrent theme in her stories on diverse and multifarious levels both of story and of metaphor. Mukherjee's texts are characterized by the combination of sociopolitical engagement with sophisticated aesthetic inter- and trans-art texture.

Eventually, the *sixth part* closes the circle by taking up the contemporary cultural conditions of the West and their potential development with regard to both their inherent chances and possibilities, and their latent risks. In the *conclusio*n, we critically summarize Mukherjee's achievements and problematize them against the recent shift of the notion of multiculturalism in the framework of the global refugee and migration crisis since 2014.

Overall, we are convinced that there are not many works (yet) that tackle the state and perspectives of multiculturalism in such a depth as the early and middle periods of Bharati Mukherjee's writings. Her work helps to reframe the issue of multiculturalism in a way that can potentially salvage it from the disastrous place where it was left by the neoliberal years. Parts of the following rely on extended conversations between Judith Hilber and Bharati Mukherjee at the latter's home in Berkeley, California, and at the University of California at Berkeley.

August 2018   Bozen-Bolzano-Bulsan
                                                          Roland Benedikter and Judith Hilber

Chapter 1
The Western Global. Lands of Difference—Lands for Building?

Abstract This chapter describes the idea and practice of multiculturalism in the 1970, 1980s and 1990s in Western democracies, as related to "postmodern" pluralism and decentralization. Mukherjee's stance was that both idea and practice had to be developed further beyond ideologies towards a new "social imaginary" capable of connecting socio-cultural minorities and majorities, and which could be provided by merging literature and painting in particular.

Keywords Multiculturalism · Postmodernism · Pluralism · Social Imaginary Minorities · Majorities

1.1 The Postmodern Ground

The question what the purpose of literature may—and should—be under "postmodern" conditions, and what its socio-political implications and potentials can and should be, is at the center of Bharati Mukherjee's literary work from the 1970s to the 1990s. It is the question about how, and to what extent, art can be contemporary at all under radically pluralistic conditions. And to what extent it has to be inter- and transdisciplinary to achieve such a goal.

> Why literature? What sense does it convey? Is it still viable? Is it still pertinent in a 'postmodern,' technologically computerized information age? It seems, at first glance, that writing fiction has almost become obsolete, withdrawn into its own artistic ivory tower.[1]

Answering such provocative questions, Indian born U.S.-writer Bharati Mukherjee (1940–2017) and former professor of creative writing at the University of California at Berkeley incessantly explicated—and continuously developed—her views on literature between aesthetic creation and social condition.

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[1]Bharati Mukherjee, *Unpublished Interview*, by Judith Hilber, University of California at Berkeley, October 1994, p. 1. Consecutive quotes from this interview will be given parenthetically in the text as UIV and p.

Bharati departed from one main contextual observation. The "postmodern" conception of the world entails the breakdown of the grand narrative of the legitimation of power; the decay of its explicit and implicit claim for truth; and the dissolution of generally accepted moral and ethical values. The authoritative grand narrative, the idea of integrative truth and the respective moral codes, were the firmly grounded ideals of modernity. The deterioration of their social importance and political influence has had a considerable impact on the idea of subjectivity—which had been the pivot of most of the literary universe of Western modernity since the eighteenth century. A process of "liquidation" of identity was inaugurated (Dietmar Kamper). The "postmodern" transformation resulted in a fundamental heterogeneity of individuality both in theory and in practice, as well as of world perceptions. The "one world" of modernity was, in fact, dissolved into a countless plurality of relatively isolated and unique subjective worlds, and all the worlds were now equally valid since a common frame of reference was missing. After the "postmodern turn" to radical subjectivity in the second half of the 20th century, truth was no longer absolute; instead it was conceived as always dependent on a certain context and on a concrete individual. According to scholars such as Nelson Goodman, as a consequence *truth in social practices* was therefore substituted by rightness. "Living worlds", i.e. concrete existential processes, were now created individually rather than by joint agreement. That led to an increase in freedom of the subject, but also to growing isolation and partition of the social sphere. Subjective independence and social fragmentation went hand in hand.

Epistemologically, the "postmodern" view of reality designated itself as *partial nominalism*. The heterogeneity and plurality of worlds was perceived as chains of signifiers (Jacques Derrida) that have no stable continuity or identity, but are permanently being created, processed and developed. The signifiers create the signified called reality, not vice versa as classical realism claimed. The creative act is done—consciously and unconsciously—by the individual human being. In the postmodern view, the world is a result of many individual acts of "world-making" by means of conscious, subconscious and unconscious personal creativity. "Language"—in the broad sense—is the primary medium for it since it is the system and playground of signifiers. No longer unified by a central principle, many heterogeneous individual processes of world-creations and their outcomes must autonomously legitimate themselves, since they exist in relative independence without a hierarchical "metalinguistic" cover or "essence" to refer to. This is because the grand narratives of legitimation are questioned in their core by daily lifestyle practices.

In such a both "generative" and programmatically non-integrated society built not on stable, but rather fluid grounds, the world-continuum in its fundamental configuration has much in common with literature, having language as its primary medium, being something manufactured, consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously produced on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand remaining open, subject to change, transformation and to interpretation, and therefore, not being entirely controllable, like the many layers of language itself. Within the "postmodern condition", the act of subjective creation is essentially of the same structure as the multiplicity of meanings inherent in the daily use of language. Due to the fact that

world and reality cannot be not something fixed for the "postmodern mind",[2] it is not only possible, but mandatory for the individual to take part in the processes of world-creation and thus influence, shape and form social evolution in the proverbial Beuysian sense of "everyone [being] an artist."[3] Nobody is able to not act, not even if she or he does nothing. Joseph Beuys´s "postmodern" view of society as being a living organism or "Social Sculpture" equals an open work of art in a permanent process of creation and transformation—through socio-cultural and micro-political cycles of start and end, birth and death, achievement and loss, progress and regress, with many of these cycles enacted simultaneously, and with some reversible and others irreversible. Denouncing the elitist notion of art and artist, Beuys proclaimed the "Extended Concept of Art" according to which each individual takes part in the artistic creation of the social body, be it willingly or not. The participatory role is both a chance for and responsibility of the individual to contribute, both in positive and negative ways, to the "social organism".

Accordingly, literature in the postmodern conception is, in essence, a way and means of "free" world-making, and *at the same time* the very mirror and reflection of such a process. It constructs and reflects reality, and is thus simultaneously actor and mirror. It tries to make unconscious happenings more conscious, without the claim to ever reach a "full" level of insight or "the" meaning which does not exist. Literature is and epitomizes change. It is therefore the paramount medium to capture the "postmodern" phenomena of worlds; their dynamics of reality-creation; and the ever-proliferating nuances of plurality. It requires involvement, grants spaces for individual interpretative unfolding and fosters inter-active (co-interpretative) creativity.

1.2   Claiming Space on the Postmodern Ground: An Ambiguous Endeavor

Along the lines of these "postmodern" conceptions of language and literature within fractioned Western societies, Bharati Mukherjee tries to apply the principles of literature to the socio-political sphere. Her concern, starting in her earliest works and persistent all over her production in the 20th century, consists in trying through literature to create *imaginary spaces as spaces within collective imaginaries* with regard to all kinds of minority groups still struggling with settling down in new "globalized localities" that characterize the post-1968 socio-economic internationalization. Being a *migrant* herself, Mukherjee embarked on an odyssey of transition

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[2]Judith Hilber and Roland Benedikter: *The Postmodern Mind. A Re-Consideration of John Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror' (1975) from the Viewpoint of an Interdisciplinary History of Ideas*. In: Open Journal of Philosophy. Vol. 2, No. 1/2012 (February): 63–72, http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?paperID=17469.

[3]Wolfgang Zumdick: *Joseph Beuys* als *Denker. PAN/XXX/ttt: Sozialphilosophie – Kunsttheorie – Anthroposophie*, Mayer, Stuttgart und Berlin 2002: 12ff.

from an (Indian) "Old World" citizen (with a home of rather traditional traits) to an (American) "New World" outsider and expatriate under "fluid home conditions". According to her own description, she experienced racial discrimination and xenophobia—in what she felt as no man's land between the country of her past (India) and the continent of her present (America), where for a period of time she was homeless and lived a life in levitation. Moving on, she finally reached her status as an *immigrant* and eventually as a full, naturalized *citizen* with an American identity and America as her homeland (*desh* as she often called it in Indian terminology).

From the start, Mukherjee wanted to support, promote and stimulate the participation of minorities, especially those from non-traditional immigrant countries (those which in the 20th century were called "Third World" countries) on the grounds of equal narrative (signification- and imagination-wise) rights. This concern of hers has gained both in impact, ambiguity and contradiction as "America's complexion is browning daily" and "whites are [even starting to] losing their clear majority status in some states,"[4] as Mukherjee reported referring to demography foresights since the 1980s and 1990s.

Consequently, all of Mukherjee's literary characters in the 20th century show various degrees of socio-generative involvement. They manifest successful or failed life-management on an individual level on the one hand, and public, socio-political engagement or apathy on the other. The playground of their unfolding stories is the United States, which is addressed by Mukherjee as a case of the most advanced globalized society, thus setting the example for others; at least to a certain degree.

1.3 Migration, Immigration, Collective and Individual Seizure

In all of Mukherjee's literature, the primordial figure of "the immigrant" is a cardinal phenomenon incorporating all the symptoms and problems not only of globalization, but also of the "postmodern" *zeitgeist* within Western societies, including, in particular, the precarious (and as such in principle "unsolvable") relation between the global and the local. The breaking with one's inherited traditional culture, the clash with new ways and notions of life, and the threat of in many ways incomprehensible foreign cultural, moral and ideological norms and values lead to a so-called *culture shock*. They contribute to dissolve the Western subject and bring about a partial and temporary, in some cases even deep-reaching and lasting, "liquidization" (Dietmar Kamper) of known values and life styles. With the gradual steps of enculturation and of becoming familiar with *the Other*, i.e. the alien which is gradually integrated in a process that rarely "comes to an end", the "liquid" crystallizes again with a new chemical structure and disseminates the

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[4]Bharati Mukherjee: Beyond Multiculturism: Surviving the Nineties. Iowa Humanities Board Lecture, 21 May 1994: 7.

fall-out to various places. In the eyes of Mukherjee, the overall process can be seen as the gradual concretization of a new multiple identity, the so-called pluralization of identity, along with the creation of imaginary spaces as both time-zones of transformation and new formation.

It is noteworthy that such "pluralization" for Mukherjee is both simultaneous and successive. It is *simultaneous* insofar as identity becomes multiplied within one and the same person who then embodies a set of different identities at the same time. And it is *successive* insofar as the immigrant undergoes a sequential transition of identity, from one identity to the more multipolar next. This means that while letting go of the past, she or he *changes identity*. Leaving certain sets of the "I" behind, she or he is to a certain extent "reborn" or (to use an Indian term) "rein-carnated" in new forms of life and personality with novel expectations, fresh energies, and a different responsibility for the engagement and participation in individual and collective processes.

As reality teaches, this is meant to be the ideal case (and sometimes desperately desired) because there is failed life-management and unfortunate socio-political involvement implicit in both migration and immigration. It is expressed in all kinds of psychological and psycho-somatic problems and diseases, which mirror the principal ills and symptoms related to processes of transition and transformation.

1.4   National Identities and "Othernesses": An Uneasy Relation

This constellation unavoidably touches what was conceived historically as "national identity". With regard to classical "order and affiliation" patterns, the nineteenth century "melting pot" theory in the United States has long served as an example of how to reconcile unity, coherence, and pluri-culturality in "the" classical Western immigration country. The "melting pot" consisted of the neutralization of cultures of origin and their development towards a more inclusive "civil religion", i.e. towards the social idealization of secular values such as freedom, individuality and solidarity and their practice by the individual. According to Mukherjee though, this model can no longer be applied unchanged to the late twentieth (and subsequently twentieth-first) century complexity of citizenship. In her view, American mainstream culture cannot "neutralize" all differences and *Othernesses* to their common middle ground in times of global migration. Neither the U.S. "natural" assimilation concept by economic survival pressure nor Canada's mosaic model with patches of one central national identity and many peripheral, utterly distinct cultural ethnicities, will be able to do justice to a multiethnic community consisting of globalized, i.e. poly-differential singularities.[5]

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[5]Multiculturalism is of course a particularly encompassing and complex field of inquiry, and we cannot render the vast literature on it here appropriately. Rather, in the restricted framework we

This view of Mukherjee's has obviously been strongly contested and accompanied by many polemic statements and debates. For example, Neil Bissoondath, nephew of Nobel-Prize winning Trinidad-British writer Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, referred to Canada's multiculturalist mosaic as "cultural apartheid" despite its pluralistic and liberal stance. In his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* he writes:

> Multiculturalism, with all of its festivals and its celebrations, has done - and can do -nothing to foster a factual and clear-minded vision of our neighbors. Depending on stereotype, ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid, multiculturalism has done little more than lead an already divided country down the path to further social divisiveness. (Bissoondath, 89–90)

According to Bissoondath, multiculturalism as attempted in most Western democracies has failed both in theory and in practice. Even though there is nothing wrong with the word "discrimination," as Bissoondath points out, since

> [l]ife is at its best when there is choice, and choice implies discrimination. (Bissoondath, 92–93)

the discriminatory act inherent unavoidably implies a *moral* choice that often wasn't addressed appropriately by either side: neither by the incoming immigrants, nor by the resident locals.

Bissoondath's judgement about the multicultural experiments of the "Great White North" seems in contrast to what Canadian premier Justin Trudeau said in his speech at the occasion of the festivities to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary in July 2017:

> Whether we were born here or have chosen Canada as our home, this is who we are. Ours is a land of Indigenous Peoples, settlers, and newcomers, and our diversity has always been at the core of our success. Canada's history is built on countless instances of people uniting across their differences to work and thrive together. We express ourselves in French, English, and hundreds of other languages, we practice many faiths, we experience life through different cultures, and yet we are one country. Today, as has been the case for centuries, we are strong not in spite of our differences, but because of them.[6]

Ironically, how difficult and complex a factor multiculturality, even if practised at home, may turn out to be at the level of world politics, where instead of being an asset it can easily become an unexpected burden and disadvantage, was shown, to remain with the same example, by the visit of Trudeau to Bharati Mukherjee's homeland India in February 2018:

> Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's first official visit to India has not been the headline-grabbing love fest he must be accustomed to on his overseas trips. Despite plenty

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have, we focus on Mukherjee's own contributions to it meant to innovate the field by innovating imagination, or more precisely the social imaginary. To think through how a more extended and elaborated analytic framework on the topic of multiculturalism might be developed in inter- and transdisciplinary ways remains a desideratum beyond this aspiration.

[6]Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada: *Statement by the Prime Minister on Canada Day*, July 1, 2017, https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/07/01/statement-prime-minister-canada-day.

of photo opportunities, including at the Taj Mahal, Mr. Trudeau and his family's tour has been largely ignored by senior members of the Indian government. When he arrived in the capital, Delhi, he was met at the airport by a junior minister in what many interpreted to be a 'snub'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, on many occasions, personally received visiting government leaders. He also famously hugs his foreign counterparts… But Mr. Modi has not yet met the Canadian prime minister, despite him being in India for two days. He was also absent when Mr. Trudeau visited his home state of Gujarat on Monday. And it's not just the prime minister. When Mr. Trudeau visited the Taj Mahal on Sunday, some media reports pointed to the fact that the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, where the monument is located, did not go to greet the visiting premier. So is India really cold shouldering Justin Trudeau? And if so, why?

'Yes, this is a major snub,' columnist and economist Vivek Dehejia [said]. Mr. Dehejia said the reason for Mr. Trudeau's lukewarm reception could well be that several members of his government were closely allied with a Sikh independence movement - the Khalistan movement - which seeks to create a separate independent Sikh homeland in the Sikh-dominated northern state of Punjab. 'His Liberal party relies heavily on the Sikh-Canadian vote bank and some of the Sikh members of his government are fellow travellers with the Khalistanis,' said Mr. Dehejia. Mr. Trudeau counts four Sikh-Canadians in his cabinet. If this were the case, it would not be the first time that Khalistan has soured relations between officials from the two countries. Punjab's top elected official refused to meet Canadian defence minister Harjit Sajjan in April last year, alleging that he was 'a Khalistani sympathiser'. Canada announced it would supply uranium to India in 2015, in what was believed to be a significant step forward in relations between the nations.[7]

Nevertheless, Trudeau in the occasion of "Canada 150" also said:

As we mark Canada 150, we also recognize that for many, today is not an occasion for celebration. Indigenous Peoples in this country have faced oppression for centuries. As a society, we must acknowledge and apologize for past wrongs, and chart a path forward for the next 150 years - one in which we continue to build our nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown, and government-to-government relationship with the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation. Our efforts toward reconciliation reflect a deep Canadian tradition - the belief that better is always possible. Our job now is to ensure every Canadian has a real and fair chance at success. We must create the right conditions so that the middle class, and those working hard to join it, can build a better life for themselves and their families.[8]

Despite these conciliatory tones, many criticized Trudeau for addressing the problem of failed integration explicitly with regard to the past, but rather inexplicitly regarding the future.[9]

Mukherjee had long indicated the problem by pointing to a failed integration of imaginaries, due to the non-integration of different cultural and, in particular,

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[7]Ayeshea Perera: *Justin Trudeau in India: Is the Canadian PM being cold-shouldered?* In: BBC World, 18 February 2018, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43109029.

[8]Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada: *Statement by the Prime Minister on Canada Day*, loc cit.

[9]How far the recent, startling wave of suicides of indigenous people in Canada despite many constructive attempts towards inclusion over the past decades may point to an ongoing problem of ethnic and socio-cultural integration, and if so, who is responsible for it, is difficult to say. Cf. Robin Levinson-King: *Searching for an indigenous driven approach to suicide prevention*. In: BBC U.S. and Canada, 23 March 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39371690.

different literary and art histories. According to Mukherjee, art, even if dedicated to or concerned with the past, always points to the future. In her view, a new, broader concept of dialogue between collective and individual imageries has to be applied, and a new terminology invented, in order to avoid loaded and pre-given notions and structures. Inclusion, integration, or participation, to name a few coinages, or even terms such as "fusion"—Mukherjee's own favorite innovative term—should not merely stabilize things, but instead contribute to create a "new imaginary", leading perhaps even to a "new culture". The respective process of innovation should be understood as a reciprocal artistic exchange by the means of respect and sincere mutual interest on all sides, both by "dominant" and "minority" groups. The "We versus Them" or, as Washington's Catholic University's Jeremy Z. Muller put it influentially, but in heavily disputed ways, the "Us and Them"[10] consciousness on *both* sides has to be deconstructed. Two-way processes with equal dynamic forces on an artistic base should form the firm pedestal for the construction and further chiseling of a common, more organic "Social Sculpture."

In this way art in general, and in Bharati Mukherjee's perspective literature specifically, may make a contribution to social progress without losing its auto-poetic, self-referential and independent aesthetic value and moral territory. Mukherjee's art, as realized in her literary work, in her view "naturally" fuses both the aesthetic element and the socio-political engagement. Hers is not *l'art pour l'art*. But neither does it want to be just "committed art". Mukherjee's engagement in the imaginary universe works on the self-fulfilling prophecy of a "new world" through accurate description, or by what has been sometimes branded "thick description"[11]: a new "progressive imagination for all". It is the "Imaginal Politics" of a society that incorporates Mukherjee's idea of fairly "shared globalization".

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[10]Jeremy Z. Muller: *Us and Them. The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism*. In: Foreign Affairs, March/April 2008. Cf. our critique in Roland Benedikter: *Extremism and Ethnicity—Reloaded*. In: Ethnopolitics Papers. Edited by The Specialist Group Ethnopolitics of the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom (PSA) published jointly at the Exeter Centre for Ethnopolitical Studies of the University of Exeter and the Centre for the Study of Ethtnote 11 Queen's University Belfast, Volume 6, No. 42, April 2016, pp. 1–35, https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/page-files/EP_No_42.%20Benedikter.pdf and https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa-communities/specialist-groups/ethnopolitics/blog/ethnopolitics-papers-volume-6-2016; and Roland Benedikter: *Das Südtirol-Modell in der internationalen politikwissenschaftlichen Diskussion*. In: Politika 2010. Jahrbuch der Südtiroler Gesellschaft für Politikwissenschaften / Annuario di politica della Società di Scienza Politica dell'Alto Adige / Anuar de politicadla Sozieté de sciënza politica de Südtirol (threelingual: German, Italian, Raetoroman), hrsg. von Prof. Dr. Günther Pallaver, Raetia Verlag, Bozen 2010, S. 443–477.

[11]Clifford Geertz: *Thick Description. Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*. In: Clifford Geertz: The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays. New York 1973: Basic Books, pp. 3–30, http://www.sociosite.net/topics/texts/Geertz_Thick_Description.php

Chapter 2
Evolving the Time-Space Through the Hybridization of Art: Literature, Architecture, "Transformation Design" and "Complexity Science"

Abstract This chapter deals with one of Mukherjee's core methods: the hybridization of art towards a "contextual political" conglomerate of literature and painting with the goal of forging a new, integrative imaginary for deeply pluralistic and fragmented societies.

With this goal in mind, in Mukherjee's project an attempt is made to melt literature, architecture—in a broader, interdisciplinary sense—as well as the new disciplines of "transformation design" and "complexity science", again in both the literal and metaphoric sense. Mukherjee believes that restructuring imaginary "spaces" both within the self and in the social realm through literature can take inspiration from architecture, design and an interdisciplinary science dedicated to complexity. In her view, literature and these fields of "applied" or "social" arts and sciences are closely related in the "postmodern" process-oriented framework, since they are all about transforming the time-space characterized by increasing heterogeneity and complexity.

Not directly referring to any "postmodern" philosophers or theorists, Mukherjee tried to realize conflicting—and often contradictory—"postmodern" theories about complex transformation in practice. Practice here does not mean that Mukherjee went out in the streets and actually demonstrated physically for a remaking of the given society. Instead she engaged herself through the pen. She created worlds and through this tried to shape the existing world with one specific medium of art, literature, taking inspiration from other media, in particular from painting. Her books fulfill both a participatory role in the imaginary of the social organism as well as an encouraging, motivating role for the development of an extended concept of social art: the so-called appeal to the mute, incapacitated audience to empower themselves by learning to voice their own speech and claim their own rights, for example through literature. That means that in Mukherjee's perspective, the mute have to be given their own language—which is the core aim of Mukherjee's early

and middle work of the 1970s through the 1990s. Two steps are of particular importance here: First, the reconstruction of misplanned, inappropriate imaginary constructions; second, laying the bases for a new, joint imaginary fundament.

2.1 The Plan: Restoring Misplanned Imaginary Constructions

In Mukherjee's view, the terms minority groups, minority voices, minority positions, minority rights, and minority cultures, although meant in a positive manner, remain nevertheless somewhat ambiguous, since they tend (in most cases unwillingly) to fix mainstream-versus-outsider and center-versus-periphery relations. Nevertheless, such concepts by no means refer to "minor" rights, inferior standards or subordinate social statuses. Postmodern societies could not tolerate such an equation, and even less the notion that most minority elements have to finally be boiled down to the famous—or sometimes rather infamous—"melting pot". Instead of being melted into one and the same metal, according to Mukherjee minority groups must be enabled to bring in their own metals and minerals to make a contemporary society prosper. They must be granted their freedom to decide about alloys and form compounds in combination with others and with each other. At the same time though, they in turn must be aware of and open to fusions that may occur due to internal and external influences. In other words, minorities and marginalized people should be paid attention and given the possibility to introduce and advance their own cultural, linguistic, artistic and individual heritage, while they themselves have to be open for accommodation, insertion, integration and assimilation according to the contextual needs of the new space they advance to. That means that they must mobilize and exhibit an amount of flexibility and readiness to accept and adopt the standards, particularities, offers and contributions made by the receiving societies in given frameworks of co-created time-spaces.

According to Mukherjee, if this versatility principle is disregarded, the opposite extreme to homogeneity will emerge and harden: the—well protected—ghettoization of different groups with sharp dividing lines resulting in an all too well-defined and designed mosaic, whose boundaries are rigidly respected and have no points of contact, or only superficial ones. The question of national identity in this case may be modeled on the "most dominant" population, as Mukherjee put it, around which ethnic minorities may lead a well-protected or even positively discriminated, but in the end peripheral existence.

At the same time, the other extreme remains constantly an option to such a "structural" solution of plurality: to fall back on old, modern and premodern patterns of unification. In this latter case, minorities and "peripheral cultures" are either regarded and tolerated as foreign guests (sometimes formally classified as "resident alien" in the U.S.) or, worse, seen as unwished intruders and unaccepted strangers

who blemish the lifestyle and cultural and social identity of the center. Some traits of this ideology unexpectedly re-emerged, for example, in the UK after "Brexit", i.e. after the exit referendum of Great Britain from the European Union on June 23, 2016, after which "hate crimes" against "foreigners" of all kinds, including White Christian Europeans (WCE's), suddenly sprung up all over England in particular in ways never expected by large parts of the population, experts, international observers and the elites. Some blamed this on the rather inflexible model of multicultural "integration" practiced by the UK, in particular England, in the preceding decades where immigrant populations widely concentrated on themselves, especially in the countryside, without much exchange with the local people.

According to Mukherjee, the principle of the "mosaic structure" of multiculturalism has been laid out and consolidated especially in Canada. This is the reason why she eventually decided to leave the country after 14 years of residing there and made the U.S. her country of choice to fight for her ideas of "applied integrated pluralism".

2.2 Mukherjee's Example: Laying the Basis for a New Imaginary Fundament. From Apartment-Hunting to Building One's Own House in a New Environment: A Difficult Mental Transition

Summing up, coming from an ethnic minority herself and having experienced alienation, displacement, "outcastism," and racial discrimination, in her work from the 1970s to the 1990s Mukherjee dealt with matters which can be typically located in the "postmodern", globalized Western context, expressed in the contemporary literary discourse, and placed within the contemporary world-creation process. According to her, *multiculturalism understood as social art* is a paramount example of dealing with the *global-local interface* which during the final decade of the 20th (and the first decades of the 21st) century has become a defining mechanism for the further perspectives of developed societies.

During her own journey as a migrant, Mukherjee, according to her own accounts, experienced "direct" racism and xenophobia. The hostility towards her as a foreigner in her first host country Canada, which in her perception was unwelcoming, led, as she expresses it, to an "interior nomadism". Besides the humiliations which Mukherjee experienced and the bitterness she bottled up inside herself, which was a recurrent theme in her personal conversations all over her life, her constant search for a new home did not cause her to resign. On the contrary, she increased her "mental" activity and after having left Canada and immigrated to the United States, she started to settle down "mentally" and build herself a permanent home, from where she expanded her artistic influence by "infiltrating" both the literary communal ground as well as the social field. In essence, Mukherjee in her

own view started to claim valid space for herself by starting in her own mind, and through her writing in her self-perception she did it exemplarily for all minority groups by enhancing the awareness of the cultural and socio-political trends related to them, including both failure and progress.

In her own conception, Mukherjee's imaginary edifice is an open and welcoming place, inviting all citizens, irrespective of whether they belong to the so-called dominant group or the so-called newcomers, to visit and become acquainted with their personal style. Her literary style is meant to help people of different cultures and heritages to understand each other "from within", i.e. in their imaginaries, and then to inspire the guests of her literary house to develop their own ideas and consequently to join her in building more such cosmopolitan homes. In Mukherjee's view, the technique of building, the materials and the carrying out of the construction can take any form as long as it does not damage the aspired ideal of contributing to a more just, emancipated and liberal society.

Nevertheless, starting to embrace such a path of new construction while practicing simultaneous programmatic openness, violence lies latent and cannot always be prevented. Mukherjee's stories contain many incidents of violent "rehousement" attempts or struggles against them, which try to prevent the "foreign home construction next to my home" or in turn tell stories about failed "mental" adaptation by immigrants. These examples make a core part of her agenda. But if there is an agenda, there is a program, meaning that there is a productive if not creative potential inherent in any obstacle. Thus, literature for Mukherjee is

> a more peaceful way of revolutionizing the world than through nuclear weapons or conventional weapons. (UIV, 25)

As a consequence, Mukherjee's socio-aesthetic commitment is in many ways archetypal of the art-reality concept in the postmodern condition.

It is important to mention here though that the "revolutionary" aspect is ambivalent, including Mukherjee's own use of the term. Its message does not necessarily convey a positive meaning and invoke anthropologically positive movements supporting the ideals of social sculpture. A "revolution" is in many cases violent, in one way or the other (physically, psychologically, ideologically), and if successful, sometimes may involve a cultural or political overthrow and lead to an elitist or authoritarian regime, perhaps substituting more liberal, looser cultural and socio-political organizational patterns. Thus the motif of "revolution" can be detrimental, even poisonous for the idea of "social organism". Occasionally the intention may be good and yet the outcome damaging. A potential negative turn can be ascribed to a vast variety of reasons, including unconscious distortion of vision or misunderstanding or ignorance or unhappy contingencies causative of *vis maior*.

Nonetheless, what counts in Mukherjee's vision of literature as a "revolutionary" agent of change is the appeal to a positive intention to productively bring in and use one's creative talents towards inclusive imageries understood as "social art", and to never let loose and get off the carriage, but to always go on and try as best as one can. This should be done in the name of a more differentiated *and* deepened unity

between people, not to the advantage or new privileging of former (and future) minorities. Therefore, it is not only vitally important that society has, produces, and listens to people who impel an attitude of involvement, but equally, that its citizens take a critical stance towards their story-tellers, prophets and visionaries—including, as Mukherjee always demanded, towards herself.

Chapter 3
A 400-Year-Old Legacy. The Traditional Locality and Its Interrelation with Globalized "Hybrid" Frameworks

Abstract This chapter describes Mukherjee's artistic agenda: the idea of "fusion" as both a method of integrating different artistic disciplines like writing and painting, and as the socio-political utopia of a pluralistic multicultural society.

Keywords Local vs Global · Tradition vs Innovation · Fusion

3.1 "Fusion"

Although claiming, from the 1970s to the 1990s, to be a U.S. citizen and an American author writing for an American audience, Mukherjee was born, brought up and educated in India. Her Indian heritage has never been "canceled", and never been denied by her. But having gained a more objective distance over time, Mukherjee tried to consciously make use of it and to incorporate it in her otherwise both distinct and typically American way and style of writing. The ultimate goal was "fusion" between the Indian and American songlines of her life:

> I see myself as an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island. [My] *Indianness* is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world.[1]

3.2 "Fusion" as Contextual Political Dimension and Social Perspective

"Fusion" is a key term that Mukherjee prefers to use for the imaginary merging of the East and the West. But for her it has a much farther-reaching than just personal implication. According to her vision, "fusion" should become the keyword in the redefinition of an envisaged "new" contextual political dimension and social

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[1]Bharati Mukherjee: Introduction. In: *Darkness*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992, xv.

perspective, inspired by American multicultural transformation. According to Mukherjee, the huge homogeneous "pot" of the traditional nation state in which all anthropological "taints," every "Otherness" was melted down to "Sameness" in some way should be informed by new, more progressive social technologies which are still undergoing experimentation.

However, the "alternative raw materials" for such transformation—the different cultures brought by migrants—already assumed a new status at the end of the 20th century, in Mukherjee's opinion. In her view, they have advanced from the status of corruption to difference, and from aberration to variation. In this advancement lies the worthiness of postmodernity. The change and increase in value of ethnic variabilities are not merely ascriptions imposed from the outside, but have taken place because of their primary reinterpretation and re-estimation that have started both in the "dominant" populations and within the minorities themselves. A new *language game*, in both Ludwig Wittgenstein's and Jean-Francois Lyotard's sense, has socially developed, with a myriad of pros and cons involved.

Indeed, by implementing especially Wittgenstein's language game theory, parallel to the unfolding of Bharati Mukherjee's work, the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924–1998) mapped the postmodern condition and its specific "reality structures" in influential ways on both sides of the Atlantic. According to Lyotard's main theoretical work, "Le Differend: Phrases in Dispute"[2] (1983, English 1988), social realities are created and defined by *language games* which come into existence within a certain discursive frame of reference. World-making is in essence both ignited and "executed" by "language gaming" within given socio-historical and socio-political contexts. The driving force for generative inventiveness, originality and innovation of language games, is what Lyotard calls "Paralogy": the fundamental incommensurability of all games, i.e. their uniqueness and absolute autonomy from each other, whether they know it or not, and their fundamental equivalence, whether it is officially and factually (which is not always the same) recognized or not. It is between the incommensurabilities of language games that the spark of the new can be ignited, sometimes, here and there, when they meet, most often by not understanding each other properly.

Nevertheless, euphoria about the potentials and powers of language to create realities through (to some extent competitive) "gaming" according to Lyotard would be inopportune. For example, in the discourse between minority and non-minority groups, i.e. between center culture versus multiculturalism, some new habits have emerged over time through language change, but other rules have been formalized and hardened. According to Mukherjee's example, only a new, uncharged imaginary can be used to define and play the game better, and in more just ways. "Fusion" or "Merging" are suggested by Mukherjee as terms to initiate such a new phase in the imaginary creation of reality:

> You can study them for a lifetime and find something new each time you look. (HW, 18–19)

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[2]Jean-Francois Lyotard: *Le Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, University of Minnesota Press 1992.

3.3   Imaginal Politics and Its Eastern Predecessors in Art According to Mukherjee: Moghul Miniatures

To exemplify (and at the same time to start to realize) "Fusion" and "Merging" by literary means, Mukherjee—to avoid political polemics—first communicated her individual development of how she came to practice them in the field of the arts. The *personal* Mukherjeean fusion of the East (her heritage) and the West (the new acquisitions during her adult life) included her development from an expatriate foreigner to a fully "naturalized"[3] U.S. citizen. Proceeding from this personal experience to her *artistic* craftsmanship, some remarkable writerly features developed, again by a very individual "fusion", now between different arts: literature and painting. While literature is what characterized the "American" Mukherjee, ancient Moghul painting was the main inspiration and heritage of the "Indian" Mukherjee. So how to reconcile both—and make something new out of their "fusion" with regard to the request of an "inclusive imaginary" for the global age?

One of Mukherjee's unique artistic characteristics is the literary employment of a technique that belongs to the 16th and 17th century Indian court painting. These periods were governed by the so-called *Great Moghuls* who were the local and regional chiefs and essential patrons of the arts, especially of the miniaturist painters who resided at court and had to carry out the Moghuls' orders. The commissions principally consisted of depicting the occurrences and celebrities at court, in mainly portraying the Moghuls themselves, and in painting natural life such as animals and flowers in their natural habitat, as collected and exposed by the Moghuls for reasons of reputation and socio-political recognition, as well as for the enjoyment of the rulers, their officials, companions, favorites, diplomats and (often foreign) guests. The resulting art has been summarized under the term *Moghul painting* which is in many ways synonymous with miniature painting.[4]

Ernst Kühnel, an adept in this field, enumerates three main characteristics proper of Moghul painting. First, he states that Moghul miniature painting is a "reality-art" portraying the historical 16th and 17th centuries in India. It is then, he goes on, rather a craft than an art or it is an art of the crafts; and lastly it is an "atmospheric" art.[5] As we will see, all three concepts are decisive for Mukherjee's practice of how

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[3]The in-depth discussion of the notion "naturalized" in the framework of the debate on nationalism-multiculturalism would be worth its own, separate treatise. It is something we cannot carry out here.

[4]In the framework of this booklet, we look at Moghul, Mughal or Moghal painting only in general terms and then 'apply' some of its characteristics to a few texts by Bharati Mukherjee, following her own procedure. If the reader wants to get more serious about pursuing the thematic of Mughal painting she or he might begin with William Dalrymple's *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi 1707–1857*, Yale 2012.

[5]Ernst Kühnel: Introduction. In: *Indische Miniaturen: Aus dem Besitz der staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1937.

to "fuse" literature and painting through mainly short (miniature) pieces of "language gaming" (short stories) in order to "infuse" the Western imaginary with new inspiration.

3.4   Artistic Know-How on "Fusion": Historiography

Miniaturist painting was an explicit "realistic" art in Moghul-age India insofar as it assumed the public function of a chronicle by "narrating" apparently authentic scenes of the given contemporary time, its life episodes and historical events. It did so in the name of the political rulers in order to preserve their lifestyle in pictorial, visual documents for posterity. But Moghul paintings were also conceived to create imaginaries to stabilize and secure the given order, i.e. the power of those in power. Since there were no or very few competing narratives of similar artistic power, miniature paintings contributed to the order of things *not* to be changed, like most pre-modern art. Displaying a somewhat photographic value with bright, deep and intense colors, the pictures were close to nature and very true to life. The court painters in their self-understanding were as much artists as accurate chroniclers and picture-reporters with a high aspiration to be truthful in every tiny detail, while also being faithful to themselves by not denying their personal artistic skill and interpretation, and to the rulers, by not disappointing their expectations.[6] For, although being an apparently "realistic" art, in Moghul miniature painting

> there is real sensibility, real creative power, irrespective of mere technical skill,[7]

as J. V. S. Wilkinson points out. Wilkinson also confirms the historical, documentary value of the paintings:

> Of astonishingly mature accomplishment, they reveal great narrative gifts testifying to close observation of the contemporary scene.[8]

Nevertheless, without doubt the Moghul paintings also "created" reality according to the rulers' wishes. Both representing and creating reality were, to a certain extent, in balance, although we must assume that the "creating reality" aspect was more important insofar as it secured power and stability for those who provided the commission and paid for the work.

Trying to closely follow this "double" (and deeply multi-faceted) example of simultaneous representation and creation of reality, according to her statements, Mukherjee's fiction too testifies to the actual contemporary scene, but in contrast to the Moghuls, not by trying to stabilize it, but to further develop it. At the same time, like the Moghul paintings, Mukherjee's "fusion" of literature and painting is both

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[6]Ernst Kühnel: *Moghul Malerei: Mit zwanzig Miniaturen*. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, n.d., 26.

[7]J. V. S. Wilkinson: *Mughal Painting*, The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art. London: Faber and Faber: 1948, 5.

[8]Ibid., 2.

about representing and creating reality. Yet, Mukherjee's art is not aristocratic like the emperors' painting, but it aims to be democratic in its self-understanding. Its purpose is to reach all social strata and to arouse a general awareness of the astounding social, cultural and ethnical stratifications in one and the same "social body" of the given Western society, in Mukherjee's case the United States, that may have been overlooked, ignored or repressed.

Or as Mukherjee herself stated,

> …the best praise, the most satisfying kind of mail that I get is that reader saying, 'you know, all these minorities that I see in malls were faceless people until I read *Darkness* or the stories in *The Middleman*. Now I can see them as individual human beings going through many of the same domestic or social and political conflicts that I, coming from a different culture do, and that it's simply different cultural strategies of negotiation of the same problems. (UIV, 1–2)

3.5   Two Main Functions Both of Moghul Painting and of Mukherjee's "Imaginal Politics" Through "Painted Literature": Reporting and Chronicling

As a consequence, Mukherjee's art as a fusion of literature and painting is (and wants to be) a kind of reporting and chronicling that at the same moment aims to be "creative" for something new, still not existing in the facts but already hidden in them as unknown potential. It is a longing for something that is inherent in what is, but that is still not.

Nonetheless, Mukherjee's artistic "objective" is less focused on posterity, on radiating and projecting an aura of brilliancy into the future, than it is meant to document the present in a unique, unveiling way that is not carried out according to a commission by the powerful or in the service of the system, but by Mukherjee's own compelling moral, artistic and socio-political concern. To chronicle, i.e., to write down, record and thus "disseminate" (Derrida), i.e. make public marginal states of affairs or neglected social phenomena, entails documenting realities while creating new versions of *the Real* (Jacques Lacan) *at the same time*, and by this very procedure. Analyzing is not simply mirroring, but also creating, and it has always and unavoidably this double face—as, for example, the analyses about an alleged "Clash of civilizations"[9] have shown since the 1990s. They have created this clash almost as much as they have described it.

Therefore, description is always an invitation to each individual to extend her or his social commitment in the socio-scape—and foremost to expand it to partly desolate fields. Usually, only individual cases can be rendered by literature to set an example. Description of "the whole", in literature, or, to be true with the insights of

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[9]Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations?* In: Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993 Issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations.

"postmodernity", even in "official" historiography, occurs only through exemplary single cases. The static, historiographical preservation and self-complacent immortalization of some Moghuls and their glamorous achievements are replaced in Mukherjee's case by an instant, immediate goal: the creation of a more inclusive society, without exactly knowing (and probably: without wanting to exactly know), what such a society may be once allegedly "realized".

3.6   "Writing for a Group": A Contradiction?

Nonetheless, there is a more specific historical note to be inserted here with regard to Mukherjee's writing. Mukherjee was among the first writers to address the topics of a specific immigrant group in the U.S., namely South Asians and, in particular, Indians who went to the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[10] In her own words, she tried

> to claim valid place for this community through fiction… [and] force the dominant culture in the U.S. to realize that we who have come from India… are to be treated as… citizens and not as permanent guest-workers and exotics. (UIV, 6)

Throughout the 1970s until the 1990s, Mukherjee was self-assertive about her vanguard position in this regard and took it very seriously:

> I'm writing about a pioneering group and I am a pioneer… I'm writing about a group that hasn't been written of in literature before and actually not even in the sociological treaty. This is [a] pioneering kind of research because South Asians have such a short history in the United States as immigrants. I therefore am trying to find book by book the language, the literary traditions that are appropriate to people who are going through feelings that have not been felt before, experiences such as suddenly the dislocation and therefore destabilization of communal identity, the distancing from formal religious traditions… [Throughout the 1970s to the 1990s] I had to invent the literary traditions that will most closely, most precisely explain the traumas and the raucousness and energies of this group, i.e. people like me. (UIV, 15, 8)

Obviously, Mukherjee was not sufficiently aware that "writing for a group" was, and remains to a certain extent in contradiction to her claim, to contribute towards a more "inclusive" society.

3.7   Towards an Inclusive Approach of the "Social Narrative": Mukherjee's Artistic Agenda

Nevertheless, considering such contradiction, Mukherjee throughout the 1970s to the 1990s more or less constantly tried to produce a kind of "partial, but universal" narrative history of minorities in a given time-space frame through literature, and in

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[10]Cf. Ronald Takaki: *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. New York, London, Victoria, et al.: Penguin Books, 1990, 445ff.

particular through merging literature, painting and "imaginal realities". What she wanted was an (in the broad sense, including the social and political spheres) "aesthetic" rewriting of a given situation by gathering a huge amount of facts which she then fused with her conscious, half- *and* subconscious "world-making".

There is another parallel here. The fact that Moghul miniature painting is also regarded as a "craft" by experts, as much as it is seen as an art, can be interpreted as analogy to the extended concept of art mentioned before as "Social Sculpture" or, more precisely, "Social *Sculpturing*", to which Mukherjee seems in her own way inclined. "Social Sculpturing" means: Art is not seen in isolation and as existing for its own sake, but has to combine aesthetics with social engagement. It has to see both as one and the same process (although not exclusively, since there must remain a plurality of ways and means).

In Mukherjee's case, the Moghul miniatures stand for the (although not politically accurate, and thus modified) example of a potential unity of "free" and "applied" art. The reason is that the Moghul miniatures were always "trade products", politically correct by their very origin and yet painted with high artistic prowess and individualism, and even with some inherent critique.

For the Bharati Mukherjee of the 1970s to the 1990s, the fusion of the functional with the aesthetic and with the critique component is indispensable. She asserted that it was important to neither neglect aesthetic calculations nor forget

> that there is a big social agenda, a missionary agenda. (UIV, 25).

Mukherjee in this phase of her development thinks of fiction

> as being very much about historical, social, political realities. Because I believe that fiction can deform and reform attitude, and remake attitudes. I take the world-reality part very, very seriously. I can't find myself writing about love in a vacuum, or on personal emotions in a vacuum; they have to operate for me because I'm that kind of person with that kind of a background in the context of world issues. (UIV, 10)

In this sense Mukherjee's literary commitment, and in her view, art in general, can be regarded as a socio-aesthetic discipline which leads the way out of the dilemma of art between aestheticism and engagement (pragmatism, functionalism), that is: between art as a means in itself and art as a means to an end. Like many other "postmodernists", Mukherjee would dispose of both (rather unilateral) interpretations in order to foster a more "mediating", in the ideal sense more integrated (and thus more encompassing) one.

Answering the question "Why literature?" Mukherjee therefore said in the 1990s:

> I think literature mediates the world. Without art, without humanities we would be technocrats. We would be simply inputters of data without having any way of understanding and processing the data. So, 'Why literature'? It's to turn statisticians into humans. (UIV, 25)

3.8 A First Artifice: Multi-faceted Scenery as Atmospheric Vitalization

The third thematic characteristic of the classical Indian miniature Moghul painting —the model of Mukherjee's writing—indicated by Kühnel is, as mentioned, the emission of an atmospheric aura, for quite different purposes, implications and goals. These goals could, but do not necessarily follow a common goal. In fact, the sober matter-of-factness of "political art" seems to need a vitalizing animation to become "real". In the case of Mukherjee, the example of Moghul art teaches this: Its surroundings drifting off to some distant, misty horizon, traversing rolling land-scapes and natural habitats which give a comprehensive picture of the scene, in order to create a special atmosphere to revive the impression. They revive it for a goal widely unknown to the spectator, but inherent in the creation of reality, although perhaps not fully envisaged, neither by the artist her- or himself, nor by the spectator, nor by the surrounding socio-political context. But in the end, perhaps by all of them in the form of a mutual, common—and both active and passive—joint process.

Similarly, Mukherjee's scenes in her novels and short stories of the 1970s to the 1990s often try to radiate a special atmosphere, without any apparent goal but the need to "progress", making more or less clear that "progress" is a double-faced issue at least: it is wanted, but at the same time unclear in its consequences and implications, let alone its interpretations. Evocating something that is still unclear by the work of constantly aspiring to it: that is the essence of Mukherjee's literature.

3.9 The Result: Ambiguous Atmospheres and "Special" Colors that Create a Differentiated Whole

As a consequence of these aspects, the main (in most cases ethnic minority) characters in Mukherjee's first books are in most cases somewhat stiff, almost paralyzed since they are typological, exemplarily reduced figures who in addition do not live in their natural habitat but are dislocated from their usual and familiar environment. The tension between the new, alien, yet often exciting surroundings and the old, left-behind, traditional, well-known, but in many cases boring or outdated backgrounds is solidly present inside the imaginary of most of these characters. It builds up an animated, sometimes insistent and bitter, if not in some cases nauseous atmosphere. Dislocation, alienation and their psychological mani-festations are conditioned reflexes and defense mechanisms, seemingly stemming from situation and circumstances.

Color is a core means used here by Mukherjee to create atmosphere and to elucidate what is going on inside the "human reality" of her characters. In the Moghul miniatures, the coloring has richness and depth, which thus renders emo-tions. It reflects the brightness, variety and plurality of being. Employing a similar

compositional device in writing, Mukherjee's creation of atmosphere heavily relies on the literary description of colors. In her early work the color *red*, most of the time in the form of blood, plays a major role expressing all the violence and bitterness experienced by her "(im)migrants". In her middle works, the colors are enriched and assume prolific shades and nuances until the full range of the color palette is represented.

In Mukherjee's work, the colors have an independent, self-generated intrinsic energy. They can, together with their pigmental manifestation of a certain shade, paint a lively cutting of, in most cases, ambiguous traits. Here are a few examples of the terminological (and thus conceptual) extravagances used by Mukherjee to evoke atmosphere: peacock blue, parrot green, blueberry yogurt, crushed raspberry, amber color, glassy black, lime-green, lime-sherbet color, peach-color, color of parrots in sunlight, fuchsia, khaki, lilac, sensual color, juicy green, indigo, lavender, marigold yellow, smoky orange, glossy green.

3.10   Mukherjee's Core Aspiration: The Time-Postponed Implementation of Traditional Eastern Painting Impressions and Techniques into Contemporary Western Writing

There are many more aspects of Moghul miniature painting techniques implemented in Mukherjee's writing, parallels which the writer herself draws expressively. They seem to be less a thematic borrowing than one of impression and technique. Mukherjee vividly proclaims to have consciously adopted a unique kind of writing style that is an adaptation from Indian miniature painting. Although it consists of various aspects, its essence can be condensed to one word: *Compression*. Mukherjee:

> My image of artistic structure and artistic excellence is the Moghul miniature painting, with its crazy foreshortening of the vanishing point, its insistence that everything happens simultaneously, bound only by shape and color. In the miniature paintings of India, there are a dozen *foci*. The most complicated stories can be rendered on a grain of rice, the corners are as elaborated as the centers. There is a sense of the inter-penetration of all things. In the Moghul miniature of my life, there would be women investigating their bodies in the mirrors; but they would be doing it on a distant balcony under fans wielded by bored serving girls; there would be a white man eating popcorn and watching a baseball game; there would be cocktail parties and cornfields and a village set among rice paddies and skyscrapers. In a sense, I wrote that story, *Courtly Vision*, at the end of [my collection of short stories] *Darkness*. And in a dozen other ways I'm writing it today, and I will be writing, in the Moghul style, till I get it right.[11]

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[11]Bharati Mukherjee: A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman. In: *The Writer on Her Work: New Essays in New Territory,* ed. Janet Sternburg, Vol. 2, New York: W. W. Norton & Company 1991, 38.

This was a crucial paragraph in what Mukherjee in 1991 called "my manifesto." It pronounced the core aspect of her writing aesthetics. The "Moghul miniature painting" method, transferred to literature, endows her texts with a first-hand idiosyncratic literariness which paradoxically testifies to the postmodern condition, although it originates from 16th and 17th century oriental art. And it does so in a vast variety of ways and techniques—all of them taken from the Eastern Moghul era. When these techniques are more closely observed, they all suddenly (and paradoxically) appear as accurate metaphors of the postmodern condition.

Chapter 4
Setting the Example for Imaginal Politics Through Art. Techniques and Procedures to Integrate Mukherjee's Indian Legacy with Western Postmodernity

Abstract This chapter explores the techniques and artistic procedures that Mukherjee applied to integrate her Indian legacy with Western postmodernity—thus setting the example for establishing a border-crossing "global imaginary" through art.

Keywords Art · Crafts · Imaginary constructs

4.1 Four Crucial Techniques

4.1.1 Foreshortening–Paralogy

The mentioning of the importance of "foreshortening" by Mukherjee is no accident.

In Indian miniature painting, the "foreshortening" of the vanishing point causes perspectival mannerism. Geometrical perspectives are changed and distorted in favor of (multiple) close-ups and zooming in on otherwise unseen or marginal details. Their "Paralogy" (i.e. a method of rendering that contradicts logical rules) disregards all geometrical laws of perspective on a two-dimensional picture space. It is an operative device for depicting scenes in a vigorous tone by employing "world-making" techniques—literally. Space and distances are intensified by distorting and redefining proportions between objects and subjects.

This technique enlarges the scale of particular sections in the picture, while shortening others. It magnifies objects that would otherwise be out of sight or outside the ocular resolving power, i.e. "minor" subjects, and integrates them as equals in the whole of the image. It also brings objects closer to each other, so that they are perceived simultaneously instead of successively; and finally, it makes scenes happen more synchronically than diachronically. On this account it implies considering a wider, more holistic—if artificially distorted—range and angle of vista while relativizing every and all single elements. For this purpose, secluded items are squeezed into the picture with technical and artistic aids. The overall

method of integrating the different independent of size and importance by artificially modifying their "natural" relations is called *compression*.

4.1.2 Simultaneity–Incommensurability

The insistence on simultaneous, yet heterogeneous occurrences is not only a corollary of "foreshortening". Parallelism can be achieved by placing various events side by side in individual pictures or by framing the main depiction within them, be it for decorative functions only. Nevertheless, not even decoration stands for decoration's sake merely. It aims to contribute to the general viewing of the depicted scene. In Moghul miniature painting, such frames are usually as full of life as the "main inside" which they surround. Fauna and flora, animal and bird life, flowers and trees, buds and leaves animate and shape the picture while defining its extensions and horizons. Although individual incidents occur, they can all be regarded independently of each other since they are incommensurable; each single scene contributes to the depiction as a unity through differentiation, and none of them is redundant. The achieved impression of the picture is increased, more plentiful, diffused, and cosmically outlined. In short, it is *compressed*.

4.1.3 Polyfocus–Dissemination

The abundance of foci results from both the relativization of singularities, their setting in relation to a vast variety of objects, and the concurrences of (seemingly) detached incidents. This method distributes equal emphases and takes away one single predominant view of the picture, as well as constantly disturbing simple convergence. It decenters the depicted scenes and disseminates the gaze. The focal point of observation is dispersed and has to enter a seemingly never-ending endeavor of wandering (or "nomading") around. Concurrently, an imaginary process takes place which deprivileges and minorizes principal affairs and majorizes minor or petty-considered issues, taking both artificially to a similar or even the same level. Therefore, by accounting for an increased inclusivity through the employment of multifocal views, a never static, but constantly "moving" microcosm of over-abundance is generated. A *compressed,* but at the same time *free floating* world between "equals" emerges.

4.1.4 Demarginalization–Decentralization–Trace

In Moghul miniature painting, in addition to the hierarchical shifting in the pictorial space (the majorizing and minorizing of positions), a temporal deferment is taking

place. It is conditioned by the spatial displacement of events. Instead of the usual sequential storyline-telling technique in which one scene is presented after the other and one picture (ideally) supersedes the previous one, which is reminiscent of a picture story, the miniatures retrace the timeline and reorganize the scenes in synchronicity as a "retro-deferment." Consisting of many individual, autonomous pictures which appear related because of their painterly conjunctive devices, ancient Western painting sometimes practices a kind of diachronic storytelling in one and the same picture. In Moghul painting, the single pictorial elements do not claim to have a connected diachronic character and thus a unifying center. The single elements manifest themselves in fact as independent, singular pictures with a meaningfulness and expressiveness of their own. The result is a demarginalization of the marginal, which becomes of equal importance as the central; the decentralization of the overall picture; and the wandering around of the observer's gaze which almost automatically starts to look for traces how to connect the single elements, and for the potential story hidden between them. The result is that the "singularity" is becoming more important than the whole of the picture; and the process of wandering around becomes more important than any overall meaning of the content. This singularity, albeit, goes at the expense of integrity. Forcing concentration on a particular detail, the imaginary has to take a cutting. Consequently, it can only be a detached, isolated episode with a single, principal focal emphasis, changing its place continuously. With a tendency to be restrictive, it lacks completeness—and thus manifests itself as something *made*, created, forged: in essence, as a work of art.

Restriction on singularities and the zeroing in on particularities surely are ways of "imaginary" world-making. Yet, these are only provisional measures that eventually have to be connected with a more inclusive view of the whole. In the form of *compression*, Moghul miniature painting aims to fulfill the claim of comprehensiveness, simultaneously tackling the abundance of multifarious story-lines and events.

4.2   Collecting the Fruits: Teachings of Indian Moghul Painting for the Western Postmodern Context

Despite all differences in culture, space and time, according to Mukherjee the Indian Moghul painting legacy as a whole presents multiple, sometimes surprising inspirations for the Western postmodern context. In her view, the parallels are abundant. Let us mention here just the *five* most important ones.

4.2.1 Complexity of Life

Presenting multiple foci with the aspiration of synchronicity, as Moghul painting does, opens up the possibility of treating a higher complexity of reality as it is horizontally compressed, i.e. focuses on a particular historical timeframe. In the Indian Moghul miniatures the historical hallmark stands for the "compressed" present, for contemporaneity. Analyzing structures and conditions in their synchronicity is not purely pursuing sociology, cultural or political analysis, but also involves assuming the role of a historian of the contemporary.

In fact, artists in the Moghul age were both painters and historiographs. The Moghuls commissioned their court artists to record and depict scenes from their own lives and environments, events at court, fights that they waged against their enemy, and people that they ruled. In this way the artists had to engage themselves with the investigation of their contemporary times as much as they contributed documents and records to history and historiography. Contemporaneity nevertheless unavoidably necessitates that the artist is not fully aware and can never sufficiently know what she or he is recording and transferring to posterity; if it is essential or superfluous. Artistic contemporaneity is always an attempt to elucidate an ongoing process into the open, and thus as much an experiment as the attempt of a representation. It can never be completely achieved by an artist since she or he is her- or himself part of the process. Therefore, he or she can not completely control if she or he chooses the "right" things, and what will be of her or his work and its impact. Contemporaneity as to navigate in the dark and the open by bearing testimony to the real in "compressed" manners: That in Mukherjee's view is one connecting point between the worlds of the Moghuls and postmodernity.

4.2.2 Variety of Social Contexts

Many Moghul miniatures delineate the variety of social life with greatest scrutiny—at the price that there may be no clear "center", "message" or "content". All strata, the whole spectrum of the Indian caste system, have their place, often depicted in a specific incident dispersed to

> different centers to which the eye is drawn in turn, uncertain where to rest.[1]

Usually the depictions are episodes characteristic of daily life. They give insight into India's 16th and 17th century social activities—from Moghuls to Brahmins, from soldiers to priests, from yogis to artists, from pariahs to hunting and wildlife

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[1]J. V. S. Wilkinson: Indian Painting. In: *Indian Art*, ed. Sir Richard Winstedt, London: Faber and Faber, 1947, 123.

incidents. Similarly, postmodernity is also about the variety of social forms, which in principle are not classified in hierarchies, but must be rendered as a complex "into-each-other".

4.2.3 Range of Differentiated Existences

In Indian miniature painting, synchronicity and integrity, life and world, nature and culture, i.e. the range of essential and existential being is crowded into one and the same space, often seemingly without order. For Moghul painters, differentiation also means variation, and the inclusion of the possible into the real. Yet any spectrum of actual and possible life forms is compressed to—and presented as—a *specific*, not as a *general* microcosm. Painting with elaborate filigree, intricate exactitude, and a competence of refinement, the Moghul artists performed a remarkable technique of rendering unique micro-stories in and by their own right. A sophisticated poly-chromaticity and the merging of brilliant, splendid colors of delicate, subtle color patterns reflect a kaleidoscopic world view and enhance the fertility of the "craft-fact". Exactly as the ideal "postmodern" artwork should do and sometimes does, in Mukherjee's view.

4.2.4 Continuity of the Plurifold Function of Art

But the world in miniature concentrating on many details of the "real" world that have to be selected and are fragmentary does not only embody the plurality of life. Despite its features of singularity, it also paradoxically attends to a more holistic, all-encompassing, and interconnected world comprehension. In the Indian miniatures the technical device employed to gain the overview over living chaos is the aerial perspective.[2] As postmodern Westerners who perceive the Indian pictures as a historical document, we are distant observers, whereas the people at the historical present of the miniature held two positions: as observers when they looked at the picture, and as participants when they were depicted as part of it. While being fragmented objects *and* intrinsic parts of the socio-historical reality, the people of the epoch also had the opportunity to see, reflect and convey their situation from a distance by looking at themselves in the pictures. The artwork was simultaneously representation, celebration, a tool of power to cement the stand of things, a mirror and medium of reflection—thus fulfilling an at least *fivefold function*. Interestingly, this fivefold function has not in principle changed over time, as it still characterizes a "good" work of art in the postmodern age, i.e. in a completely different historical timeframe and civilization.

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[2]Karl Khandalavala: The Mughal School and its Ramifications. In: *The Development of Style in Indian Painting*. Delhi, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta: Macmillan 1974, 77–78.

4.2.5 Unity of Being in Difference: "Part and Wholes"

Eventually, the postmodern condition is about the dissolution of the whole and the celebration of the part. It is about elevating "the parts" to singular and "the whole" to plural. It is about a new relation (and maybe paradoxical unity) between "part and wholes", as the grand doyen of American intellectualism, Bruce Mazlish (MIT), branded it to be the character of globalization.[3] The relation between "part and wholes" is also about a new relationship between the "incomplete" and the "complete".

To give validity to both dimensions, the incomplete and the complete, and to sense both simultaneously in one and the same act of perception, is precisely the Moghul, and perhaps even more so the Hindu comprehension of the world (without ignoring their deep differences), if not even the spiritual center of Indian artistic perception as such and beyond beliefs. Not to deny the unpredictable multiplicity of simultaneous world-making processes and yet not to get lost in their labyrinth by constantly keeping a certain distant, outside standpoint of "lila", i.e. the conscious and subconscious conviction that the whole world-process as such is not more and not less than a *game*, of which the human being is both an expression and a constitutive particle, corresponds to the religious insight in *karma* and *dharma*. It can be regarded as a dynamic espousal whose parts have equal kinetic energy, validity and identity in what the Hindu legacy in particular perceives as world process. According to Mukherjee, this is something that is congenial to aspects of the specific postmodern sensibility as she perceives it:

> Hinduism has made me very sympathetic to or [even] a believer in plurality. If Judaeo-Christian religions emphasize one absolute way to the truth, Hinduism insists on plural ways to the future… As a Hindu I never lose the long perspective or the long view. So for me… because of Hinduism as a way of looking at the world rather than as a religion with doctrine to practice… I don't see any conflict between the holistic and the fragmented. (UIV 4, 7)

It cannot be overlooked though that in such statement, although accurate with regard to Hinduism (which Mukherjee rarely differentiates from the Islamic background of Moghul painting and its Buddhist, Persian, Chinese and Jain influences), another contradiction of Mukherjee's thinking is hidden. To repeat the cliché of Western culture as allegedly relying on "one absolute way to the truth" based on "doctrine" and to compare it through an open "better-worse" judgement with her own culture of origin means ignoring that postmodernity and the very postmodern condition that Mukherjee celebrates have come into existence only within the context of the culture created by "Judaeo-Christian religions", and not in the Hindu sphere. Democracy and pluralism in the current sense were created in the Judaeo-Christian sphere, not elsewhere; and, as scholars such as Juergen Habermas have pointed out, this is no accident. The ideas and practices of individualism, open

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[3]Bruce Mazlish: *Parts and Wholes. The seven-dimensional approach of Roland Benedikter to the analysis of globalization – and its predecessors in the history of the interdisciplinary Social Sciences. An affirmative reading*. In: *Transcience. A Journal of Global Studies*. Edited by the Global Studies Programme of Humboldt University Berlin, Volume 4, Issue 1 (2013), Berlin 2013, pp. 36–39.

society and democracy according to Habermas rely directly on Christian world-views. As Habermas puts it,

> Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.[4]

As sometimes in her works and speeches, in statements like this one Mukherjee manifests half-erudition, the remnants of a confrontational stance between civilizations (maybe due to her personal experiences) and the permanence of certain hidden prejudices of the migrant against the receiving civilization that, as it seems, complement those vice versa and are and remain inherent even in the best attempt to overcome them. A fair historic evaluation of Mukherjee's thought, life attempts, engagement and work will also have to include this aspect. Any attempt to transform multiculturalism into an art cannot be naïve and ignore imperfections, but must rely on a transparent, sober and realistic view of its pioneers.

4.3 Investing the Dividends of "Indianness" into Writing in (and for) the Western Context: Perfecting the Art of *Compression*

According to her statements, Mukherjee inherited the legacy of the Hindu world apprehension both through her participation in Indian culture as a young citizen and as an artist particularly fond of classical Moghul miniature painting. Now a Western writer, her biographical and professional connection with what she called "Indianness" enabled her to reinterpret the topical situations and conditions of Western postmodernity as a participant who tried to deconstruct, reconstruct and redefine the *status quo*. By adopting the Moghul miniature painting technique for her writing, Mukherjee was convinced she had found a unique way to incarnate fragmentation and totality, plurality and unity, specificity and generality as inherent in the best perspective of postmodernity:

> I want to show through these [the inclusion of Moghul miniature paintings into postmodern writing] how we in our time can understand the plurality and fecundity of the world in a tiny miniature that has been preserved in how damaged a form and that is being commodified and commercialized in our generation.

> …That is why I have a particular and personal fascination with Moghul miniature paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries… In those miniature paintings… a whole

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[4]Jürgen Habermas: *Time of Transitions*. Polity Press, 2006, 150–151. Cf. Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.): *Habermas and Religion*, Polity Press, 2013.

universe and multiplicity of actions, societies, animal, human, fish world, bird life is crowded inside a very tiny frame. And I feel I have evolved a craft of American late 20th century writing out of that fecundity crowded in a small space. So… ['miniature'] and microscopic becomes synonymous with density, complexity and economy. (UIV, 35)

Departing from this artistic credo that Mukherjee wanted to

perfect the *art of compression*, introduce the whole universe, a large amount of themes: social, political issues and *grand passion* in the smallest space possible. (UIV 8)

Courtly Vision, the last story in her masterly short story collection *Darkness,* is one of Mukherjee's first, most programmatic and maybe most successful attempts to realize such aspiration. It is a paramount example of stylistic historical adaptation that paradoxically aims to reflect the contemporary postmodern condition through techniques of past centuries. In *Courtly Vision,* not only does Mukherjee apply the Moghul miniature painting technique to her style of postmodern writing with great consequence, but the narration is in large parts itself—programmatically—a full-size description of a Moghul painting:

'Emperor on Horseback Leaves Walled City.' Painting on Paper, 24 cm × 25.8 cm. Painter Unknown. No superscription, c. 1584 A.D. Lot No. SLM 4027-66. Est. Price $750,

as the details inform the reader. *Courtly Vision* is a Moghul miniature picture drawn and painted by words. Every stroke and brushstroke in the painting is repeated by Mukherjee as a transferal into language.

The result is that without seeing the picture, when reading *Courtly Vision* one can vividly visualize the original, since every little detail is minutely delineated. The language renders a Moghul miniature picture that itself depicts a multifaceted daily scene simultaneously covering three main localities: at the emperor's court, inside the walled capital city, and outside its walls in the open fields. Many events occur simultaneously at all levels and places in the picture space. A dualistic stream between unity and plurality, universality and particularity, collectivism and individualism, and macrocosm-microcosm is evoked. On all planes a "fusion" of the "different" (Lyotard), i.e. of seemingly conflicting issues takes place. And the picture is described through a language that tries to apply all techniques that it describes as inherent in the image on itself.

4.4 "Generative Contradiction" as the Law of "Language Gaming". Can It Be a Path to a New "Difference in Unity" Shared by East and West?

Jean-Francois Lyotard, the leading French philosopher of the end of the 20th century who triggered the rise of the term "postmodern" in the 1970s and 1980s, often visited the United States since he thought some basic features of the "postmodern" future were developing there. For him, "the different" is synonymous with Paralogy, i.e. with the logics of non-logics. The encounter of differing and

contradicting views and issues is needed in contemporary societies so that the "*Widerstreit*" (Heidegger, Wittgenstein), i.e. competitive and conflicting yet open language games, can be played. The law of language gaming is "generative contradiction". They are "needed" since, according to Lyotard, only through dissension and pluralistic incommensurability of underlying legitimation patterns, which are all taken as of the same validity, can a fruitful and inclusive social process in the sense of a "grand dialogue" be achieved.

Obviously, the sixteenth century Moghul miniature paintings in Mukherjee's view "anticipated", if such a thesis can be accurately brought forward at all, aspects of the postmodern condition not in democratic, but in aristocratic and authoritarian ways. Mukherjee's adaptation of its technique for her short stories uses the aspect of the pictorial legacy, while exchanging its contextual autocratic social system with pluralistic democracy. It can be questioned if this is suitable, and whether it is a correct procedure since it means artificially splitting an artistic technique from its context of origin. Mukherjee asserted yes with great conviction and enthusiasm, sometimes pointing to the "ahistoric" character of postmodernity as critically underscored by thinkers such as Michel Foucault.[5]

Taking all these aspects together, the narrative method of Indian Moghul painting and the graphical accomplishment of the literature of Mukherjee seem to belong together. Reading *Courtly Vision* makes the reader eager to compare the literary story with the painting; a "fusion" between the arts takes place within the reader. Furthermore, many more "fusions" on different planes bring together, and to a certain extent even blend, binary forces like those of earth and sky, East and West, social life and wildlife, and nature and culture—as, according to Mukherjee, is taught by Hinduism. *Courtly Vision* is programmatic also in this regard, as it exemplarily lays out the cornerstones of "generative contradiction" and thus anticipates the further unfolding of "fusion" and "compression" in Mukherjee's subsequent work. Let us take a look at just a few examples of "generative contradiction" as practised by Mukherjee in order to assemble what is substantially different, if not opposed.

4.4.1 Earth–Sky

In Mukherjee's work, the union of the terrestrial and heavenly principles of the classical Indian tradition occurs as a multi-level synthesis—with, in her view, postmodern scientific, religious and metaphorical implications and repercussions. The geological and astronomical order as well as the metaphysical and physical order coalesce, since all these orders express the aspect of what lies behind them. The attention of the beholder, that is, the person who looks at the painting—and the reader of the short story *Courtly Vision* respectively—is first focused on the soil:

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[5]Cf. Christopher Falzon: *Foucault and Social Dialogue*, Routledge 2006.

the earth and its mundane being in various styles of existence. From there the description is gradually drawn up, past different social, cultural, and natural life forms across the skyline and the whole space to the top of the picture, the sky.

> "Her gaze slips upward, past the drunken gamblers on the roof-terraces, to the skyline where fugitive cranes pass behind a blue cloud."[6] "Over all these details float three elegant whorls of cloud, whorls in the manner of Chinese painting, imitated diligently by men who long for rain." (CV, 171)

In *Courtly Vision*, the sky is painted by the brushstrokes of the horizon, which marks the dividing line between the earth and the sky. It is the brushstrokes of the fugitive cranes, and those of the clouds. The cranes and the clouds are set against the background of the sky and thus prove its presence. The meteorological-artistic information expressed in the longing for rain implicitly suggests wider and higher spheres of the cosmological realm.

These further hint at a metaphysical principle which governs and directs the rules of the entire cosmos. The men who long for rain seem to have a strong belief in the existence of a transcendental ruler who can influence the weather, even grant or withhold rain. Seen from their view, the cranes incorporate moral values. In the *diligent* imitation in the manner of Chinese painting, a reverent, almost ritual act can be recognized: the worshipping of the clouds and thus the conjuring up of rain. The rain, i.e. water, which is the source of life, insinuates the transcendental life-giving principle and thus the totality and unity of all anthropological and natural existences (namely of *Being*). The world consists of these multiple and pluralistic life forms which simultaneously constitute the unity and are issued by it. They mutually presuppose each other.

4.4.2   East–West

> Mother and Child. Child and Mother. The Moghul courtier - child of Islam, ruler of Hindus - finds the motif repetitive. What comforting failure of the imagination these priests are offering. What precarious boundaries set on life's playful fecundity. He hears the Fathers murmur. They are devising stratagems on a minor scale. They want to trick the emperor into kissing Christ, who on each huge somber canvas is a bright, white, healthy baby. The giant figures seem to him simple and innocuous, not complicated and infuriating like the Hindu icons hidden in the hills. In the meantime, his eyes draw comfort from the unclad angels who watch over the Madonna to protect her from heathens like him. Soft-fleshed, flying women. He will order the court artists to paint him a harem of winged women on a single poppy seed. The emperor will not kiss Christ tonight. (CV, 169)

Mukherjee here alludes to the Christian missionaries and their history in South East Asia. She is thus confronting a heritage as complex as dangerous for mutual understanding and reconciliation both between the geopolitical areas and the

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[6]Bharati Mukherjee: Courtly Vision. In: *Darkness*. New York: Fawcett Crest 1992, 168 (quoted hereafter parenthetically as CV, p.).

respective migrant flows—which usually go just in one direction, namely from the East to the West, and not vice versa. Nevertheless, in *Courtly Vision*, the transcendental and the terrestrial hint at yet another fusion—the fusion of two worlds, namely the East and the West and their underlying religions, in this case Hinduism and Christianity. Although different in their views and imaginations, and further different in their ontological and epistemological perceptions, the two worlds in Mukherjee's view meet after all, touching each other. At the areas of interface there is impingement which, however, has nothing to do with assimilation. Conversely, the winged angels are converted into winged women of a harem—yet it would have to be discussed if this can be interpreted as depreciative or not. One interpretation reads: the transcendental of the West is brought down to the Eastern earth—although most in the West would see the West as a "materialist" and the East as a "metaphysical" region. In turn, the worldly and profane element is endowed with wings and thus becomes "celestialized," that is, transmogrified from terrestrial to celestial status and thus lifted above the ground.

Although highly contradictory, in *Courtly Vision*, despite an initial alienation and belittlement of the foreign, the different religious concepts are converted into something grounded on a joint familiar realm of thinking. Even though

> [t]he emperor will not kiss Christ tonight (CV, 169),

he might do it tomorrow or in the near future; but tonight he is engaged in a political mission.

> He is at the head of his army, riding a piebald horse out of his new walled city. (CV, 169)

The Moghul emperor might kiss Christ on the victorial return from his campaign or not at all, who knows.

In *Courtly Vision*, the merging between East and West is presented by Mukherjee in a plain and obvious way, that many have considered too plain and obvious, by simply depicting Europeans mingling with Indians. This has been sometimes criticised, since it poses the questions if the magic term "fusion" is simply identical with mingling, thus losing most of its progressive appeal; and what this may substantially contribute to a future, more complex "multicultural" identity.

It is important to notice that in *Courtly Vision*, the Europeans do not form an enclave nor are they treated separately, but live diasporically in the Moghul emperor's realm. Europeans and Indians are focused on alternatingly during their mutual involvement and physical as well as spiritual attraction and tension. The main fictional characters Count Barthelmy,

> who has tamed thirteen rivers and seven seas (CV, 167)

and two

> ingenuous Portuguese priests, (CV, 167)

Fathers Aquaviva and Henriques, symbolize the Western world in somewhat typological manners.

Count Barthelmy, representing the physical, carnal and worldly principle, in the Moghul painting described by *Courtly Vision* crouches

> in a lust-darkened arbor… posed full-front; the self-worshipful body of a man who has tamed thirteen rivers and seven seas. Dainty thighs bulge with wayward expectancy. (CV, 167)

This expectancy is directed to the Oriental world: to the Eastern character Jahanara Begum, the emperor's woman. The allurement is not uni-directional, but mutual:

> The Begum is a tall and rigid figure. She
>
> stands behind a marble grille in her palace at Fatehpur-Sikri… Oh, beauteous and beguiling Begum, has your slave-girl apprised the Count of the consequences of a night of bliss? (CV, 167, 168)

The two Portuguese priests, on the other hand, stand for the fusion of the spiritual, heavenly principle of the two worlds as opposed to the carnal, symbolized by the figures of Count Barthelmy and Jahanara Begum. Addressing the core Christian symbols of *child and mother*, monotheism and polytheism in Mukherjee's account confront each other, and eventually overlap.

There is a core mechanism here that Mukherjee wants to point out as potentially useful for Western postmodernity. Usually the first encounter of seemingly incommensurable Eastern and Western cultural values resembles a collision and leads to a "natural" rejection or disapproval of the alien *Other* by both sides.

But as Mukherjee imagines, this may also inevitably enforce a juxtaposition that brings about a relativization of one's own truths and beliefs, which eventually leads to *eclectic acquisitions* (be it on a conscious or unconscious level), if not to wholesale adoptions. These are merged with one's conventionalities. Here, at the fictional Moghul's court, the merging of East and West on the secularized and the sacred plane is in progress in a subtle, unobtrusive, *erotic* manner. Two Western notions of life, the secular and the religious, infiltrate the corresponding Eastern concepts, and vice versa. According to Mukherjee, that is as it could and should be in our age. With this, a special status is given to eroticism—which in Mukherjee's vision is a core value of both art and multiculturalism. In her view, eroticism may be the ultimate incorporation of practical "generative contradiction".

4.4.3   Eroticism as the Essence of "Fusion"

In *Courtly Vision*, the Western social structure, however, is not represented solely by an aristocrat and the clergy as operating within an Eastern cultural and religious context. In Mukherjee's imitation of Moghul miniature painting, the broader spectrum of social life in a trans-cultural environment is aspired to be represented. Each level and class have to be given their focus, be it at low or high rank.

In Mukherjee's vision, the emperor and all other hierarchical court-life modes participate more or less indiscriminately in their roles. The emperor's wife, Jahanara Begum, in her "beguiling," captivating and enchanting posture stands for Eastern feminine charms and elitist beauty. The Eastern exotic bliss, as perceived by the Count, lures the Western exotic appeal, as a sensation on the Begum's side, into her clutches. An as eccentric as electric force field with a built-in transformer fed by human nature—eroticism—it converts the forces to "generative antipodes", when they are directed both against *and* towards each other.

This "generational" moment in-between contradictions builds up the tension of a magnetic field—which in Mukherjee's view finally presupposes and makes possible, if not necessitates "fusion". Mukherjee, from early on, revealed that her understanding of "fusion" was not social or political in the first place, but in its essence tied to notions of eroticism. In her view, the mutual male-female attraction both models and anticipates the merging of West and East. Eroticism, not intellectual or philosophical debate, is both the essence and the main driving force of "fusion".

Just as a footnote here, it has to be noted that Mukherjee's construct of typological generative antipodes in *Courtly Vision* is without doubt (consciously?) "politically incorrect" since it (to a certain extent) identifies the West with "male" and the East with "female" traits and attitudes. This is not accurate when cultural and civilizational habits and mainstreams are compared. For example, there is hardly any "feminism" in Hinduist mainstream areas; and women enjoy much broader rights of equality in the West. Therefore, realistically the West would have to be considered much more "female" than the East if social and political realities with regard to women are compared, and if such pejorative comparison is of any value at all. Mukherjee's typologization of the West as male and of the East as female is a reduction similar to her other typologization that rendered Christianity as hierarchical and Hinduism as pluralistic—which again does not correspond to the practices on the ground if social reality is considered. The opposite is the case: the areas of Christianity have declared equality for every citizen (although not always fully realizing it), while in the areas of Hinduism the caste system stubbornly persists until today (although it is overcome in a variety of single practical cases). As in this case, Mukherjee's retrospective idealization of her culture(s) of origin features sometimes problematic reductions and undertones particularly if the author goes in direct comparative mode.

At the same time, Mukherjee was very realistic with regard to other issues, particularly with regard to eroticism as such. Mukherjee foresaw the de-exoticization of the mutually-perceived "foreign", and thus also a gradual loss of mutual attraction, if globalization unfolds further and encounter becomes daily practice. Therefore, she tried to create an enthralling poetic power as a substitute for *eros,* which nevertheless, as she well realized, can easily fall prey to distortion, mystification or falsification, or even to the raping of the foreign culture, i.e. the "Other". "World-making" at the intersection of different civilizations, societal models and cultures *can* mean that there will be overlaps which are *not c*onsensual.

4.4.4 The Making of "The East" and the Redefinition of Patterns Today

For example, Edward Said's treatise of 1978 on the "Western creation of the Orient" showed how the Orient was invented by Europeans as a concept in literature, which had little to do with the realities of Asian and Middle Eastern countries and their factual life styles. In his fundamental book, *Orientalism,* Said called this process the "Orientalization of the Orient," which means an exoticization and eroticization of the East. "Orientalism" thus is not equal to the cultural self-representation of the Oriental reality (except for postmodern tourist means). It rather is the external Western approach of a certain era to the Orient, be it scientific-systematic as a discipline or personal-literary including both true accounts and fictive imaginaries such as dreams and images. The concept "Orientalism" includes the Western vocabularies and terminology with which to express and categorize facts and experiences, which are

> available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. (Said 73)

Today, forty years after Said's masterpiece, the "dividing line" is in the process of redefinition. The rise of China with its demographic, rapidly growing economic and increasing cultural supremacy over neighboring countries, and the stagnation of India as the second potential Asian superpower and biggest (formal) democracy draws a new dividing line within "the East". China's "new silk road" (Road and Belt Initiative) is both economically and culturally pluri-expansive and puts India in an increasingly marginal position which posits the question about its role in the forthcoming "G-Zero" world.[7] Many believe that the marginalization of India is part of the "retreat of global democracy" ahead of the rise of authoritarian societies and governments such as China, leaving poor space and few options to what was once considered by Westerners to be the most exotic and attractive part of the "East", i.e. South East Asia.[8]

Simultaneously, the rise of China to equal global importance and influence as the West, but on completely different value fundaments, shows that multiculturalism is not a universally accepted idea, nor is it the freedom of art, not to speak of their interconnection as envisaged by Mukherjee. China's Han culture is, as experts often put it, the "global champion of assimilation" internally, while on the global stage, China refuses to take its share in global migration and in the refugee crisis: the

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[7]Ian Bremmer and Nouriel Roubini: *A G-Zero World. The New Economic Club Will Produce Conflict, Not Cooperation.* In: Foreign Affairs, March/April 2011 Issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-01-31/g-zero-world. Cf. Ian Bremmer: *Every Nation for Itself. What Happens When Nobody Leads the World*, Portfolio 2013.

[8]Shinder Tandhi: *Chinese Dreams, Indian Nightmares. Does BRI Imply a Collision Course?* In: Global-e. A Global Studies Journal, edited by the Global Studies Consortium at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Volume 10, Issue 74, November 9, 2017, http://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/november-2017/chinese-dreams-indian-nightmares-does-bri-imply-collision-course.

biggest nation on earth in 2015 counted exactly 583 recognized refugees on its soil,[9] while at the same time making its voice heard in the 2018 negotiations of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on a new international migration agreement. China wants to decide where the migration streams go, but without taking responsibility, and only internally, never globally.

All this posits the question to what extent old patterns of "supremacy" between "the East" and "the West" (as described by Mukherjee and Said) have been turned upside down in the meantime—i.e. to what extent are the former colonialized powers now colonializing the former colonizers? In other words: To what extent has the relation between East and West changed structurally if the most recent phase of globalization is taken into account? Does the work of Mukherjee of the 1990s hold true to what the reality is in the second decade of the 21st century?

4.4.5   "Enlightening Defusion"

There is no doubt that Mukherjee's work of the 1990s is both a motor of mystification of the East-West-"eroticization", as much as an advocate of demystification. Her attempts in this double direction remain ambiguous, in line with other aspects in her overall oeuvre, and in line with her idea of art as "generative contradiction". She called her twofold attempt of simultaneous mystification and demystification "enlightening defusion", which she claimed to be the artistic prerequisite of any new, truly "generative" "fusion".

Nevertheless, at this point of the erotic story told in *Courtly Vision* the defusion of the opposing forces is technically not yet matured. The exotic is still exotic for both Westerners and Easterners and as such desirable, as the passage we already heard depicts:

> Oh beauteous and beguiling Begum, has your slave girl apprised the Count of the consequences of a night of bliss? (CV, 168)

In fact, the consequences of an affair can be fatal for both, the Count as well as the Begum. The Count will be ostracized for the sacrilegious act. Desecrating the chastity of the Eastern court aristocracy and defiling the Begum of her purity is not only a carnal, but also a cultural act that will turn him from a respected guest into a dangerous pirate and looter. In turn, the Begum will be disowned and lose her indigenous privileged position. She will be demoted from her place in the social caste structure and be driven outside to the fringes of the outcasts. Barthelmy's face has inscribed the warning of such consequences of the liaison between the dark-complexioned, indigenous beauty and the fair-skinned European conqueror:

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[9]Gunnar Heinsohn: *Europa wird den globalen Kampf ums technische Wissen verlieren*. In: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 30.10.2017, https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/kommentare/der-westen-wird-den-globalen-kampf-ums-technische-wissen-verlieren-ld.1324618.

His face is colored an admonitory pink. (CV, 167)

The temptation is strong, the force of attraction hardly resistible and the bliss promising. But beware, the price to pay is high.

To make the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar, (UIV, 2)

as Mukherjee perceptively puts it, involves going far beyond the stage of such blissful rapture and intoxicating enticement of the *Other*.

In her capacious chamber the Begum waits, perhaps for death from the serving-girl, for ravishing, or merely the curtain of fire from the setting sun. (CV, 168)

4.4.6 The Exotic and the Aesthetic

On a mere emotional level of sheer ravishment and desire for the forbidden, the notion of the exotic as erotic is in danger of becoming a figment of—and of falling prey to—aestheticization. This affects not only the West with its "Orientalization of the Orient," but the East as well as the "Occidentalization of the Occident", to reverse Said's phrase. The current global constellation includes a new construction of the notion of "the West" by rising powers particularly in Asia, which is indeed related to an "Occidentalization of the Occident", i.e. with the creation and implementation of a new image not familiar to the West itself. It again deals with ascribed identities and habits, and it does so in many different facets that include economic, political, cultural, religious and spiritual, demographic and technological dimensions—including self-constructed biases against them. In all these aspects, imagined identities are no longer produced just by the West to legitimize its endeavors, but now equally also by other geopolitical areas including the East, and both are increasingly intertwined in multifold ways and tied by the process of growing interchange.

In *Courtly Vision*, this intricate and complex generative process at the interface of contradictions, misunderstandings and mysteries is anticipated—and shown through the character of Count Barthelmy:

The head twists savagely upward at an angle unreckoned except in death, anywhere but here. In profile the lone prismatic eye betrays the madman and insomniac. (CV, 167–168)

On the other side, the court life is animated by Jahanara Begum's (partly Western) slaves who not only attend to her needs and whims, but also hold her back from heeding the erotic call of the exotic *Other*. It is no accident that it is—paradoxically—the slaves who stabilize the given order and prevent it from (dangerously) evolving. Other slaves, basin slaves, for example, who procure the emperor's fountains; eunuchs; courtiers; as well as "tinier figures" constitute part of the arena at court too.

Among them is Basawan, the court artist, a miniaturist of whom the Moghul is especially proud. He is a master, a perfectionist in his art of miniaturizing, condensing and thus making graspable and understandable complex forms of life in a condensed and comprehensive way. Basawan painted the Begum on a grain of rice, and in the course of the story he is challenged to paint a whole harem (of winged women) on a *single* poppy seed. Abd al-Samad, an extremely accomplished court artist, painter and expert in calligraphy, is recorded to have written "a chapter—a short one, it is true—of the Koran" on one single poppy seed. He gained the name *Shirin qalam*, which means "Sweet Brush" as Wilkinson points out in the chapter "Indian Painting" in his book *Indian Art* (Wilkinson 1947, 121).

Not only the artist, but the performers and entertainers at court too have their social place and function. Seven jugglers with their masterful acrobatics are heaped up to a "shuddering pyramid" (CV, 169). The two Western priests, however, too much caught up in their austerity and their missionary zeal to Christianize the emperor, to "trick" him "into kissing Christ" (CV, 169), disregard and despise earthly life:

> They have dogged the emperor through inclement scenery. Now they pause in the emperor's famed, new capital, eyes closed, abstemious hands held like ledges over their brows to divert the sullen desert breeze… A courtier sits with the priest on a divan covered with brocaded silk. He too is blind to the courage of gymnastics. (CV, 169)

4.4.7 Chiaroscuro *or Not?*

In Mukherjee's prose, the cultural differences of East and West are never painted in a *chiaroscuro* manner. The priests are criticized for their unworldly, almost naive attitude towards the foreign and for their incapability of enjoying the pleasures of life. Yet neither is a native courtier able to relate to his surroundings and to fellow people who are dependent on philanthropic charity in order to earn their daily bread. The courtier cannot see and appreciate the jugglers' performance because he is engrossed in his own private world of desire for

> [s]oft-fleshed, flying women. He will order the court artists to paint him a harem of winged women. (CV, 169)

Outside the court, city life is in full swing. The citizens, all the inhabitants of the Moghul's empire, are out in the streets celebrating:

> Grandfathers leading children by the wrists are singing of the emperor's victories over invisible rebels. Shopkeepers, coy behind their taut paunches, give away their syrupy sweets. Even the mystics with their haggard, numinous faces have allowed themselves to be distracted by yet another parade. (CV, 170)

Even the mystics, in *Courtly Vision* the Eastern equivalent to the priests, relinquish their asceticism and surrender to the urban pleasures by taking part in the ongoing festivity. They are men of the world, yet just for this moment. A temporary

"fusion" of mysticism and profanity takes place. On the one hand epitomizing the transcendental principle, and on the other participating in the social and political events like ordinary human beings, in Mukherjee's account the Eastern mystics represent the link between man and god, the material and immaterial world—and between the metaphoric and the literal, such as the process of watching paintings and reading literature while at the same time being a citizen in a concrete socio-political context.

4.4.8 Societal Wild Life and Wildlife

In *Courtly Vision*, it is a special day for all these people. The emperor leaves his walled-in city with his army to betake a campaign which will be victorious. The emperor and his entourage form the focal point of the painted miniature at the bottom register

> of that agate-colored paper. (CV, 171)

They function as the fusion between court and city life, between ruling aristocracy and subordinate citizenship, and between civilized and natural life as they are just about to leave the city, crossing the threshold of the city gate. The departure is a parting from the cultural, urban and legislated organism and a stepping into the open field where other than social and ethical rules, or in fact no rules at all, count; where battles are fought, and where the law of the jungle justifies all anti-humanitarian action by proclaiming the survival of the fittest the right of a few. Not only in the name of royal interest and the public is war being waged, violence executed, and force being used, but also on a smaller, more private, individual scale. Injustices which add up to the "societal wild life" reality and touch on the law of nature are inflicted.

The outcasts who are excluded from all social orders vegetate in that same open field outside the city wall: thieves, murderers, rascals, emaciated men and stealthy women who feel guilty of a transgression and do repentance lying in front of a temple which is also outside the city. But in contrast to the men, the women are yet another link between urban and wild life, for when having served their culpability or guilty conscience, they will leave the desolate place of the temple and return to everyday life in their safe, habitual surrounding inside the city, after they have been pardoned their moral or spiritual defilement and thus have acquired a purified state.

> Excessive, unruly life - …thieves naked to the waist - bloom and burgeon on its branches. The thieves, their torsos pushing through clusters of leaves, run rapacious fingers on their dagger blades.
>
> …Adventures all, they guard from each other the common courtesy of their subterfuge. They sniff the desert air and the air seems full of portents. In the remote horizon three guards impale three calm, emaciated men. Behind the low wall of a *namaz* platform, two courtiers quarrel, while a small boy sneaks up and unties their horses. A line of stealthy

women prostrate themselves and pray at the doorway of a temple in a patch of browning foliage. (CV, 170–171)

Over all these details float three elegant whorls of cloud. By heaving up from the bottom singularities to a higher, panoramic outlook, the unification of the earth and the sky is achieved. The cloud, once again, symbolizes the link between the terrestrial and the celestial principles.

Yet, the cloud is not just that. It has a double symbolic function. It epitomizes the merging of social and natural wild life at the same time. From its vantage point one can see that there is room for both in the world depicted. Indeed, the observer presupposes that each single social position has its justification. Court and city; city and countryside; safe, protected walled-in ground and hazardous, enemy territory house the various kinds of life comprising both socially legitimate and illegitimate forms.

4.4.9 Nature–Culture

Finally, a merging by "generative contradiction" takes place on another level: that between culture and nature. Specifically speaking, it is the fecundity of human ways and walks of life, and what springs and grows from them: Knowledge, education, tradition, religion, the sciences and the arts, in short: civilization as a body of cultural values on the one hand, and the natural, biological habitat with its wealth of fauna and flora on the other. An anthropologically based genesis and a transcendental ontogenesis are coexistent, and in the ideal Moghul painting, neither of them takes precedence over the other. A wild peacock, parrots, fugitive cranes, rose petals, lotus blooms and spiky desert grass demonstrate the richness of nature. The transitory bond between plant and animal nature and human culture is tied through domesticated animals. The soldiers' horses and the emperor's camel are led into war—an uncultured, barbaric pursuit, which is yet another illustration of the synthesis of the civilized and the savage proclivities of life. They are examples of the animal within the human being.

Not only war but also love acts are staged as signs of fusion between reason and an instinctive drive that is ascribed to the human being's animal desire. In *Courtly Vision*, the Count's and the Begum's erotic disposition and radiation are carefully interwoven with nature. Zoological and botanical treasures become erogenous symbols. A cave-deep, lust-darkened arbor which could be the clandestine love-nest; or a dusty aqua-colored, broken-spined peacock's feather which epitomizes the ambiguous unity of splendor and fragility. As long as beauty is the object of desire, it remains pure and unscathed, but as soon as it becomes the object of possession and disposability it starts to fade. The broken spine anticipates the fatal consequences of a broken heart and a broken social position. Two red-eyed parrots duplicate the beguiling, desirous female principle; the gray, flat trunk of a mango tree insinuates the Begum's smooth skin and soft body; and the lotus bloom stands

for her sexual maturity and receptivity. Finally, fugitive cranes flying against the skyline between the defining and delimiting earth and the widening and opening sky symbolize independence and the desired realm of "absolute freedom" where perfect, although forbidden love is possible without fatal consequences. The two potential lovers are parodied by their natural habitat and almost literally merge with it:

> Count Barthelmy… crouches in a lust-darkened arbor. His chest - a tear-shaped fleck of rust - lifts away from the gray, flat trunk of mango tree. He is swathed in the coarse, quaint clothes of his cool-weather country. Jacket, pantaloons, shawl, swell and cave in ardent pleats. He holds a peacock's feather to his lips. His face is colored an admonitory pink. The feather is dusty aqua, broken-spined… Two red-eyed parrots gouge the patina of grass at the adventurer's feet; their buoyant, fluffy breasts caricature the breasts of Moghul virgins. (CV, 167)

> The light is charged with unusual excitement, and it discovers the immense intimacy of darkness, the erotic shadowiness of the cave-deep arbor in which the Count crouches and waits. (CV, 170)

> The Begum is a tall, rigid figure… From her fists, which she holds in front of her like tiny shields, sprouts a closed, upright lotus bloom. Her gaze slips upward, past the drunken gamblers on the roof-terraces, to the skyline where fugitive cranes pass behind a blue cloud. (CV, 168)

Once again, a cloud assumes symbolic significance. This time it is blue, the color of the sky and thus an allusion to the metaphysical principle on the one hand, and in "generative contrast" to that, a metaphor for nature as an aesthetic spectacle.

The picture is enriched by another layer of symbolism with the two fugitive cranes passing the cloud. The "Begum's gaze slips upward," from the earth to the flying cranes. The drunken gamblers, too, refer to both barbaric, instinctive life versus civilized, reasoned behavior. The earth and the sky fuse through contradictions. Human and animal life melt, and the domestic-cultured and the barbaric interlock. In the fashion of Chinese boxes each merger is enveloped by the next higher level, which is characterized by less human interference and the increase of the transcendental principle. The dichotomy civilization/primitivism as the innermost box is enclosed by the wo/man/nature layer, which is again wrapped by the hull of geology/cosmology. A perpetual dynamism is granted by the multi-layered structure of life forms and their oscillation and mutual intrusion. Actuality blossoms and blooms through the historicity of a universal fusion effectuated by an individual fate.

Chapter 5
Mukherjee's 20th Century Source: Pop Art of the 1960s. A Similar Inspiration, 400 Years After the Moghuls?

Abstract This chapter addresses the influence of Pop art on Mukherjee's style and overall endeavor: to "merge the metaphoric with the literal", i.e. art with concrete reality, including politics.

5.1 Mukherjee's Early and Middle Work of the 1970s to the 1990s: A "Literary Version of Pop Art"?

We have seen that Mukherjee's core inspiration has been taken from the art of storytelling in Indian Moghul miniature painting. But this is not the only influence she takes from painting in order to apply it to the postmodern condition via literature. Mukherjee's style has been compared to yet another artistic movement in painting, which originated 400 years later in the 20th century: *Pop art*. Pop art formed the tail of "high modernism" and simultaneously belonged to the inaugural phase of postmodernity. This movement was by no means restricted to painting, but reflected a comprehensive artistic aspiration and social phenomenon. The parallels of its basic features to Mukherjee's writing style are as astounding as her deep relation with Moghul miniature painting of the 16th and 17th centuries is.

Lawrence Alloway, the literary critique who coined the neologism "Pop art" in 1958, originally used it as referring to products of the mass media and not to works of art by particular artists.[1] Gradually and increasingly the term was used for artistic works, and eventually for their distinctive style. Furthermore, it was extended to designate the entire Western life style philosophy in the late 1950s and the 1960s: consumerism, in and from which these works were born. Most art works of the period projected a common spirit characterized by both its critique of and simultaneous inclusion into consumerism. Alloway's description of "Pop art" underlines the social expansion of art to a more comprehensive "anthropological" constant that

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[1]Tilman Osterwold: *Pop Art*. Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag 1989, 71.

serves as a seismic instrument to measure the social and cultural tendencies and phenomena of a certain time within a given "popular culture." Pop art, he argues,

> can be defined as the sum of the arts designed for simultaneous consumption by a numerically large audience. Thus, there is a similarity in distribution and consumption between prints, on the one hand, and magazines, movies, records, radio, TV, and industrial and interior design, on the other. Popular culture… [here] is distributed on the basis of mass production. It is not like folk art that, in theory at least, is handcrafted by the same group by whom it will be consumed. The consumption of popular culture is basically a social experience, providing information derived from and contributing to our statistically normal roles in society. It is a network of messages and objects that we share with others.[2]

In listing four characteristic features which identify a Pop art work, Alloway calls attention to a catalogue consisting of "variables" designed to keep a work of art untouched by a rigid classification and which should, conversely, grant enough room for the uniqueness and distinctness of each individual work of art. The matrix of Pop art masterpieces in this view contains:

1. Syntactic complexity, which means the merging of two forms of expression, for example painting incorporating writing such as letters, figures, words and phrases, and even short texts;
2. Interdisciplinary extension of media which becomes manifest in assemblages and collages;
3. Familiarity of the subject and literal presence of the object by which paradoxically an alienation (of the art and of the subject or object itself) is achieved; and
4. Close connections with technology, which means that art and technology fuse or mutually transform each other and are not opposing rivals.

To this, the more stringent aspect of synchronicity has to be added, which in typical Pop art paintings is expressed by their programmatic two-dimensionality, which rarely proceeds to attempts of three-dimensionality. In Pop art, two-dimensionality signals the conscious reduction of multitude to synchronicity through a surface principle which is both mirroring the superficiality of industrialized art in consumerist culture and the "total" transparency of the open society. Two-dimensionality also reflects the artificiality of art as world-making; as well as the "estrangement" effect: to transform the all-too-well-known into something mysteriously "flat" but yet worthy of exploration; and eventually also the ambiguity of the indivisible dualism of critique and participation.

Investigating Mukherjee's literary work under these aspects means selecting and concentrating on a few examples that are chosen by no particular criterion other than variety in order to have the broadest possible selection of the early and middle works discussed or at least touched upon in the course of the following pages. Through the examples addressed we will see that justice is done by calling Mukherjee's writing a

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[2]Lawrence Alloway: *American Pop Art: An exhibition organized for and shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art, April 6–June 16, 1974*. New York, London: Collier Macmillan, 1974, 4.

literary version of Pop art (UIV, 34)

as she herself used to do.

We can do so because all four elements of Alloway's catalogue which he primarily construed for Pop art painting can be found in Mukherjee's writing, as writing here substitutes painting and vice versa. The primary medium of expression is the written text which is infiltrated and enriched by a pictorial substance, whereas some paintings described in Mukherjee's texts make use of linguistic elements. All four core elements characterizing Pop art are worked into the texture of Mukherjee's books with the distribution of different emphases, and they constitute a remarkable continuity throughout her works.

5.2   Syntactic Complexity, Played Out on Different Levels

Syntactic complexity in Pop art productions is often realized by the coexistence of—and interaction between—language, picture and sculpture. For example, Jasper Johns employs letters, figures and words; Robert Indiana's *LOVE* (1970) or *EAT/ DIE* (1962) pictures are to be seen in the context of this then innovative method, as well as Roy Lichtenstein's comic strips which use texts in combination with pictures; *Mr. Bellamy* (1961), *Masterpiece* (1962), and *Eddie Diptych* (1962) are but a few examples.

Ut pictura poesis was Horace's famous phrase which captured the technique of borrowing from other arts; it says, "as in painting, so in poetry." The phrase expresses the mutual adaptation of artistic styles and fashions in an exchange between—and "fusion" of—painting and writing. It means to write pictorially and adopt painterly mechanics of composition such as coloring, depicting, drawing, brushwork, shading, iconography, portraiture and the like.[3]

Accordingly, in Pop art paintings graphemes, numbers, letters, words and phrases or sentences interplay with color and form, i.e. the basic means of expression in painting. Mukherjee's writing style very much parallels this technique. Writing, her principal medium of expression, is enriched with pictorial elements wherever possible. *First*, Mukherjee employs painting as a holistic, *ekphrastic* method by incorporating the description of miniature paintings and by adopting an interdisciplinary style between the two realms of art; *second*, this method becomes manifest through the particular application of segmental devices typical of painting: color and form.

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[3]Ibid., 36.

5.2.1   Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis is the embodiment of a picture or image in a text. This does not mean that the picture is graphically reproduced as an illustration. Rather, language is used to delineate a certain painting as a sort of translation from one art into the other. *Courtly Vision*, the short story mentioned above, represents a perfect example of this method. However, this is certainly not the only one, due to Mukherjee's fascination with Indian Moghul miniature paintings. In another emblematic story, *The Holder of the World* (1993), this fascination is transferred to the main protagonist Beigh Masters, the female center-point of the novel. It presents another incorporation of a picture in a written text from where it "speaks out" as the original Greek meaning of *ekphrasis* implies.

In *The Holder of the World* Beigh Masters is an asset hunter on the trail of an ancient person who becomes her personal heroine and obsession: Hannah Easton, alias Salem Bibi,

> the white wife from Salem[4]

> of

> Raja Jadav Singh, King of Devgad, a Hindu-ruled disfiguration on the Muslim map of South India, and a deeply embedded thorn in the flesh of Emperor Aurangzeb. (HW, 211)

(1658–1707), denominated *The World-Taker* and the last of the Great Moghuls of India.[5] In a small maritime museum in an old fishing village Beigh Masters discovers five miniature paintings documenting Bibi's precious-as-pearl's life at Panpur Palace, Singh's royal nest. Utterly overwhelmed and with an almost ecstatic happiness, Beigh reflects:

> My voice has caught a high note; I want to cough or clear my throat… There is surely one moment in life when hope surprises us like grace, and when love, or at least its promise, landscapes the jungle into Eden. (HW, 15)

Beigh's gaze becomes absorbed by the pictures. Zealous to "memorize every stroke," she "repaints" the pictures linguistically. The accomplishment of this description is tremendous; the reader gets to know every line and brushstroke and can visualize the paintings in their original form. She or he can envisage the opulence of the "Old World", the brightness and brilliance of the emperor's court, the forcefulness of the feelings and emotions with which the life and air are saturated, and last but not least, the vigor of gory battle and military prowess. Relentless war and inexorable love are revealed as stemming from fundamental human desirous disposition. They interlock and blur according to triangular patterns, for through the triangular structure, according to Mukherjee, the one self diverges from the angle along the sides in order to meet with the opposite self in another angle.

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[4]Bharati Mukherjee: *The Holder of the World*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, 211. All subsequent quotes appear parenthetically in the text as HW, p.

[5]Edith Tömöry: Mughal Painting. In: *A History of Fine Arts in India and the West*. Bombay, Calcutty, Madras et al.: Orient Longman, 1982, 255.

> Their eyes form a perfect, glitter-pointed triangle: Salem Bibi's [protagonist], her Hindu lover's [lover defeated in war], the Mughal conqueror's [victorious warrior]. (HW, 18)

Here is Beigh's complete, meticulous train of thought, describing the painting in words:

> The corners are browned by seawater or monsoon stains. White ants have eaten through the courtiers' sycophantic faces and lovers' tangled legs, through muezzin-sounding minarets and lotus blooms clutched by eager visitors from pale-skinned continents oceans away… Here, the Salem Bibi, a yellow-haired woman in diaphanous skirt and veil, posed on a stone parapet instructing a parrot to sing, fulfills her visions in the lost, potent language of miniature painting. She is always recognizable for the necklace of bone. Later when the Indian imagination took her over, the bone became skulls.

> …Here Precious-as-Pearl zigzags on elephantback, by masoola boat, in palanquins - the vast and vibrant empire held in place by an austere Muslim as Europeans and Hindus eat away the edges. (HW, 15)

Beigh Masters witnesses the mutual fascination of East and West at the cosmopolitan Coromandel Coast of the seventeenth century. The pictures vibrantly reveal the effervescent lifestyles in fervent sensuality. The vibrant colors and the tropical climate both stir up passionate self-abandonment and animate spiritual inspiration. The intense carnality to which the Hindus and Europeans surrender alike is juxtaposed by the Muslim abstemiousness. This is set against the predominant permissiveness and engrossment as a warning of the moral and cultural deterioration of the place.

> In the first of the series, [Bibi] stands ankle-deep in a cove, a gold-haired, pale-bodied child-woman against a backdrop of New England evoked with wild, sensual color. The cove is overhung with cold-weather, color-changing maples and oaks, whose leaves shimmer in a monsoon's juicy green luxuriance. At the water's edge, a circle of Indians in bright feathered headdresses roast fish on an open fire. More braves stand in shallow water, spears aloft, as grotesque red salmon climb the underside of giant breakers. Their wolf-dogs howl, neck hairs rising, as children toss stones in play from the shingled beach. Around her submerged high-arched instep, jellyfish, dark as desire, swirl and smudge the cove's glassy waves. Crouched behind her, in the tiny triangle of gravelly shore visible between her muscled legs, black-robed women with haggard faces tug loose edible tufts of samphire and sea grasses. I was right - they were fascinated by us. The artist cannot contain the wonders, fish and bird life bursts over the border. (HW, 15–16)

The *cultural deterioration*, however, turns out to be a prolific development of fruitful inspiration. The attraction and sensation of the different: *the Other*, permeates the venue of an international place of exchange and transaction. Not only are the Westerners fascinated by the wonders of the Oriental world, but likewise the native Orientals cannot withhold their inquisitiveness about the particularities of the foreign continents and venture their own mental journey of exploration. Here, multiculturalism is not a concept, but a desire; not a policy, but a living *eros*; and it is not about politics, but about imagination in the first place. Or to put it in Chiara

Bottici's terms: it is about "Imaginal Politics".[6] Yet all starts with the seemingly a-political, meticulous description of atmosphere:

> In a maritime museum in Massachusetts I am witnessing the Old World's [Europe's] first vision of the New, of its natives, of its ferocious, improbable shapes, of its monstrous women, that only Salem Bibi could have described or posed for. Her hips are thrust forward, muscles readied to wade into deeper, indigo water. But her arms are clasped high above her head, her chest is taut with audacious earnings. Her neck, sinewy as a crane's, strains skyward. And across that sky, which is marigold yellow with a summer afternoon's light, her restlessness shapes itself into a rose-legged, scarlet-crested crane and takes flight.
>
> The bird woos with hoarse-throated screeches, then passes out of sight. (HW, 16)

Metaphors of—and comparisons with—the world of animals are frequently used to depict the inner state and life of human beings and their behavior or posture. Birds symbolize independence and freedom as a recurrent theme of miniatures in general and of the Coromandel Coast's society in particular. The theme captures the openness and liberal-mindedness of the people as well as the longing for wider perspectives, that is, the conquering of new lands, the learning of new practical technologies, the acquaintance with new views, and the acquisition of cosmopolitan trends. It comprises the audacious earnings of ferocious, improbable passion as well as a restless craving for deeper insight and understanding both in the material and spiritual world. In Mukherjee's eyes, this is exactly what multiculturalism should be about in its ideal essence.

> I lift the final one. I want to memorize every stroke.
>
> In the largest of the series - its catalog name is *The Apocalypse*, but I call it *The Unravish'd Bride*—beautiful Salem Bibi stands on the cannon-breached rampart of a Hindu fort. Under a sky on fire, villages smolder on purple hillocks. Banners of green crescent moons flutter from a thousand tents beyond the forest, where tethered horses graze among the bloated carcasses of fallen mounts. Leopards and tigers prowl the outer ring of high grass; the scene is rich in crow-and-buzzard, hyena-and-jackal, in every way the opposite of fertile Marblehead. In a forest of blackened tree stumps just inside the fort's broken walls, hyenas lope off with severed human limbs; jackals chew through caparisoned carcasses of horses; a buzzard hops on a child's headless corpse. (HW, 17)

The shadow of the frolic, excessive life is cast as well: the apocalypse. The dark sides and barren fields border the rich and abundant vitality of the pluri-cultural coast. The fertile inhabited oasis is constantly threatened by the wild, unruly land, where untamed beasts lie in wait and descend mercilessly upon their prey: the corpses and carcasses of war victims, mounts and men. On this ground of doom, the bloodthirsty soldiers of the emperor Aurangzeb have fought a war against the Raja who claims to be the rightful ruler, Jadav Singh, Salem Bibi's lover. The fight has turned the place into a devastated battleground and has mutilated and dishonored the Raja. *The Unravish'd Bride/The Apocalypse*: the double title of the miniature at the center of *The Holder of the World* confirms once again that love and destruction

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[6]Bottici (2014).

are inseparable human dispositions; in Mukherjee's typology, the female (love) and the male (war) principle form a dialectic unity.

> Salem Bibi's lover, once a sprightly guerrilla warrior, now slumps against a charred tree trunk. He grasps a nephrite jade dagger hilt carved in the shape of a ram's head and, with his last blood-clotted breath, pledges revenge. His tiny, tensed knuckles glint and wink, like fireflies, against the darkness of his singed flesh. The poisoned tip of an arrow protrudes through the quilted thinness of his battle vest. An eye, gouged loose by an enemy dagger, pendulums against his famine-hollowed cheek, a glistening pink brushstroke of a sinew still connecting it to the socket through which the smoky orange sky shows itself. The lover's once stationary eye fixes its opaque, worshipful gaze on the likeness of the Salem Bibi painted on the lover's right thumbnail.

> Near Salem Bibi's dying lover, under a multirooted banyan tree smeared with oils and ashes holy to Hindus, the upper body of a lotus-seated yogi slain in meditation holds itself serenely erect. An infant, chubby and naked, crawls from blood-splattered shield inventing happy games. A thief crouches behind a pretty purple boulder and eyes the necklets of pearls, rubies, diamonds, on courtier-warriors' stilled chests. Broods of long-haired monkeys with black, judgmental faces ring the heaps of dead and dying. (HW, 17–18)

And further:

> In the clean, green distance beyond the conflagration's range, on a wide road that twists away from ruined forts and smoking villages, a gloomy, insomniac conqueror on a sober-eyed elephant leads his procession of triumph-aroused horsemen, foot soldiers, archers, gunners, lance bearers, spies, scouts, mullahs, clowns, poets, painters, bookkeepers, booty haulers, eunuchs, courtesans, singers, dancers, jugglers, wrestlers, cooks, palanquin bearers, tent pitchers, storytellers, to the next gory and glorious field of slaughter. Their eyes form a perfect, glitter-pointed triangle: Salem Bibi's, her Hindu lover's, the Mughal conqueror's. (HW, 17–18)

And the Ekphrasis concludes:

> On the low-parapeted roof of the fort, Salem Bibi chants stubborn and curative myths to survive by. Her braceleted hands hold aloft a huge, heavy orb of unalloyed gold and a clear, multifaceted diamond through which a refracted lion and a lamb frolic in a grove of gold grass as supple as silk. At her henna-decorated, high-arched feet, a birdcage lies on its side, its microscopic door recently ripped off its hinges. The newly exposed hinge glows against the cage's duller metal, a speck of gold-leaf paint. (HW, 17–18)

5.2.2   Color

As mentioned, Mukherjee's pictures are painted with a particularly extended and rich palette of colors. Color is a basic material for painting—and thus for her writing too. The brightness, density and variety, even shrillness of the palette were notably employed by Pop artists to capture the picture of a relentless consumer and mass media society. Mukherjee's employment of colors assumes a significant role following that trace. Colors throughout her writing shine through the words and from in between the lines so that the reader's iris is activated in order to perceive

bright and multicolored pictures. Thick primary colors and their mixtures and dense, shiny color patches shimmer, almost dazzle from the depicted coloration. Hues and tones tint and shade the environments of Mukherjee's stories. Multiculturalism, for Mukherjee, is a particularly sophisticated and often surprising, in many ways unforeseeable—and thus both the more beautiful and estranging—mingling of colors that creates even more breathtaking new colors, many of them unseen.

In her novels, clothes (which as we know "make people") in particular radiate a multifarious and flashy color scheme brightening up and animating the occasionally dull inner lives of the people wearing them. They often serve as a shield or a mural protection behind which the real, deplorable psychic processes take place,

> and doubtless the top layer preserves the fiction. (*The Middleman,* M, 11)

According to Mukherjee, it is a long-known fact: Light, the origin of all color, very much affects people's moods. Accordingly, in Mukherjee's stories warm, sunny weather fuels energy, motivates and lifts up the sad, whereas cold, dull and rainy weather soon makes the protagonists reluctant and depressive.

In another story in the *Darkness* collection, *The World according to Hsü (*WatH*)*, the protagonist Clayton couple seeks a break from their everyday life, from witnessing racial assaults in Canada and from the personal tension that has built up between them in the previous six months on a vacation stereotypically dreamed out, on a classic island in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa, where Graeme Clayton wanted to see the Southern Cross.

> This island of spices, this misplaced Tahiti, this gorgeous anachronism, would serve them beautifully, they'd thought. (WatH, 33)

On the surface, they see themselves as the classic romantic tourists and couple:

> They had wanted an old-fashioned vacation on the shores of a vast new ocean. They had planned to pick shells, feed lemurs on the balcony of a hotel managed by a paunchy Indian, visit a colonial museum or two, where, under glass, the new guardians of the nation enshrined the whips and chains of their past. They had readied themselves for small misadventures - lost bags, cancelled hotel reservations - the kind that Graeme Clayton could tell with some charm on their return to Canada. (WatH, 30)

However, not only is the political situation out of control on this island, with coups and curfews, revolution and counter-revolution that prevent them from pursuing their rhapsodic intentions, but there is also a tension between the couple, Ratna and Graeme. They have left Canada in disharmony, with discord over whether they should move from Montreal, where Graeme (at 35) is the youngest full professor of psychology at McGill, to Toronto, where he has a unique chance to advance his career, but where racial discrimination is more violent:

> …For Pakis, Toronto … [is] hell. (WatH, 33)

Therefore, the moving was not agreed upon by Ratna who is a "Paki" for Canadians but

half - the dominant half - Indian, (WatH, 36),

and the other half (from her mother's side) Czech.

He had paid five thousand dollars in airfare so they could hold hands on a beach under the Southern Cross, but already she was accusing him of selfishness and bigotry. (WatH, 39)

Ratna's hopes for the journey are more than a sentimentalist and adventurous pursuit. There are expectations brooding inside her:

Surely simple tourist pleasures, for instance, watching the big pink sun fall nightly into calm pink waters, would lighten the shadows of the past six months? She imagined herself in her daring new bikini on a shoreline tangled with branches and cattle skulls. But always, Graeme was just behind her, training his Nikon on that chaotic greenery to extract from it some definitive order. (WatH, 30)

The color *pink* here represents a washing off and dying of the molding problems, an attempted deception as pink would shine and shimmer gaudily. But after all, the color is not opaque enough to cover up the molding undercoat. The pink has to be darkened, i.e. turned into a red with a greater coating capacity.

The red of the wine around the end of the story eventually realizes this function. The whole bottle of *red* wine becomes symbolic of their unfulfilled romance. The delectable French wine pleases, soothes and spreads an aura of *Home*. Home is detached from geographical and physical criteria and becomes, as another of Mukherjee's stories emblematically states,

a territory of the mind. (*Isolated Incidents*, in: *Darkness,* 78)

At that moment, Ratna feels in harmony with herself and pours herself another glass.

No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home. (WatH, 48)

Politically the island is in an anarchical, revolutionary state. But the riots and the unstable and dangerous situation are hushed up internationally. The subversive conditions on the island should not scare away tourists, thus they are rarely reported in the press.

Likewise, inside the country the alarming density of violence and uproar is masked and made up with bright, misleading colors,

daubed in garish greens and browns. (WAtH, 48)

The comedown capital presents itself as a Potemkin's village,

the oranges and yellows of the buildings … [are] brilliant (WatH, 40)

in the afternoon light, and a wooden house has *painted* columns. The King's musicians are dressed in uniform,

splendidly gallant, red satin with gold braid [and]… the bandmaster… [is wearing] a yachting cap and a bright red tunic. (WatH, 43)

Even a mannequin's "lavender silk" (WatH, 41) serves as an eye-catcher in order to fade out the debris of the ruined shops in the surroundings. On top of all this the sham brilliancy on the surface of an utterly underdeveloped country also shines off against the color television set with the latest color system hiding the black-and-white realities underneath:

> A waiter turned on the television set for the World Cup scores, replayed from Dar es Salaam, *en provenance de* Buenos Aires, on another cold night under the Southern Cross. The Claytons had not expected color television on such an island. The German (East or West, Ratna wondered), overhearing the Canadians, informed them that it was cheaper to install the latest color system than an obsolete black-and-white one. It had to do with the island's profound underdevelopment. They could not even manufacture their own spare parts, and the industrialized countries no longer turned out components for black-and-white. That's why he was on the island, he said; to install a complete microwave transmitting system. (WatH, 45–46)

Finally, the food. The National Dish reflects the island's political havoc since it is

> a concoction of astonishing crudity. (WatH 45)

This is extenuated by the catching "flowered shirt" of the African chef serving the dish. The reader imagines a motley shirt which captures the couple's attention. Thus the crude and repulsive appearance of the meal seems ephemeral since both the couple's and the reader's eyes are diverted and attracted by the brightness and cheerfulness of the chef's shirt. In analogy to the dish, which symbolizes the political crudity, the flowered shirt hints at the tropical vegetation of this island of spices, a vegetation which is rich, multifarious and bright in colors. Nature shapes a landscape which is

> narcotically beautiful, (WatH, 30)

making both the couple and the reader oblivious to the destructive forces at work in *Third World* destitution.

Not always in Mukherjee's novels does color, standing for the variety of multiculturalism, serve to paint over shades that should not be seen. In some contexts, the chromatism stresses the vitality and self-determinedness of a character and epitomizes the lucid effects and effulgent achievement of that very character. Mukherjee's own explanation of her textual use of color oscillates between a personal love for an iridescent chromatism and its well-intended effects:

> I want to infuse a gray mind and black-and-white world with the primary colors that I grew up with and that I love. Everywhere you go in India peasant women as well as affluent women are dressed in extremely bright colors, and the paintings on mud walls of huts are full of bright natural colors. So I grew up in a world of primary colors. And then as a fiction writer I very often use characters' love of color or embroidery or painting as a clue to her character and to her desire to break out of the imprisonment of convention. So that's certainly what I'm doing…. (UIV, 38)

5.2.3   *Form*

Form, the second essential pictorial principle besides color as taken over from painting into writing, is another essential element in Mukherjee's stories. Frequently scenes are delineated with a meticulous pen to reflect the familiar and to make "the surface of things" both mysterious and a metaphor of the greater surroundings. In Mukherjee's work, the accentuation of form is usually also closely connected to space-claiming, a core motive of multiculturalism. In her graphic narration an over-abundance of details is drawn. Settings are described in an exacting manner in such a way that the reader gradually draws the lines of an imaginary picture of their topography, until an almost photographic result is achieved,

> a sharpening of line and color, possible only in the labs or on a carefully researched, fully cooperative, tropical island, (WatH, 32–33)

as Graeme Clayton's aspiration expresses in the story *The World according to Hsü*. This sharpening and increase of the optical resolving power, does, of course, comply with Mukherjee's miniaturist technique.

In particular, descriptions of interiors and interior designs, assemblages of furniture and constellations of people are carried out graphically. In *The Tiger's Daughter*,[7] Mukherjee's first novel, there are a few eloquently pictorial examples. These are again chosen from a rich fundus found not only in this, but in all of Mukherjee's early and middle novels.

When the protagonist of *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara of Indian roots, returns to India from the United States, she meets two men with whom she ends up in the same train compartment. The result is a "culture shock". The ongoings and constellation between these three people in a small, moving room is pictured strikingly visually with an atmospheric air pregnant with egotism, sympathy and antipathy which are not expressed directly, but created by the *invisible* gestures and *unuttered* words within the formal confinement of the compartment:

> It began with a quarrel over luggage space, but Tara feared they were responding to other irritations. She sat surrounded by bedrolls, trunks, old leather suitcases, baskets of fruit, while the Nepali tried to push her Samsonite bag out into the corridor.
>
> 'This is too large, lady,' he objected. 'How you think there'll be room here for that monster?'
>
> 'It is small, excuse me,' answered the Marwari. 'The lady's suitcase is the smallest here. I'll call the attendant this minute if you don't move *your* bags and baggage.'
>
> Tara's feelings did not appear to matter at all. Her suitcase had become part of a general irritability. In the end the question of luggage was resolved without the aid of the attendant. The two men piled the pieces in the middle of the floor, making the compartment's washbasin totally inaccessible. (TD, 25–26)

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[7]Bharati Mukherjee: *The Tiger's Daughter*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992. All quotations from this novel are from this edition and abbreviated as TD, p.

The crowdedness of the compartment can almost be physically experienced by the reader. Tara's desolate interior state can be felt psychically insofar as she is ignored as being responsible for herself and having a mind of her own, since decisions are made for her by the two men. Being told from Tara's point of view, her interiority is sympathetically acknowledged; and the observed behavior and details of the male party hint at their whims and the eccentricities of their private life. They appear to be rather chauvinistic features by which Tara is puzzled and alienated, coming from an emancipated place like the United States, and being married to a liberal-oriented husband who had sustained her independence and progressive thinking.

> "At Jamnagar the aging 'boys' in soiled caterer's turbans called out, 'Dinner! Dinner!' The Nepali ordered the English menu. Tara, still close to David's [her American husband's] worries, feared diarrhea, jaundice and polluted water. She ordered a Coke. The Marwari, true to his nature, ordered nothing.

> …The 'boy' placed the tray before the Nepali passenger. Mulligatawny soup in a stainless steel bowl, poached eggs, toast, boiled okra and carrots, bread pudding. Then a feckless Coke without a straw for Tara. She pushed her lips around the wet, warm bottle, then suddenly panicked. How long had it lain about, opened? Old worries flooded her, warnings from her mother about diseases contracted in public toilets, sinister sexual germs lurking in railway stations.

> 'I don't want it after all,' she said, paying for the Coke. The attendant took the bottle away and drank it in the corridor.

> The Nepali traveler looked rather embarrassed to be the only one eating. He smiled vaguely, rubbed his hands on the limp napkin, and started on his soup.

> 'The Indian menu is hopeless,' he commented, sucking in a spoonful of rice floating in yellow liquid. 'Madam, are you new here?'

> 'Yes and no,' said Tara, preparing to hide behind a *Time* magazine. (TD, 30–31)

Tara feels alienated in her old *desh* (homeland) and estranged from her former fellow countrymen. Since the once familiar gender power play, which culturally conditioned behavioral rules and discursive structures, now after living in the United States makes her feel uneasy, she tries to avoid and repress the participation in the ongoing interaction. By retreating to her now familiar American world in form of a magazine, she tries to block off sensitive questions of belonging. The *Time* magazine offers a safe shield behind which she can hide her inner dichotomy of "yes and no".

> The Marwari stirred in his corner. Now he reminded her of a spider, impassive and calculating. He stood up, and Tara noted dry, goose-pimpled flesh hanging loosely from his bony arms. He reached under his seat for a tiffin carrier propped between bedroll and suitcase. The tiffin carrier consisted of four round brass cans stacked between two brass stems and held together by wooden handle. She had not seen a tiffin carrier, not even thought of one, in seven years. She wondered if David had ever heard the word.

> The Marwari dismantled the carrier and laid the cans side by side on the white leather seat. Around the bottoms of the cans pale yellow rings of moisture began to spread on the leather. There were wilted *chapatis* and four lemon wedges in one container, fried pumpkin and eggplant slices in another, cabbage curry in a third, and homemade yoghurt in the

fourth. The spidery little man pointed to his cans like a roadside vendor and tried to tempt Tara to share his 'humble and native food, Madam.' Again she thought the meal had been turned into a battle by the travelers, that her answer was crucial to both men though her hunger was, to them, quite inconsequential. She accepted a wedge of lemon, sprinkling it with coarse salt, and pledged fatigue after the long flight from America. (TD, 26–28)

5.2.4   Food

Food is another core object of Pop art that plays a huge role in Mukherjee's attempts toward a broadly accessible multicultural imaginary. As Sabrina Small wrote,

> An examination of Andy Warhol's Pop Art (1960–1978) reveals an artist devoted to all things mass produced, especially food. Easy to obtain and enjoyed by all ranks of society, mass produced American food products, such as Campbell's soup and Hershey bars, carry personal meaning as well as national appeal… Warhol's identification with popular American products and his ability to render these objects as artistically valuable signified his belief that art was universally attainable… Warhol's personal addiction to junk-food allows him to identify as American. In a postmodern world, this identity is a by-product of mass production. Therefore, the repetitive use of food in his art is neither a critique of Warhol, society or consumerism; it is merely a mirror in which the viewer becomes lost. Food is a lens for deconstructing the layers…"[8]

Mukherjee's attempts towards an art of multiculturalism follow a similar path. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, food and eating worries or habits as well as the distinct differences between the three passengers are rendered as piercing metaphors. The picture of the four food "compartments" of the tiffin carrier equals the structure of train compartments: well confined, containing a certain amount of "content" which was selected in a well-considered way, and which will be emptied after a period of time, i.e., when a certain purpose is fulfilled. The food has "objective" nutritional value, and provisions and sustenance that go together are compartmentalized, while others are put in separate containers; whereas the encounter over food has social, if not intellectual value. Even if the sociability and general value of such train compartment incidents are not obvious, a close reading reveals that

> there are no accidents, (UIV, 36)

as was Bharati Mukherjee's firm belief, related more to a Hinduist worldview of fate than to Western concepts of destiny.

In other words: Ultimately it is fate that brought these three people together in the compartment. It is the stage on which Tara is reintroduced to her old *desh* with a different, "New World" (America) background; a stage on which her drama takes place after seven years of marriage with her *mleccha* American husband, David

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[8]Sabrina Small: *What's Eating Andy Warhol? Food and identity in Pop art*. In: Appetite, Volume 47, Issue 3, Wiley & Sons, November 2006, 400.

Cartwright, in the United States. The food passages of the train journey attune the reader to Tara's hopes, doubts and uncertain undertaking of her "homecoming" as *Americawali*. Food becomes a metaphor for a fateful constellation inherent in things.

5.2.5   Housing

Housing is claiming spaces, imagining changing and improving spaces, living in spaces. This was another main concern of Pop art, particularly in its late phase at its conjunction with postmodernity. Housing and living are also pictured by Mukherjee in a meticulous, if not documentary manner, since in her view they are possibly the most encompassing incorporations of "Imaginal Politics". In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the living surroundings and habits of the Banerjees, who are Tara's parents, their extended family, and their house are rendered with particular scrutiny:

> The lawn was rarely used. It was too hot during the day to sit outdoors, and in any case Tara's mother, who suffered from headaches, preferred the darkness of the air-conditioned interior. The Banerjees would perhaps have liked to sip their cocktails outdoors, but they were inhibited by their good breeding. It was considered impolite to eat in full view of others, and though there were high brick walls studded with spikes and shards of glass, they were afraid someone might spy from an upstairs window. (TD, 38)

Considering the riots and protests of the underprivileged, the Banerjees have to be especially careful and shield themselves and their high caste nobility from the alleged "Communist" threats and other class claims in their neighborhood:

> At the carport the visitor was handed over by the *durwan* to the bearer, who then escorted him to the hall, verandah, or formal drawing room. To enter the hall, one had to pass through gigantic double doors, hung with coir blinds. The blinds were sprayed with rose-scented cold water on the hour. These doors remained open all day, but were chained and padlocked in four separate places at ten every night when the family retired. A few servants who had been with the family for at least eight years, and who had business in the house early in the morning, were allowed to sleep in the main building. The rest of the staff, their wives, children, cousins and occasional friends, lived in the servants' quarters behind the house. (TD, 38–39)

If these few words describe a precise outer social structure by indicating spaces of hierarchical affiliation, the interiors of the house become, under Mukherjee's glance, metaphors of the interiors of souls:

> The hall was eclectically furnished. Italian marble tables, and mahogany tables in the shapes of hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades, occupied the dingy corners. On two heart-shaped tables stood enormous ebony elephants. On the high-ceilinged walls hung framed photographs of earlier Banerjees. …[She] knew these Banerjees had noble faces, that some had been photographed in yogic positions, bare chests girdled by Brahminic thread. But the grime on the glass made these facts impossible to verify. As a child Tara had often amused herself, especially in the rainy season, by scratching the grease with her long fingernails. But she could only reach the toes and ankles of the photographed men. In a poorly lit corner hung one headless tiger skin. (TD, 38–39)

The place depicted contains and reflects history as well as genealogy. Having been the home of an extended Brahminic family, through generations the place has gained an elitist flair with selected pieces, both Indian and European, which contribute to the privileged ancestral position of the Banerjees as a family of Bengali *zamindars*:

> The living room was filled with imported furniture - heavy, dark, incongruous pieces whose foreignness had been only slightly mitigated by brilliantly colored Indian upholstery. In built-in glass cabinets, expecting to be admired, were large, tarnished silver cups that Tara and her father before her had won in annual debating championships.
>
> …There was a great deal of dust everywhere. The sweepers cleaned regularly, morning and late afternoon, but they were not expected to rid the room of dust. There were occasional ants on the floor, large, black and indolent. Insects were not a source for embarrassment. (TD, 39–41)

In the construct of Mukherjee's imaginary, housing is both an external and interior dimension for the protagonists—the more important, the more they feel disrooted:

> An old-fashioned wooden door, armed with steel bolts, hooks, and chains, draped with diaphanous pink net curtains, gave access to a spacious verandah. As a child… Tara… had loved the chalky whiteness of its walls, pillars and grilles. Against the whiteness exploded bougainvilleas, purple and vermilion, hibiscus, marigolds, full-bodied dahlias, cascades of golden laburnum. These flowers were not carefully contained in vases or bowls, but grew, almost in spite of the *mali*, in pots lining the wide edges of the balcony railing. They flowered in insolent detachment from the landscaped garden below, sharing nothing with the cut flowers in the living room so pleasantly arranged, nothing with the Banerjee family and their servants who loved flowers. They grew as if they had independent destinies. (TD, 39–41)

But the miniature cosmos of the ancient house, so ambiguous for the returning woman, is even richer in dimensions, historical reminiscences and secret allegations:

> Dwarfed by the flowers were two deep canvas easy chairs - reminiscent of the order and ease of the British days without its bitterness or alarms -, four green rattan chairs, a table, and a low divan. Pale brown lizards slept on the walls of this verandah…
>
> The only extraordinary equipment in the verandah was a Sears and Roebuck garden swing, sold to the Banerjees by a departing librarian of the local USIS [United States Information Service]. The swing had been redone by the family tailor in green and yellow brocade. Even the awning was made from silk brocade. Though the swing was no doubt intended to be hammered into the earth, it had adapted itself to Bengal Tiger Banerjee's [Tara's father's] wishes, and settled firmly into the marble floors of the verandah. (TD, 39–41)

On her return, Tara consciously perceives the smallest details of her home. Her past and childhood are revitalized in a new light, which is tinted by her experience of *home*, if home at all, in America. The notion of "exotic" suddenly is turned upside down:

> The house on Camac Street began to exercise its hypnosis on her. New York, she thought now, had been exotic… Tara was grateful to call this house home. (TD, 41)

A description of Tara's friend Reena's place is similarly minute. The crowdedness and abundance of rooms in Tara's friend's house where she stays almost appears like an architect's sketch; and the furnishings and decor of the sitting room might well be designed by an interior decorator who has a proclivity to the foreign. Reena's mother meets Tara on the lawn.

> She led Tara through a series of halls and small rooms, up a narrow back staircase and through more small rooms into her private sitting room. Like Tara's house Reena's house was too large for the needs of the family, and looked permanently empty and middle-aged…

> The sitting room, which Reena's mother had learned to call 'my den' from an old issue of an American interior decorating magazine, was furnished exuberantly. Pink Sankhera sofas and chairs were burdened with overstuffed cushions in red, green, yellow and blue printed raw silk. Pale madras checks of blue and orange draped the windows and polka-dotted Swiss organza covered all tabletops. On the wall hung mounted prints of Moghul paintings, Radha and Krishna surrounded by monkeys and peacocks and framed scenic views of Lac Leman, Matterhorn and Lausanne. (TD, 181)

5.2.6   Edifices

Last but not least, edifices and their town- and cityscapes and scenic views are the "landscapes" where multiculturalism is destined to unfold due to global urbanization. Thus they also are contourized exemplarily and extensively by Mukherjee, and further colored with significant hues, as always following her core motif exemplified in *The Holder of the World*: "to merge the metaphoric with the literal". This, at the same time, is the core maxim of "Imaginal Politics", as understood by Mukherjee.

In the opening chapter of *The Tiger's Daughter* the historical idyll and the "good days of the past" can be felt through an exacting description of the aristocratic European in-place, the Catelli-Continental Hotel in Calcutta with its immediate surroundings. At the same time, a fundamental change and "deterioration" that is in process in the whole city are sensed. A political crisis which marked

> a year of colonial unrest (TD, 10)

in the form of a nationalistic movement, which indicated a general social and Calcutta-specific urban decline and a nostalgic grief for the better "British times", is captured by the topographical description, but without direct statements and references to the lost past and the desolate, crumbling present. Such procedure again is characteristic, if not fundamental for Mukherjee's "Imaginal Politics". In Mukherjee's texts, in almost all cases reality has to speak for itself, or better: to express itself through facts. These facts have to be observed and "read" closely and with fullest awareness by the reader in their multi-dimensional meanings if something so complex and conflict-prone as multiculturalism is to be understood through its multifaceted historical, political and social layers—in order to then be

co-created and evolved with the highest available individual and collective consciousness. "Imaginal Politics" here in first instance means the art of patient, silent and concentrated observation of *what is*—and thus to constantly and stubbornly read the literal as metaphoric. That is why Mukherjee's description of edifices is almost painfully detailed:

> The Catelli-Continental Hotel on Chowringhee Avenue, Calcutta, is the navel of the universe. Gray and imposing, with many bay windows and fake turrets, the hotel occupies half a block, then spills untidily into an intersection. There are no spacious grounds or circular driveways, only a small square courtyard and a dry fountain. The entrance is small, almost shabby, marked by a sun-bleached awning and two potted hibiscus shrubs. The walls and woodwork are patterned with mold and rust around vertical drains. The sidewalks along the hotel front are painted with obscenities and political slogans that have been partially erased.
>
> A first-floor balcony where Europeans drank tea in earlier decades cuts off the sunlight from the sidewalk. In the daytime this is a gloomy place; only a colony of beggars take advantage of the shade, to roll out their torn mats or rearrange their portable ovens and cardboard boxes. The area directly in front of the Catelli's doorway is littered with vendors' trays, British mystery novels and old magazines laid out on burlap sacks, and fly-blackened banana slices sold by shriveled women. At night neon tubes from tiny storefronts flicker over sleeping bodies outside the hotel, then die before the breaking of the violent Calcutta dawn. (TD, 3–4)

But the place has even more to offer—paintings of course, as does not come unexpectedly in a Mukherjee novel:

> The Catelli is guarded by a turbaned young man, who sits on a stool all day and stares at three paintings by local expressionists on permanent display by the hibiscus shrubs. He is unusual for a doorman of any hotel; he is given to sullen quietness rather than simple arrogance, as though he detects horror in the lives of the anonymous businessmen who pass through his doors each day. A doorman is an angel, he seems to say. He is not without love, however, this guardian of the Catelli-Continental Hotel. He loves the few guests who come every day but do not stay. He sees flurries of exquisite young women in pale cottons and silks and elegant old men carrying puppies and canes, and he worships them. While small riots break out in the city, while buses burn and workers surround the warehouses, these few come to the Catelli for their daily ritual of espresso or tea. And the doorman gathers them in with an emotional salute. (TD, 3–4)

But in such a scenery with its time-delayed overlapping worlds there is no room for illusions:

> There is, of course, no escape from Calcutta. Even an angel concedes that when pressed. Family after family moves from the provinces to its brutish center, and the center quivers a little, absorbs the bodies, digests them, and waits. (TD, 3–4)

The classical figure of the doorman, the daily ritual of espresso or tea and the emotional salute, relics of the flourishing heyday of colonial European aristocracy and finesse, juxtapose the mold and rust, the walls painted with obscenities and political slogans, the colony of beggars and the litter in the doorway of the hotel, all visible signs of a general erosion that started like an invisible virus and slowly infected the social body when the (although unfree) coexistence of cultures declined. The hotel is a fluctuous place of "natural" multiculturalism where the

movement of—and interaction between—all different kinds of people constantly takes place. It is affected first by instability and unpredictability, whereas the one-family house of the Banerjees can be protected from outside changes much more easily and thus preserve its traditionalist aristocratic aura much longer by opposing and withstanding the dissolving forces of the surroundings.

> So slight were the initial changes among the families of Bengali *zamindars*. An imprisoned and gigantic spirit had begun to move, and all things on its body - towns, buildings, men - were slowly altering their shapes. The alterations were not yet impressive; none suspected they might be fatal. (TD, 11)

5.3   Sound and Noise: Plurality of "Media in the Medium"

A further characteristic of fundamental importance for Mukherjee's conception of the "art of multiculturalism" as "Imaginal Politics" inspired by Pop art is the insertion of many simultaneous (synchronic) levels of self-reflection into her basic medium: literature or written language. This is achieved through the description of media such as newspapers, books, parchments, television and radio, their different, often conflicting and chaotic sounds, noises and languages which make them a postmodern Babylon in Mukherjee's rendering. Among the media inserted into Mukherjee's texts are also poems and literature by other authors. All this creates a mirror effect, where the medium literature is self-reflected through its description of other media: through an array of "media in the medium", and through the insertion of text quotations. This is because Mukherjee was convinced that multiculturalism, according to its very founding features, is too dangerous to leave it to the "simple" reflection of one medium alone. Observation and subsequent judgment has to be broken up by "mirrors in mirrors" in order to grasp the complexity of the issue which is never reducible to easy conclusions. Any judgment must therefore remain "suspended" in the invisible, living space between different media which serve as containers of specific insights and truths all legitimate, and all insufficient.

Again, Pop art has some teachings for such an approach. The pop artists of the 1950s and 1960s used various, in fact, almost a universal set of modern means of expression, thus increasing the range of media dramatically, and compared to their times in revolutionary ways. Rauschenberg's collages, assemblages and combine-paintings are mass media "pictures within pictures" or montages ranging from all kinds of printed material to found images. Scattered sources such as postcards, newspaper and magazine pages, posters, calendars, whole books and slides are combined with all sorts of materials, from wood to textiles, wire, grass, plastic, and metal, and are clustered with pillows, tires, filth, waste-products, junk culture objects, bones and stuffed animals. "Combine paintings" like *Black Market* (1961), *Canyon* (1959), *Odalisque* (1955–58) and many others are composed

according to these principles.[9] Joseph Beuys' "Newspaper sculptures" such as *Untitled* (1963–64) follow a similar path. The identity and the valences of the media put together remain unbroken as a legible "sign inventory" on the one hand, and yet, at the same time, they are interpreted in a new way within an unusual, awry context. In other words, their significance is suggestively and substantially distorted and altered through their dislocation as well as "contextual disrelation," meaning that relations between scriptures and objects are changed to unusual distances and incongruent contexts. Rapports are turned upside down to alienating mannerisms.

What else than such an approach could be more congenial to the basic experience of dislocation and estrangement, combined with "unordered pluralism" or even "chaotic pluralism" fundamental to the experience of multiculturalism in its most primordial beginnings—that, as we learned throughout the decades since Mukherjee's artistic journey began, often may unexpectedly return even within later, more mature phases? The ethnic confrontations during Barack Obama's tenure (despite his cultural and societal upvaluation of ethnic and historic minorities such as the Native Americans, wrongly branded as "Indians") as well as since the beginning of the presidency of Donald Trump are reminders that multiculturalism is not something that can be "achieved" once and for all and then stays here forever; but rather, that it is a constant process and struggle for interconnection, integration and justice on *all* sides involved in a horizon which remains open, dynamic and insecure.

In literature, the "free" integration of other media into a basic medium is a typical postmodern technique, known under the terms *intertextuality* and *interdisciplinarity in the arts*. Already existing texts or snaps of them infiltrate and mingle with a new one to form yet another new, authentic writing often composed of secondary pieces; and media are rendered by other media, or described with great accuracy through the basic medium. Therefore the technique of "media in the medium" is understood by Mukherjee not as one of quoting but of liberal and lavish appropriation. It is about opening up "second" and "third" (and so on) levels of reflection within a basic stream of consciousness. Origination and derivation blend almost indistinguishably to another original in the making, although the ready-made or found insertions are still obviously distinguishable from either an authorial voice or a first person narrator. Not only literary texts but trivial phrases, commercial slogans, mural inscriptions, newspaper or periodical clippings, catchwords, music and song texts, announcements and programs, historical citations and quotes from all kinds of sources and sign codes from various fields are used in the text generation. Last but not least films and paintings or other artefacts, sculptural and design objects merge with literature.

Paintings in particular, as we have seen, play a prominent role in Mukherjee's literary fusion. That is because paintings to a certain extent are closest to the "basic nature" of imagination. Nevertheless, paintings and miniatures are not Mukherjee's only intertextual devices. A whole gamut of various kinds of multi-media *intertexts*

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[9]Tilman Osterwold: *Pop Art*, loc cit., 145 ff.

generate and contribute to her compositions and endow them with a touch of combine-texts.

In fact, in her attempt to deeper explore the inner dimension, Mukherjee often dispatched contradictory or even conflicting dimensions of "Imaginal Politics" and employed different kinds of registers, which resulted in multi-layered and poly-voiced outcomes. Usually, the various registers are fully recognizable, indicated with explicit or visual markers and scored with their own tone and rhythm as parts, overtures, intermezzos or finales of a larger opus. They either flow smoothly *legato* with the whole composition or exempt as *staccato* nuances catching particular attention, from *fugue* to *scherzo* and from *toccata* to *rondo*.

The aim that Mukherjee wants to achieve through her extensive use of intertextual, interdisciplinary and multi-media techniques consists again, as with the miniatures, in the art of *compression* and the introduction of a whole universe

> with the energy and postmodern disjunctiveness of the TV commercials of MTV…, the quick arts. (UIV, 8)

Or as Mukherjee stated in her self-reflection:

> I find myself using an awful lot of art, occasionally music and certainly the poems of Matthew Arnold and Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, some Victorians, some Edwardians because of my own obsessive interest in these particular fields or particular poems and because I suddenly see, as I'm writing, connections between let's say a Matthew Arnold poem or a Keats Ode to what I'm doing. (UIV, 35)

Some eclectically selected clippings from Mukherjee's novels and short stories shall serve us to illustrate her "grand orchestration" meant to catch the complexity and "infinity" of multiculturalism.

5.3.1   Literature by Other Authors

External literary writings, i.e. literary texts by other authors, are a recurring source in Mukherjee's opus. John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" introduces each of the four parts of *The Holder of the World*:

> *Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,*
> *Thou foster-child of silence and slow time…* (Part One)
> *Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard*
> *Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on…* (Part Two)
> *Who are these coming to the sacrifice?*
> *To what green altar, O mysterious priest…* (Part Tree)
> *Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought*
> *As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!* (Part Four)

Each of these couplets captures the fundamental atmosphere of the following and attunes the reader to the underlying mood of each part of the novel in both an economic (compressed) and aesthetic way.

An expressive, concise clipping is taken from Kipling in the short story *Fighting for the Rebound* in *The Middleman* story collection:

> The East is East and the West is West and never the twain shall meet.[10]

This quote can also be read as the epigraph of this short story, and as question mark behind Mukherjee's own "Imaginal Politics". In *Fighting for the Rebound*, the American main protagonist, Griff, is just about to break up his relationship with Blanquita, a Filipino from Manila who words Kipling's phrase (and whose name ironically can be read as "the white one"). With it she touches the biased stereotype of American superficiality and accuses Westerners of egotism and selfishness, and even of not being able to cherish love:

> You're all emotional cripples. All you Americans. You just worry about your own measly little relationships. You don't care how much you hurt the world. (FftR, 85)

Having changed girlfriends from Emilou to Wendi to Blanquita and prospectively to Maura indeed seems to prove Griff's narcissistic trait which is one obstacle to the unification between foreign and native. A difficulty, however, also arises from Blanquita's side, as she is too attached to her Eastern past and cannot let go of her Filipino background. She seems to be even more prejudiced than her boyfriend. Griff warns her of—and sensitizes her to—the difference between foreignness and exoticism:

> But, Christ, there's a difference between exotic and *foreign*, isn't there? Exotic means you know how to use your foreignness, or you make yourself a little foreign in order to appear exotic. Real foreign is a little scary, believe me. (FftR, 83)

In this sense, a rigidity and stiffness with regard to one's own past, to one's old or inherited habits and way of looking at the world indeed seem to affirm Kipling's assertion. Nonetheless, it is not a credo to preach in everyday life, even though it comes from an author belonging to the world's literary canon. It is used not as advice but as admonition (cf. *Buried Lives*, in: M, 154): as a warning and appeal to the principle of letting go, so that

> [e]xcess energy floats towards me, connecting us. (FftR, 87)

Or in Blanquita's case, that "us," the East and "them," the West can come together, that "the twain *shall* [be eventually able to] meet."

Matthew Arnold is also quoted. His novel *The Buried Life* (1852) provides the title for Mukherjee's short story *Buried lives*[11] in *The Middleman* collection. It holds an innermost human ideal which, exactly as the multicultural experience

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[10]Bharati Mukherjee: Fighting for the Rebound (FftR, p.). In: *The Middleman and Other Stories*. London: Virago 1990, 80. This short story collection is quoted as M, p.

[11]Bharati Mukherjee: Buried lives (BL, p.). In: In: *The Middleman and Other Stories*, loc cit.

teaches, is often denied in harsh exterior circumstances by those idealists who particularly long and strive for it. The stark reality turns the ideal into an illusion, but according to Mukherjee an illusion which is deflated anyways, because the reality principle, not its figment, always prevails in the end. Frequently, however, its decline may be postponed, and there may be mysteries where it may succeed against all odds. This ideal obviously is *love*, which for Mukherjee is the perfect humanitarian principle not only for day-by-day progress, but in the emphatic sense for the salvation of the world, a world in which East and West may be no longer rivals but can live together peacefully. In Mukherjee's approach to multicultural-ism, and even more to "Imaginal Politics", love is still at work when all language fails—since it is the invisible essence of language itself, as both *The Buried Life* and *Buried Lives* teach, overlapping each other from different perspectives in different centuries.

> The memory of how good the rain had felt came back to him now as he [Mr. Venkatesan, a school teacher] glanced through the first stanza of the assigned Arnold poem. What was the function of poetry if not to improve the petty, cautious minds of evasive children? What was the duty of the teacher if not to inspire?
>
> He cleared the throat, and began to read aloud in a voice trained in elocution.
>
> *Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,*
> *Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!*
> *I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.*
> *Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,*
> *We know, we know that we can smile!*
> *But there's a something in this breast,*
> *To which thy light words bring no rest,*
> *And thy gay smiles no anodyne.*
> *Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,*
> *And turn those limpid eyes on mine,*
> *And let me read there, love! thy inmost soul.*
>
> 'Sir,' a plump boy in the front row whispered as Venkatesan finally stopped for breath.
>
> 'What is it now?' snapped Venkatesan. In his new mood Arnold had touched him with fresh intensity, and he hated the boy for deflating illusion. 'If you are wanting to know a synonym for *anodyne*, then look it up in the *Oxford Dictionary*. You are a lazy donkey wanting me to feed you with a silver spoon. All of you, you are all lazy donkeys.'
>
> 'No, sir.' The boy persisted in spoiling the mood.
>
> It was then that Venkatesan took in the boy's sweaty face and hair. Even the eyes were fat and sweaty.
>
> 'Behold, sir,' the boy said. He dabbed his eyelids with the limp tip of his school tie. 'Mine eyes, too, are wet.' (BL, in: M, 158–159)

Reciting Arnold's *The Buried Life* makes Mr. Venkatesan, a schoolteacher in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, an embittered and disillusioned idealist, since the political and socio-cultural situation of the country is hostile to reconciliation and peace. A demonstration of the political-military group *Liberation Tigers*, led by a mob of hot-headed adolescents, turns out to be fatal for Venkatesan. When trying to take revenge for his younger sister, who has been humiliated and mistreated by some

frenzied, uncontrolled monks, he inflicts "serious harm." He whirls an axe like a frisbee disk

> over the heads of demonstrators and policemen and… [it falls], like a captured kite, into the hands of a Home Guards officer. There… [is] blood, thick and purplish, spreading in jagged stains on the man's white uniform. (BL, 157)

Although Venkatesan did not want to get involved in the upheavals and previously just wanted to withdraw his sister from her boyfriend—with whom she had become an activist -, the Tamil schoolteacher is inadvertently turned into a political terrorist. He flees the country as a political refugee to Germany where he gets stuck on his way to Canada. His fate, as it seems, has not been benevolent to him:

> Mr. Venkatesan thought about the swoops and darts of his fate. He had started out as a teacher and a solid citizen and ended up as a lusty criminal. He visualized fate now as a buzzard. He could hear the whir of fleshy wings. It hopped off a burning car in the middle of a Trinco intersection. (BL, 175)

From there "fate" had been persecuting him like a predator. Finally, however, when it seems that Mr. Venkatesan is about to meet his doom, he is rescued from the "fleshy wings of the buzzard". The *Polizei* of the Northern German town Lübeck discover him as an illegal immigrant in his hiding place in Hamburg at Queenie's place, a widow who boarded him

> as long as it took Rammi [Queenie's cousin] to locate a ship's captain whose business was ferrying furtive cargoes (BL, 168),

i.e., as long as he would get the chance to proceed his escape to Canada.

At that crucial, tragicomic moment his high ("Arnoldian") ideal of universal love, which he has already stopped believing in, rescues him, after all. Love *is* eventually victorious. Queenie, for whom he has developed a secret affection, does not withhold her feelings for him any longer:

> Then, suddenly, Queenie the beauteous, the deliverer of radiant dreams, burst through the door of the kitchen. 'Leave him alone!' she yelled to the man from Lübeck. 'You're harrassing my fiancé! He's a future German citizen. He will become my husband!'. (BL, 176)

William Butler Yeats, Rimbaud, and David Mamet are but a few more examples of mergers with Mukherjee's texts. Aspects of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) are reborn; their heroes Rochester and Jane are even *reincarnated* now under postmodern stars in the protagonists Bud and Jane Ripplemeyer in Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1991):

> Maybe things *are* settling down all right. I think maybe I am Jane with my very own Mr. Rochester, and maybe I'll be okay for us to go to Missouri where the rules are looser and yield to the impulse in a drive-in chapel.[12]

---

[12]Mukherjee (1991, 236). The novel is quoted as J, p.

Other novels follow this quotation and the respective allusion pattern too. Since *The Holder of the World* is a constant allusion to, if not a rewriting of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* Mukherjee's embroidery of the novel is stitched with threads. For example, Hawthorne's pattern of *The Birthmark* recurs in "Blanquita the Beautiful" (*Fighting for the Rebound*, in: M, 80), who has only one imperfection: her nails which are rounded and ridged and therefore dissembled under press-on nails.

Slight physical imperfections bother other female Mukherjee characters as well throughout her early and middle work. Jasmine, to name a further example, injured her forehead when she fell, and a piece of firewood punched a star-shaped wound into it. For Indian women these defects are a cause of major trouble to the present day since they decrease their opportunities as brides and diminish their chances to be married. In certain Muslim countries like Pakistan or even the Turkish countryside (Turkey has been aspiring to become a member of the European Union), according to the traditional rules such imperfections still have to be reported to potential grooms before the marriage since they are an element of trade, diminishing the "value" of the bride. This is one of many points of multicultural collusion since it is not the case in Western democracies, which firmly reject such practice on the basis of the principles of equality and human rights.

5.3.2 Cinema

Movies, mostly popular ones of not very high artistic reputation, too mingle with Mukherjee's literary fiction in many ways—thus underscoring how high a status in popular culture films have in India to the present day. This status, however, is not one of qualitative artistic value, but mostly one of quantitative importance since the film industry in India—Bollywood—produces sentimentalist mass productions with a cult of the actors and actresses and a widely unrestricted hero- and heroine-worship. *Kitsch* infatuation and romance unfold within well-framed lime-lights as escapist worlds from a formally democratic, but factually repressive society, in which women are denied individuation, self-liberation and self-assertion—and remain subject to sexual violence up to the present day, as all too many cases which got worldwide attention because of their outstanding cruelty and brutality have shown in recent years. But the Bollywood mainstream prefers to look away, and to create images of females that are rarely connected with reality. That gives birth to "hybrid" individual imaginaries both surreal and—paradoxically exactly in such detachment—constituent parts of the rising "global imaginary".[13]

Migration boosts the effect of acquired mass consumption culture. Outsiders and newcomers are particularly inclined to imitate icons of the receiving culture. As teaches, for example, Mukherjee's story *Isolated Incidents* in *Darkness*:

---

[13]Manfred Steger: *The Rise of the Global Imaginary. Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008.

> Poppy had done better than Ann. She called herself Peppi now - Peppi Paluka and the
> Pistolettes - and wore leather muscle-shirts and fearless disco pants. Through the listless
> years at McGill, Ann had kept a scrapbook: of Poppy stroking a cat in the lobby of the
> Beverly Hilton, of Poppy kissing Mike Douglas, of Poppy driving something sleek and low
> on the mad freeways of Los Angeles. (*Isolated Incidents*, in: D, 65)

Not by chance the main protagonist in the novel *Wife*, Dimple, immerses herself
in films and television shows. They become reality for her: her individual reality in
which she has her own life and can survive in an otherwise suppressive, unfulfilled
and isolated world of marriage, dislocated from India to America.

> She sipped from the glass and let the tip of her little pink tongue slither impudently over her
> high-gloss lips. That small gesture reminded Dimple of Hindi film actresses, but the setting
> was not lavish enough for a Bombay extravaganza. She realized suddenly that she had
> expected apartments in America to resemble the sets in a Raj Kapoor movie: living rooms
> in which the guests could break into song and dance, winding carpeted staircases, sunken
> swimming pools, billiard tables, roulette wheels, baby grand pianos, bars and velvet
> curtains…
>
> In a Bengali movie about high society life, there had been waiters in white gloves circu-
> lating through the crowd with platters of cigarettes and fancy lighters.[14] (W, 147)

The Hindi notion of—and attachment to—kitsch movies are part of the cultural
baggage Dimple imported on the immigration journey from India to the United
States. Sometimes such artefacts are pathologically clinged to as a means of cultural
preservation and an artificial keeping alive of one's native homeland. In this way
immigrants such as Dimple can in some parts of their existence live a misplaced life
and lead a

> ghost existence, hanging on. (J, 153)

And this "ghost existence" is fed very well by the cultural industry. There are

> FILMS   AVAILABLE   ON   REQUEST   FOR   SCREENING   BY   CULTURAL
> ORGANIZATIONS   AND   AT   PARTIES.   ALSO   ALL   LATEST   HINDI
> SOUNDTRACKS; TAPES; ETC. FOR INFO CONTACT V. KHANNA (W, 132),

as an advertisement in the *Khanna Cultural Society Information Bulletin New
York City* announces in *Wife*.

In the story *Jasmine*, the Vadhera family, emigrants from India to New York,
make use of every Indian film available. When these are exhausted they resume
watching the Urdu [Pakistani] repertoire without even taking into consideration that
there are British and American movies as well. They forcefully build up their little
India in Flushing, New York, like a

> safe garrison in hostile territory. (J, 134)
>
> The heroine of the story, Jasmine, is put up with them but soon leaves the "fortress of
> Punjabiness" behind which she "was spiraling into depression. (J, 148)

---

[14]Mukherjee (1992, 64). Further quotes from this novel appear parenthetically as W, p.

Jasmine is the opposite of Dimple: adventuress, gold digger, Jane of Tarzan and Jane of Rochester. She feels as potent as a goddess, as powerful as Kali and like a *sati*-goddess in the United States who

> burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre (J, 176)

in order to be free of old bonds and free for a new life and identity.

Yet this turns out to be a difficult endeavor. In *Jasmine*,

> "The [Vadhera] family [living in Flushing] consisted of [Professor Vadhera], his aged parents and his recent bride, Nirmala, a girl of nineteen fresh from a village in the [Indian] Patiala district. The marriage had been arranged about a year before. She was pretty enough to send a signal to any Indian in Flushing: *He may not look like much over here, but back in India this guy is considered quite a catch…* (J, 142–147)

The young, even childish Nirmala survives in the foreign, in many ways incomprehensible environment relying on Bollywood films:

> Every night, Nirmala brought home a new Hindi film for the VCR. Showings began promptly at nine o'clock, just after an enormous dinner, and lasted till midnight. They were Bombay's 'B' efforts at best, commercial failures and quite a few famous flops, burnished again by the dim light of nostalgia. I could not unroll my sleeping mat until the film was over.

> I felt my English was deserting me. During the parents' afternoon naps, I sometimes watched a soap opera. The American channels were otherwise never watched (Professorji's mother said, 'There's so much English out there, why do we have to have it in here?')…

> …In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I [Jasmine] wanted to distance myself from everything Indian… The Vadheras… had retired behind ghetto walls. (J, 142–147)

But there are these movies, always the films, so much needed as they are omnipresent to keep *something* alive:

> To date in her year in America, Nirmala had exhausted the available stock of Hindi films on tape and was now renting Urdu films from a Pakistani store. She faced a grim future of unintelligible Bengali and Karnataka films… Visitors from India left tapes of popular Indian television series, and friends from Flushing were known to drive as far as New Jersey to check out the film holdings in the vast India emporia. They had a bookcase without books, stacked with television shows.

> Professorji and Nirmala did not go out at night. 'Why waste the money when we have everything here?' And truly they did. They had Indian-food stores in the block, Punjabi newspapers and Hindi film magazines at the newsstand, and a movie every night without having to dress up for it. They had a grateful servant who took her pay in food and saris… In the morning the same film had to be shown to the parents…

> Sundays the Vadheras allowed themselves free time. We squeezed onto the sofa in the living room and watched videos of Sanjeev Kumar movies or of Amitabh. Or we went to visit with other Punjabi families in sparsely furnished, crowded apartments in the same building and watched their videos. (J, 142–147)

The movies become part of the texture of the immigrants' existence. In this way the Vadheras lead a kind of multicultural life without multiculturality. This life

would fall apart if they had to renounce the films, their major identity, if not basic inner meaning in life.

5.3.3   Radio

Radio also plays a major role in Mukherjee's novels. Radio news about the riots in Calcutta are heard extensively and penetratingly in the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*. They are drastically juxtaposed with the petty conversation which Tara and her friends lead on the balcony of the Catelli-Continental Hotel from which they can see and could (if they wanted to) follow the political turmoil directly. But they decide to actually ignore and forget it because of their preoccupation with their own trivialities, while the radio incessantly broadcasts the incoming news. Pronob, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors of the enterprise *Flame Co., Ltd*. who is also on the balcony, wants to follow up the news:

> 'Can you shut up for a sec, folks? I want to listen to the English news.'

> 'Don't be a dashed bore,' objected Nilima. 'I don't want to hear about bombings. I want music instead.'…

> 'I'm scared,' Tara said. 'Things sound awful.'

> 'What nonsense you talk!' consoled Reena. 'It's just a routine sort of thing. Actually, it used to be much worse before.'…

> 'It's all a political stunt,' said Pronob. 'Farms are being looted, landlords are being cubbed to death. This is reform?'

> An angry fat man, thought Tara, is pathetic. She was afraid of these moods in Pronob. They were hard to match with the moods of a young man who had once written poetry and a one-act play for children. She feared such passion would bring on a stroke or some worse tragedy. The other girls in Pronob's group paid no attention to his anger. They were busy recalling happier times when Carefree Kevin had taken charge of the Hit Parade, when Johnny Mathis had sung to them.

> Oh how lucky you are, Tara!' said the girls. 'Tell us more about America. Tell us what you do every day.' (TD, 71–73)

But such interest for "America" is mainly about distraction from "global local"—and "local global"—reality:

> There they were again, even Pronob, wanting to know what it was like being a Bengali girl in America, not how she had got there, nor why. She described to them in detail how she spent a typical day in New York, what she ate for breakfast, how much the subway token cost, how she washed and hung her nylons above the bathtub, what her thesis director looked like. Pronob wondered if the American quarter resembled the fifty-*naye-paise* coin, and if petrol was as expensive there as it was in Calcutta. He turned down the radio, so he could listen better to Tara. (TD, 71–73)

Yet, they cannot remove themselves completely from the contextual turmoil because they are in the presence of history. It is around them, and close to their skin. The voice of the radio announcer is persistent:

'This is All India Radio Calcutta. Here is the news read by Gopal Kumar Bose.'… (TD, 71)

'There have been isolated skirmishes between the police and the demonstrators on Rashbehari Avenue near Deshaprya Park. Eight men have been taken to hospital.' … (TD, 72)

'The Marchers,' said the newscaster softly, *'are proceeding in somewhat disorderly fashion. They have passed Firpo's and the Grand Hotel. The police have cordoned that area of the maidan…'* (TD, 73)

'The first phalanx of the procession is nearing the Catelli-Continental Hotel.'… (TD, 74)

'Heavy fighting has broken out in the Hindusthan Road area.' (TD, 76)

5.3.4 Newspapers and Magazines

Magazines and newspapers, including pieces of information from them, are inter-textually interwoven into Mukherjee's texts on a regular basis. They usually give clues about the characters, about their jobs and professions, about their interests, hobbies and habits, about their strengths and weaknesses. In the short story *The World According to Hsü*, Graeme is reading the *Scientific American* at the dinner table in the restaurant. He calls it "light reading", his "sports page," and does not refer to it as specialized literature in his research fields, psychology and medicine.

'I'm not reading,' he said, meaning *you're free to interrupt me, I'm not advancing my career; I'm being open and conversational, this is just the sports page to me.* (WatH, 44)

By this Graeme means that Ratna, his wife, can initiate a talk. Nevertheless, he is actually selfish and dominant, deciding when he may and may not be interrupted. Ratna, however, disapproves of his habit of reading at the table anyhow. By starting the conversation, which is a mere monologue based on his "light" reading matter, Graeme suppresses a discussion on their personal issues. Ratna drifts off into remote loneliness since she senses her feelings are ignored.

'Did you know, according to…'

She couldn't catch the name, but it sounded like a dry sneeze. Hsü? Could it be Hsü?

'…that six million years ago the Mediterranean basin was a desert? And it took the Atlantic a million years to break through and fill it again? Gibraltar for a million years was the most spectacular waterfall the world will ever see. The old sea was called Tethys and it connected the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean.'…

'In the last Ice Age the Black Sea was a freshwater lake. They have fossil crustaceans to prove it.' (WatH, 44)

In between his narrating of this paleontological account, an English folksong sung by three Ismaili-Indian children distracts Ratna. Her thoughts wander off away from Graeme, reflecting on these children.

> Graeme asked her if she was crying. (WatH, 45)

This incident piercingly exhibits the disharmony and internal conflict between the couple.

Furthermore, the excerpts of magazines and newspapers also transcend the function of characterization and go beyond the person-specific and inter-personal relationship to convey a deeper meaning. With Mukherjee (historical) biology and geo-archeology have always to do with change and metamorphosis, or the tension between artificial conservation or a forced preservation, and the natural progress of time and its built-in transformational generator.

Moreover, not just time, but locus is also accompanied by change and determines alteration. The course of history and large-scale prehistoric events and tectonic kinetics seem to overshadow and trivialize personal movements and interior motions. Compared to the grand evolution they seem to be minor and petty—or is it the other way around, since the evolution is in the end of and about the human being?

Similarly, besides television shows magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens* become Dimple Dasgupta's escapist harbor. The main character in *Wife* comes to the United States with her husband, Amit Basu, an electrical engineer. Traditionally arranged by her father, the marriage turns out to be an unhappy one, and above all it does not meet Dimple's imaginations, dreams and expectations. She had previously

> set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon… She fantasized about young men with mustaches, dressed in spotless white, peering into opened skulls. Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love. (W, 3)

It is only a small step that Dimple flees to the prefixed worlds of the media. Soon they become real to her, influence her behavior and stimulate her (speechless) inner images, wishes and desires. Her husband Amit can but destroy her imaginary worlds; and at the same time he is spiraled into another of her "unreal" worlds, the most threatening and the most harmful one to her. Under the fatal spell of her marriage and her husband, she imagines she can only break it by the most malignant and violent act, by murdering him and thus disrupting her marital bond. The magazines make her believe in set-up pictures and profess to her how one can be happy:

> That morning she had read, under a picture of a patio with sand-blasted panels, geraniums hanging from hooks and thickly cushioned banquettes: Throw out the junk. Cut out. Pare down, slice away.
>
> 'Except for the cushions,' said Mrs. J. Thomas, the bronzed middle-aged woman sitting on a banquette in the picture [in the magazine]. 'I absolutely adore cushions, they're so romantic! When I'm lonely I sit for hours surrounded by cushions. They are much more

comforting than chihuahuas or African violets.' And the magazine added in italics: *Express yourself in your surroundings. Discover your own grand passion and indulge it to excess. Then simplify the rest, throw out, be ruthless. That's the secret to happiness.* (W, 87–88)

To Dimple, the immediate United States environment is alien in a double sense. First, it is the unsettling "final destination" of her geographical and cultural misplacement, without any further exit or destination in sight. Second, the apartment in which Dimple and Amit Basu live is not their own; the furniture was not selected by them, and therefore Dimple cannot relate to it. The whole surrounding does not have anything personal or intimate in which she can express herself, act out her personality. As a result, Dimple lives more intensely in those pictures she is led to believe in, and as a consequence she hates the actual circumstances of the housing conditions to which she is confined even more vehemently. When the prospects come up to move to a new place she cherishes new hopes.

> She looked constantly at ads in newspapers for furnished apartments, looked up real estate agents in the Yellow Pages but did not have the nerve actually to call, brought out old copies of *Better Homes and Gardens* from the linen closet and stared for hours at pictures of beds and sofas. The search for a place to live gave her a new kind of certainty, almost an arrogance: she knew she was boring Meena with descriptions of The Breakfast Nook and The Boudoir, but she didn't care… Life had held out such promises but was so slow to deliver! She wanted big leather chairs with chrome arms and legs and lamps that dominated the room with their enormous curves. (W, 104–105)

So much does Dimple internalize the magazines' promises that pieces of furniture or decoration in the apartment become extensions and parts of her own body, which she cannot escape. Abhorring their place she once breaks off three petals of a plastic flower arrangement, pretending to dust each petal:

> When she was about to throw out the torn petals, she felt guilty, as if she had intended to throw out parts of her own body, so she sneaked the three petals to the [landlord's] Sens' bedroom and stored them in the purse where she kept her passport, health certificate and gold jewelry. She thought of the incident as 'a narrow escape,' though she couldn't be sure from what she had escaped, or how. (W, 105)

5.3.5 Letters

Before marrying Amit and leaving for America, Dimple as a young woman in India lives in an anticipated imaginary world. That causes her to be very self-conscious about her own qualifications and values, mainly in the negative sense of constant precariousness. Her slight bodily "imperfections" worry her insistently:

> She worried that she was ugly, worried about her sitar-shaped body and rudimentary breasts… She thought of breasts as having destinies of their own, ruining marriages or making fortunes. 'Stop worrying!' Mrs. Dasgupta [her mother] consoled. 'Worrying makes them shrink!' (W, 4)

The defects make her fear that because of them she will not find the ideal husband. During her waiting period, which she thinks of

as a dress rehearsal for actual life, (W, 4)

she is always tense and nervous and turns to a women's magazine to express her plight in the hope of being relieved. On a pink notepaper Dimple writes a letter to the magazine's therapist, an unknown problem solver known as *Miss Problem-Walla*:

DEAR MISS PROBLEM-WALLA, c/o EVE'S BEAUTIBASKET, BOMBAY-1: I am a young woman of twenty with wheatish complexion. In addition, I am well versed in Rabindra singing, free-style dancing to Tagore's music, sitar playing, knitting and fancy cooking. I weigh 48 kilos and am considered slim. My hair is jet black, hip-length and agreeably wavy. If you were to say to me that with such endowments I am a fortunate person, you would be almost correct. There is just one annoying flea in my ointment. The flea is my flat chest. As I am sure you realize, this defect will adversely affect my chances of securing an ideal husband and will sorely vex the prowess of even the shrewdest match-makers in this great nation. Therefore I'm sure you will agree it is imperative that I do something about my problem and enhance my figure to the best of my ability. Please do not, I beg you, advocate chicken soup, homeopathic pills, exercises and massages. I have tried them already. The icing on my cake was drinking two lemons squeezed in warm water first thing in the morning for ten days, with the result that I lost three-quarters of a centimeter from you know where. Need I say that I am desperate, almost suicidal? I see life slamming its doors in my face. I want to live!

I look to you now, dear MISS PROBLEM-WALLA, dear prophet and saviour of us suffering women, to pull a magical remedy from your proverbial beauty basket. Help! YRS., ETC., HOPELESS BUSTLESS. (W, 10–11)

This letter shows Dimple's gullibility and trust in anonymous people, in pictures, and in imagined worlds. Dimple cannot relate and adapt to real people, since she would not let her own painted picture be altered or spoiled by anyone, not even by the person affected. She is not able to live sanely in her immediate surrounding, only in worlds being mediated by imagination.

After she had mailed the letter she wept for three hours. She did not expect her letter to be printed. It was too sincere, too passionate; it exposed too much. She visualized Miss Problem-Walla in her air-conditioned Bombay office, sitting regally on rubbery thighs, with painted nails and legendary breasts. Could such a woman be expected to feel, to actually share her anguish?

Dimple's letter was not printed or answered. (W, 11–12)

5.3.6   Messages

Eventually, aerogrammes and messages transmitted in various forms are further frequent intertextual devices in Mukherjee's "Pop art"-like work. The messages range from cabled ones:

WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. WE ARE CONFIDENT YOU WILL HANDLE
NEW SITUATIONS WELL. ALL LOVE (*The Tenant*, in: M, 107),

to telegram messages:

Disaster imminent. Don't come. Hide (*The World according to Hsü*, D, 31),

and a message written by a tenant on a sheet of paper and left in the rented
apartment:

DUE TO PERSONAL REASONS; NAMELY REMARRIAGE, I REQUEST THAT YOU
VACATE MY PLACE AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER. (*The Tenant*, M, 111)

Advertisements also make part of short and shortest informational pieces:

The first doll in an enchanting new suite of fairy tale dolls (*Loose Ends*, in: M, 43),

including matrimonial advertisements:

Hello! Hi! Yes, you *are* the one I'm looking for. You are the new emancipated
Indo-American woman. You have a zest for life. You are at ease in USA and yet your ethics
are rooted in Indian tradition. The man of your dreams has come. Yours truly is handsome,
ear-nose-throat specialist, well-settled in Connecticut. Age is 41 but never married, phys-
ically fit, sportsmanly, and strong. I adore idealism, poetry, beauty. I abhor smugness,
passivity, caste system. Write with recent photo. Better still, call!!! (*The Tenant*, in: M, 109)

5.3.7   *Miscellaneous: Business Cards, Recipes, Signs, and Fragments*

Eventually, there are a variety of different inserts which cite written sources and
references and thus contribute to the richness of the style and the liveliness of the
imaginaries involved. Business cards, like

H. R. H. Maharajah Patwant Singh of Gotlah. Purveyor and Exporter (*Hindus*, in: D, 111)

can be catalogued as well as schedules, pamphlets and brochures of sightseeing
tours in New York (*A Wife's Story*, in: M, 35), or a cocktail recipe from a NamVets
magazine:

Milk, two ice cubes crushed with a hammer between two squares of paper towel, and
Maalox. (*Loose Ends*, in: M, 44)

Even sound is reproduced, as in some Pop art paintings:

OM-OOM-OOMPAH-OOM (*Loose Ends*, in: M, 46);

and eventually all kinds of signs appear. There are neon signs like
"VACANCY," hotel signs such as "SANDALWOOD RESTAURANT" (*Loose
Ends*, in: M, 52) or door signs, for example "STRICTLY PRIVATE" (*Loose Ends*,
in: M, 52), "COUVRE-FE 17 h" (WatH, 36), and "HOTEL PAPILLON. Prop:
M J-P Papillon" (WatH, 34). A shop signboard says: "LUI ET ELLIE. Importeurs

Props. K. Mourardji Desai et Fils" (WatH, 41), and another sign "THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING IN THIS HOUSE" (*Nostalgia*, in: D, 92). The racist "KEEP CANADA GREEN PAINT A PAKI" (WatH, 39) is announced on a car bumper, and car license plates read: "Live free or Die" and "Land of Lincoln". (*Loose Ends*, in: M, 51)

Not all of these fragments of often mysterious meaning layers are placed and interpreted in their context. In Mukherjee's world of multiculturalism, they should serve as an impression of the fathomless variety and occurrence of multiplicity, often to the point of "meaningful nonsense" or mysterious condensation of the non-related to be found everywhere, where synchronicity of the different is coming into existence or at work.

5.3.8 The Perspective: "Action Writing" as Compression of Cultural Multiplicity

Summing up, Mukherjee's stories can indeed be interpreted as multidisciplinary "combination"-texts in the fashion of Pop art. Nevertheless, in contrast to Pop art they are not reflecting a consumerist worldview, but rather a multicultural imaginary. The abundance of sources Mukherjee uses to create her texts and the way in which she quotes clippings and lines make her work to a given extent indeed a literary version of multi-culturally "reworked" or "adapted" Pop art.

In this context, it seems to be often a rather loosely planned, intuitive process which happens rather ad hoc that underlies Mukherjee's inter-textual pastiche. Her "mixtures", according to her own statements, often resemble improvisations more than strategically designed textures or "patterns to achieve this and that". Mukherjee's texted and textured embroideries are not fully pre-sketched—and this is allegedly part of the plan. In Mukherjee's way, many design patterns are refined along their origination and their coming into existence, and thus eventually leave generous room for individual points of view and open and plural interpretation. That is particularly true for the basic design of her "Imaginal Politics". Or as Mukherjee herself put it:

> There are certain moments in my life which feed into the fertility of what I'm writing but I go through phases of extraordinary energy and literary, imaginative fertility, and then any newspaper item of something I've heard on the radio or a snatch of conversation in the supermarket or seen someone's face is suddenly going to spark off or is going to reshape what I'm working on in ways that I hadn't predicted. (UIV, 3)

That is synchronicity as a simultaneous integration of the pluri-fold put into intuitive action. The process of creation through accidental "illuminated" receptiveness accompanied by the contingency of the creative act resembles the *Action Painting* technique, i.e. a painting approach which on the one hand preceded and on the other partly developed alongside Pop art, and in doing so co-shaped the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in Western art.

In the framework of *Action Painting*, the volitional impulsiveness of "generative performance" is enacted through the primacy of the process over the content, and through the simultaneous contradiction and displacement of meanings in a non-contextual, different "order" of mysterious, unknown or "estranged" characteristics. Most important is the self-referential awareness *in actu* for the process by their generator. The mind of the creator is at the same time the one of the observer, and this means that the creative process is observing itself in one and the same mind. This is considered as vital for the "humanistic" character of art and its socio-transformational potential. It means that art is neither located in a vacuum nor a vacant husk in itself, nor something stale and disconnected, but *action* of an individual, self-conscious mind turning fundamentally on itself simultaneously both in its acts and contents.

In Western (social, political and artistic) history, without doubt the "outcome" of art has been privileged over the "act". But Mukherjee is convinced that a "new consciousness" of more multipolar and realistic traits apt for the age of multiculturalism has to develop this balance further. She therefore puts her effort on a sort of *Action Writing*, which is at the origin of her love for short stories. Inspiration has to become more important than forms, the imaginative act more valued than the final work which may be its result. The way should be more important than the destination it leads to—and "literally" so.

In Mukherjee's worldview, this is valid also for any concept of multiculturalism as a social art. The continuous attempt toward integration is to privilege over temporary outcomes—which is certainly an ambiguous claim in political reality. Yet for Mukherjee, there is an *Action Politics* which consists, in its essence, in an *Action Imaginary*: the open creation of imaginary spaces to inhabit. Art, in this sense, is not an illustration, but an expression of perceptions and feelings and their involvement in the surroundings. And so is multiculturalism, beyond all specific emancipatory interests of this or that specific group.

There are many examples of such an approach in Pop art. As the main protagonist of Action Painting, Jackson Pollock, describes it,

> I don't work from drawings or sketches. My painting is direct. My method of painting grows out of a natural need. I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them.[15]

Similarly, Mukherjee's fabric of multicultural "Imaginal Politics" is very much woven and stitched by "incidental" action (which, paradoxically, is something that has to be particularly well planned and staged). The material is delicately selected, whereas the final compositional arrangements and techniques are realized in the process of creation.

> I'm bringing the world into myself, (UIV, 16)

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[15]Jackson Pollock, quoted in: The Triumph of Abstract Expressionism. In: *Art of Our Century: The Chronicle of Western Art. 1900 to the Present*, ed. Jean-Louis Ferrier, transl. Walter D. Glanze. New York, London, Toronto et al.: Prentice Hall, 1989, 493.

explained Mukherjee. Stimulants that come from the outside are processed by her "self-conscious consciousness", and then transformed and restituted to the social sculpture. The all-important point here is: There is something objective in such a subjective acquisition and transformational process, when art is truly and without restraint dedicated to "bringing the world into myself". According to Mukherjee, expressing one's own

> memories, tastes, impressions, moods, etc. [is] not being self-involved or narcissistic but…
> [it means] creating a sturdy enough ego sense of self that in spite of extraordinary dis-
> couragement I can say what I think and feel matters… So self-involvement to me is about
> having the strength, the discipline and self-confidence about the importance of one's ideas,
> however unjustified that may be. But after that, especially because my writing has grown
> after I removed myself from my very privileged background in Calcutta I've had to be who
> I am in the midst of social demotion and violent racial discrimination against me. And so I
> am who I am because I have been reformed by social commitment. So what strikes me
> worthy of being story, and what inspires me is social injustice. (UIV, 16)

5.4 Extension of Media: "Magnifications"

Extension of media is another crucial practice of Mukherjee's in trying to develop a specific "art of multiculturalism" following the Pop art example. The term "ex-tension of media" in Pop art mainly refers to James Rosenquist's (born 1933) implementation of *billboard techniques*. Rosenquist's paintings are larger than life with "magnifications" as big as CinemaScope format.[16] The painting *F-111* (1964–65), for instance, measures 120×1032 cm; *Win a new House for Christmas* (1964) 148×48 cm; and *Untitled* (1966) 92×78 cm.

Billboardism is found in Mukherjee's work quite often and in partly "aggres-sive" manners, too. However, her "magnifications" are not visual, quantitative, numerical (i.e. in the view of her typology rather "male") extensions, but linguis-tically visualized, imaginary, qualitative (i.e. in her typology rather "female") "enlargements" and glorifications. In addition, imaginary quality itself is often encumbered with a negative sign in Mukherjee's "enlargements". Film stars are celebrated and idolized by her characters, often clinging to the imaginary produced by Bollywood's commercial film industry. For Mukherjee, such magnification of *the Other* effectuates a reduction of one's personal identity; a continuing subcon-scious identity crisis; and a projection of idealized and imagined worlds onto the direct surrounding, with sometimes fatal consequences. It often results in schism since the actual world is not solely the imagination of a single person, and above all it is not an imaginary picture.

Throughout her work Mukherjee made it clear that magnification does not help the imaginary to become a realistic force—and that thus "Imaginal Politics" cannot

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[16]Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, loc cit., 88.

be (and must be carefully discerned by) the mass fabrication of "imaginary reali-
ties" as produced by the cultural industry. Consequently, multiculturalism cannot be
something "fabricated" by mere imaginary "world-making".

> Learn to read the world and everyone in it like a photographic negative of reality (J, 192),

it reads in the short story *Jasmine*.

The characters drawn by Mukherjee according to this *maxim* are many. For
example, the character Dimple in *Wife* belongs to the type of imaginal photographic
negatives of reality who in turn desperately tries to "create world" through "mag-
nifying" imagination. Dimple finds refuge and immerses in her dream worlds. She
ranks her real world with high expectations and unrealistic demands:

> She wanted [her husband] Amit to be infallible, intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm.
> (W, 89)

Of course Amit in contrast turns out to *not* be infallible, intractable or godlike.
Consequently, Dimple gradually reverses the attributes "real" and "unreal" or
"imagined". The worlds represented in the magazines and movies on television in
which she indulges become her realities, whereby she flees her factual ambience
degrading it to a despicable, unrealistic deception:

> Dimple wished she could be out in the living room watching daytime shows with inspiring
> names like *The Guiding Light* and *Love of Life*. The women on television led complicated
> lives, became pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances (but were never huge
> or tired like Meena Sen), murdered or were murdered, were brought to trial and released;
> they suffered through the Ping-Pong volley of their fates with courage. But they hardly ever
> talked to children. She could not learn from them how to make friends with Archana though
> she learned the details of American life. For instance, everything she saw on TV was about
> love; even murder and death were love gone awry… And she gave up trying to make
> friends with children. (W, 73)

Even when Dimple goes out she builds up her fantasy world and projects it onto
encountered circumstances by magnifying pictures to larger-than-life realities.
Instead of working on her personal self-development, self-consciousness and
self-formation and on the tying of social bonds, she builds castles in the air and
retreats to them:

> All the way on the subway to Queens she stared discreetly at black and brown girls in
> leather jackets, allocating her gaze to posters or the dark tunnels when the girls stared back
> at her. Sometimes she put herself in their places, pretending that Amit with his oily hair and
> thin little mustache was a 'dude' with a comb in his hip pocket, and making up stories that
> she would not have made up if she had thought of herself as Dimple Basu or even Dimple
> Dasgupta. When they arrived at the[ir] [rented] Sens' apartment, Dimple was still seeing
> herself as a high-breasted black woman in thick gold earrings and very short curly hair.
> (W, 163)

In certain moments of awareness of her equivocal situation,

> Dimple had to agree that she was losing touch with what she saw and what she thought she
> saw because she had seen it before on television. (W, 185)

The confusion of reality and figment in *Wife* goes so far that these two realms become one and the same thing. Therefore the moments of brainwaves can be subjectively procreated as chimera and delivered as a stark, objectified reality of progeny which rebounds on the subject herself:

> …her imagination, inflamed by too many hours in front of the TV, pictured what might have been. And alone in the dark apartment, Dimple collapsed in terror. (W, 162)

The cult of gigantism in the imaginary results in stylization of the real personal life, and eventually in exorbitant superficiality doomed to deny all interiority, freedom and individuality. It is pure and terrifying escapism, which in the case of Dimple shirks her responsibility for herself and for others.

As in her other works from the 1970s to the 1990s, the aim of Mukherjee's monumental interlacings in *Wife* is to delineate failures of identity development under multicultural conditions, to show how all too human and heartbreaking such failures are, and to indicate how important it is to take the over-complex and extremely difficult processes of *multiculturalization* between reality and imagination (with imagination the more important part, as postmodernity teaches) seriously and to actively work on them. The sheer—and thus blind—enthusiasm about an artificial image, and be it an enlarged, ideal "multicultural" world, builds up an aura of romanticism and kitsch around the self and paralyzes the inherently "artistic" potential for self- and societal fashioning. In a consumerist society, the object of admiration slips out of focus through the mannerism of its exaggerated worship while blurring the boundaries for the subject who loses her or his vantage point of observational distance. As a result of imaginary "magnification" through postmodern media, the subject projects her- or himself into her or his object of desire, which cannot really be reached and exists merely in a world of imagination.

All this makes the imaginary crucial in postmodern and globalized times, at the disadvantage of the "reality" concept. On account of the dissolution of the observational vantage point and its failed projection on the whole, the "postmodern" subject of (alleged) multiculturalism gets lost in a nowhere land where the kernel of her or his existence and the question of being become overpoweringly helpless and "naked". Or, as feminist philosopher Judith Butler put it in some of her statements since 2006, the "essence" of being (if there is one) becomes palpable as the "negative" question of irreducible "precariousness"[17] which doesn't point to anything other than its mere, blank "being-here-as-myself-has-no-given-sense".

The positive potentials of such insight might be huge, since they "deconstruct" the individual to the point where nothing of its psyche is left except the mere "substance" of an "empty", yet self-conscious consciousness in action that must ask

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[17]Judith Butler: *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso 2006. Cf. Judith Butler: McGill 2013 Honorary Doctorate Address, May 31, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFlGS56iOAg.

itself what it is, inhowfar it is and on what basis and with which meaning it is an "I".[18] Yet the "clear and present" danger of such "nowhere being",

> the very brink of crisis, (W, 198)

can also induce the potential decline of the subject. It may come with psychic and psychotic consequences, for example: nostalgia, melancholy, depression or agony as "mild" manifestations, and paranoia, nausea or schizophrenia as severe forms of the same precariousness as "generator of inner contradictions".

5.4.1 Criticizing Everyday Culture. Specific Matters and Means of Characterization Following the Pop Art Example

Last but not least, there is a variety of more artistic tools and "formal tricks" that Mukherjee uses in her literary art to criticize postmodern culture, including multiculturalist practice, following the Pop art example. Andy Warhol's use of newsprint sources, his Campbell's Soup cans, Brillo Boxes, rows of Coca Cola bottles and dollar bills, his portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor or Jackie Kennedy are blunt citations of quotidian objects and themes of reference in estranged ways in order to point out an unexpected, yet flowing "essence" through systematic non-familiarity with the given, secure and "civilized" interpretation of things. Roy Lichtenstein's cartoons, Tom Wesselmann's bathroom motifs or Jasper Johns United States national flags convey well-known images in "alienated" ways, that— exactly *because* of their estrangement—become newly and openly readable. Precisely for this reason they become subjects for creation rather than for mere "repetition in difference".[19] Something is broken up through its mere rendering: that is the quintessence of noth Pop art and Mukherjee's multicultural "Imaginal Politics".

Or to put it in one of Mukherjee's most essential quotes:

> I am a romantic in red suspenders. (*Fighting for the Rebound*, in: M, 84)

In other words: I am an old (traditional) soul in postmodern (revolutionary) clothes. "Multi-versal" dimensions of everyday life are not only manifested by quotations but also by paraphrases, allusions, ambiguous meanings, translations, imitations, changes of position, absurd inversions and double-takes on real objects

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[18]Roland Benedikter: Postmodern *Spirituality. How To Find A Rational Alternative To The Global Turn To Religion? A Dialogue in Five Parts.* A. o. in: Integral World. Exploring Theories on Everything. Edited by Frank Visser, Year 10/2006, Amsterdam 2006, http://www.integralworld.net/benedikter1a.html.

[19]Gilles Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press: New York 1995.

and subjects. Yet, by no means do the products of such endeavor have a realistic or even naturalistic character, since, as Alloway points out, the

> Subjects [of Pop art] are known beforehand to the spectator and depend on being recognized as existing signs. The original source which was a signifier becomes the signified [in the painting], and the original referent, though clearly present, is transformed by indirection.[20]

Accordingly, Mukherjee's subjects are infiltrated—and in many ways diverted on their ways—by well-recognized objects and ambiences which belong to pre-existing sign systems, but which have become ambiguous in their meaning. Objects in sometimes planned and orchestrated situations suddenly assume a different, sometimes opposed status. They become icons of the information age, entertainment culture, transcultural commodity and goods society. In many cases, they become icons of the contemporary "consciousness industry" so heavily criticized by many of the most lucid analysts of the late 20th and early 21st century, not least by the European critical "Frankfurt school" comprising such profoundly different characters and thinkers as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Leo Löwenthal, Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas. What these important European intellectuals both anticipated and criticized was the rise of a public imaginary in the service of a given system, a fabric of the imaginary connected with everyday objects devoted to keep things as they are and destined to remove deeper questions of identity and self from the common consciousness of society. This was the origin of the critique of the modern "cultural industry" by the Frankfurt School.

Correspondingly, Mukherjee's artistic vocabulary revolves around quotidian items, consumer goods, domestic appliances, petty interior designs and trade names. In using everyday language, proliferating with the banality of specific objects which are identified by their tags, labels and brands, Mukherjee's writing enhances their visuality—only to expose them to greater questionability.

The aspect of meaning and significance, however, is only secondary in this perception-critique context. It primarily tackles themes of mass and consumer societies, which is also the chief concern of pop artists although through very different ideological approaches. This comprises the investigation of consumer habits in a mass culture as well as of minority cultures influenced by dominant attitudes. Not least, such critique explores the—less visible—reciprocal effects: the adaptation to fashions, the power of the media and the manipulative influence of the advertising machinery.

In total, Mukherjee's art is, in this sense, the diagnostic elaboration of the symptoms and syndromes of postmodern times which are characterized by large diasporic movements and intercultural encounters. To fulfill the diagnostic needs of such constellation in ways specifically apt to—potential and existing—multiculturalism, Mukherjee, according to her statements, uses an array of particular techniques for further elaboration and characterization. To conclude our description

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[20]Lawrence Alloway, loc cit., 80.

of Mukherjee's literary art, let us mention here the most important *four* such techniques.

5.4.2 Cultural Shorthand

The technique of "cultural shorthand" is one of Mukherjee's main devices of exactness and conciseness. It is used to compress meanings and thus equivocally reduce them to a signifier of common convictions of communities on the one hand, and to enrich them with multifarious contents on the other, thus breaking up these convictions by "immediate" alienation.

In the sense of "cultural shorthand", signs represent objects and allude to their quotidian use and common function. In most Mukherjee stories though, the familiarity of the real object and its functionality expand far beyond the product's brash materiality to a metaphoric and abstracted sphere that is often contradictory. Mukherjee explains that

> By cultural shorthand I mean icons, objects, details that have value for a given community. Cultural shorthand are objects that have a shared cultural assumption for a community. The example I would give is shopping at a Blue Light Special, at K-Mart: this would mean something for most first generation, second generation residents of the United States but will not probably mean anything for the third generation or in outer Mongolia. (UIV, 30)

5.4.3 Characterizational Shorthand

The *cultural sign system* and its estrangement when transferred to new and differing contexts also belongs to one of Mukherjee's succinct means of characterization. It offers clues which aid in understanding a character, her or his motifs and motivations, actions and attitudes. It is then less a cultural shorthand and more a *characterizational shorthand*, defining personality and idiosyncrasy of an individual and her or his social and psychological status within a certain cultural sign system. For example, according to Mukherjee to choose

> Nikon instead of Minolta can be an artistic choice in the context of absolute precision or it can be a cultural shorthand. Someone who is wearing Easy Spirit shoes is a very different kind of person from someone who is wearing Nikes or Keds. So that's cultural shorthand. But if I'm using Nikon versus Minolta it is likely to be exclusively about defining as precisely, as accurately as possible a character's personality rather than culture; so that I would then be concerned with the kinds of photographs that someone who owns a Nikon system can take as opposed to someone who owns a Minolta camera. How obsessive, how serious about photography or how invested in photography is this character generally; and the same with choices of, say, titles of books or colors of apparel or the kind of furniture in the room. So it depends on the usage of the detail whether it's cultural shorthand or whether it's locating and delineating the character's individuality, her or his socio-economic status as precisely as possible. (UIV, 30)

5.4.4 Cultural Incidents and the Confusion of Cultural Codes

Nonetheless, the familiarity of the subject with regard to her or his objects and the deriving characterization is not a clear-cut relation. Taking into consideration that Mukherjee's protagonists are in most cases immigrants to the United States coming mainly from India, i.e. a different cultural background where the cultural codes and sign systems are different both in elements and usage, Mukherjee creates awry and (necessarily) multi-layered environments. Her characters are usually not typical Americans for whom America and *Americanness* is everyday life and who have fully internalized a particular notion of American culture. Conversely, they are very often newcomers to this concept, which they have not experienced themselves, but only heard or read about. In short, they have acquired the notion of *Americanness* only through theoretical or second-hand knowledge. For them this knowledge and provisional acquaintance is new, exotic and extraneous.

Inversely, the interwoven Bengali expressions, Indian rituals, food and names in Mukherjee's stories are alien and sometimes utterly unfamiliar to an American or European reading audience, whereas they are everyday conventional language and habitual reference to the characters and a smaller readership coming from that particular South Asian area. Therefore, awry circumstances create oblique incidents on a regular basis, and in turn situations which particularly the immigrant is incapable of estimating. As a result, she or he is often not able to foresee the consequences of her or his acting and reacting to the particular situation.

An example: What if an Indian woman is surprised by an unexpected Indian visitor in an American surrounding? According to what rules is she supposed to act? Indian or American? How fast can she switch, and how willing is she to stand her ground to impose one of the two cultural systems? Is she conscious of her choice, or is switching just an automatic, subconscious falling back into old habits? What is the visitor going to make of her decision?

This particular dilemma is described in the story *Visitors,* part of the collection *Darkness*:

> She glances at him shyly, and steps back, her slippers grazing the rough clay foot of one of the giant horses. Still she doesn't ask him in. Let him make that decision. In India, she would feel uncomfortable - she knows she would! - if she found herself in an apartment alone with a man not related to her, but the rules are different in Guttenberg. Here one has to size up the situation and make up one's own rules. Or is it, here, that one has to seize the situation?

> …She looks down at the floor, at his two-tone New Balance running shoes. The shoes deepen her blush. She is in a new country with no rules. No grown man in India she knows wears gym shoes except for cricket or squash. But there's mud on his New Balances, a half-moon of mud around each toe part…[21]

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[21]Bharati Mukherjee: *Visitors*. In: Darkness, New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992, 143–144. Further quotes from this novel appear parenthetically as V, p.

Unsurprisingly, given the signs difficult to decipher, the reaction is insecure and itself ambivalent:

> She takes two hesitant steps back, her left hand entwined with the elongated clay neck of the larger horse. Here, as in India, friends stop by without calling, and she is foolish to worry over why the graduate student in his running shoes has come with a poster in the early afternoon. ('All that formality of may-I-come? or hope-we're-not-disturbing-you is for Westerners,' the immigrant joke among themselves. She has heard it once already this afternoon from Mrs. Thapar. 'We may have minted a bit of money in this country, but that doesn't mean we've let ourselves become Americans. You can see we've remained one hundred percent simple and *deshi* in our customs.'). (V, 143–144)

The protagonist's Vanita Kumar's train of thought in *Visitors* exhibits her insecurity about how to behave in the new, foreign country. Her dilemma emerges through the conflict between the outer American milieu and her inner *Indianness* that she has not let go of yet, due not least to the reinforcement of her earlier visitors that same afternoon, Mrs. Leela Mehara and Mrs. Kamila Thapar. Both of them are the typical preservers of their original culture in a foreign environment in order not to

> become bad-tempered and self-centered, too American. (V, 141)

Due to the *Indianness* also of her new visitor, Vanita decides for *deshiness* and familiarity with her "old" identity. She finally

> is relieved that… the period of indecision is over. (*V* 145)

However, after

> [t]he young man has turned her into a siren (V, 148),

her decision and above all her gnawing conscience to have to balance the old and the new do eventually

> lead to disproportionate disaster. (V, 144)

The old rule of literature: *To make the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar*, here turns into cultural confusion. Since this rule is at the same time an inbuilt mechanism of migration and multiculturalism, it is characteristic of any "art of multiculturalism" too: Mukherjee exemplifies it most faithfully in all her works.

5.4.5 Brand Names

Let us eventually just give a few examples which remind another of Pop art's main motifs: *Brand names* as both cultural and characterizational shorthand. *Information on food and consumerist goods* takes up a large space throughout Mukherjee's work. The people in her stories eat Basmati rice, dal, bhindi, dalchapatis and wheat chapatis, rotis, pakoras, poppadoms, pork vindaloo, fish Bengal curry and goat curry, samosas, raita salads, spiced lentils and vegetable pillau, mango and lemon

pickle, French fries, Oreo cookies, and crostolis. Their drinks range from hot Horlick's to Darjeeling and masala tea, from cold, non-alcoholic drinks such as Coca Cola and Fanta, to alcoholic refreshments, from wine, Lancôme Cote to Heineken beer, from sweet liquors such as Kalúha and cocktails to Dubonnet topped with Ginger Ale to stronger stuff like Liebfraumilch, Cinzano, Jack Daniels and Entre Deux Mers. They smoke Gauloise and Sobrani and read newspapers and magazines with regard to their interests and geographical location: *Indian Ladies Weekly, Ladies of Calcutta Journal, Calcutta Observer, Calcutta Patrika* and the *Reader* of Bombay, *Feminine Weekly, The New Yorker, Time, National Geographic, Scientific American,* or *Technology Review*. They wear Adidas or Reeboks, Gucci shoes and Balducci, drive Mazdas, Renaults, Peugeots, Fiats, Volvos, Audis, Porsches, Chevys, and Buik Skylarks, pay with MasterCard, Visa or American Express, go shopping at Barnes & Noble, Goodwill, Fortunoff or K-Mart and acquire furniture at Macy's and Bloomingdale's. And every single brand used has its specific meaning, mythology, identity implication, and cultural hint—and even more so if different brands are combined.

Chapter 6
Mukherjee and the Future of Multiculturalism as "Imaginal Politics"

Abstract This chapter describes the perspectives of Mukherjees idea of "imaginal politics", including her envisaged integration of literature and science, and the resulting character of multiculturalism conceived more as an artistic-scientific process than a final goal.

If these are the main issues, topics, aspirations and techniques of Mukherjee's writing, the question to address in conclusion is about their future projection envisaged by the author herself. While harvesting some one-sidednesses due to her own biographical journey, Mukherjee's work always tried to be not naïve either in the evaluation of existing, or in the projection of possible and potential ways and forms of multiculturalism. On the contrary: In private conversations with her, an often astounding insecurity and ambiguity about the future potentials both of "multiculturalism as art" and of "art as multiculturalism" emerged.

The only firm star on Mukherjee's firmament was the belief in the principal value of "Imaginal Politics", i.e. in the use of literary and artistic imagination to create a better reality by better "understanding from the inside", although she often criticized the place of art in current society and world dynamics, and thus was conscious of its limits with regard to concrete progress.

What Mukherjee pointed out as future potential were, as expression of a quite realistic, and in essence rather cautious, contained, if not reluctant vision, first and foremost two hopes of future "boosters":

(1) the potentials of a new merger of art, including literature, with technology; and
(2) the interjection of art, including literature, with science and theoretical knowledge.

Both dimensions according to Mukherjee could pave the way to new, more integrated and at the same time more realistic, down-to-earth and contemporary versions of multiculturalism as "social art", able to neither ignore its still unused

chances nor the noticeable dangers inbuilt in its very bases and self-concept if globalization proceeds at the present speed.

6.1 Interconnections of Future Art with Technology: Bridging the "Two Cultures"?

For Mukherjee, there are many interconnections of future art with technology. Technology, in her view, may

> solve… man's oldest or second-oldest preoccupation, to master time, which seems even harder than mastering space,

> one can read in *The Holder of the World*. (HW, 278–279)

Machines, in the—widely converging—eyes of Mukherjee's stories, are in principle devices for mastering both time and space. Machines were integral parts of Pop art works, for instance, in the form of machine-printed art products. Consequentially, the integration of technology into art was one of the decisive achievements of Pop art. Marshal McLuhan's famous slogan "The medium is the message" was taken very seriously by Pop artists. The medium itself became part of the conveyed message, and it was often represented by technology given the ever-increasing importance of technology in everyday-life production practices since the 1950s and in particular since the 1960s.

As a consequence, mechanical reproduction and mass production in art came to the foreground. Robert Rauschenberg used several techniques to reproduce motifs and art works, such as transfer drawing, imprints, silk-screen printing and other kinds of graphical printing. His lithographic series *Stoned Moon* (October 1969), which has technology both as its object and content, was inspired by the launching of the Apollo 11 moon rocket from NASA Kennedy Space Center in July 1969.[1] Andy Warhol also used technology-based reproduction techniques: multiplied printed images are a recurrent procedure, and his blotted-line and silk-screened paintings exhibit the technological character underlying their production. Warhol's much-quoted phrase, "I want to be a machine," is telling for a whole epoch that fostered a new relation between art and technology. It is, however, not to be understood as a slogan for the dehumanization of wo/man and her and his consequent mechanization, but as a reference to the theme of art under contemporary conditions, where the content of the artwork, technology, had to correspond with the form, which was becoming more and more technological.

Mukherjee kept abreast of the progress and development of the times with great consequence, trying to explore the potentials between multiculturalism, art and technology. Her literary commitment to technology is focused on computer science and everything connected to the (early) digital revolution of the 1990s. Cyberspace

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[1]Tilman Osterwold, *Pop Art*, loc cit., 150.

and virtual reality are smoothly combined with traditional art and literature. Or as Mukherjee more directly stated:

> Virtual reality is technology - I pioneered this for fiction as fictional strategy. It enables us to imagine ourselves in a situation that we could not logically and biologically put ourselves in. So virtual reality to me is about a strategy in order to enhance imagination and enlarge sympathy… It means I can zigzag into any year, any time that I want. (UIV, 26)

In the framework of such aspiration, the old gap between art and science is diminished by Mukherjee. For her, their traditional oppositional status represents just another chance for *fusion*. Mukherjee's

> point is that science is a companion to, is complementary with art and not its enemy. (UIV, 28)

She even goes on to say that in the future,

> art has to be complemented by technology as in *The Holder*. (UIV, 35)

In her view there are indeed several aspects where contemporary art, the multicultural aspiration and technology meet, if not (have to) meld together in open and often surprising ways. There are in particular two dimensions of extended contours and features to explore, with which we will conclude our journey through Mukherjee's early attempt towards an "art of multiculturalism".

6.1.1 Literary Worldmaking and the Laws of Mechanics

According to Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* is, at its center, a fictional treatise on the espousal between art and technology to expand the frontiers of "multi-dimensional" culture. Beigh Masters and her lover, Venn Iyer, symbolize the two realms respectively. Beigh (*art*) is an asset hunter; her interest in artefacts and Moghul India discloses a whole world to her. And yet, by retracing the biography of her historical heroine Salem Bibi, Beigh has to acknowledge that without technology it is impossible to elicit, concur and remember all facts.

Conversely, Venn (*technology*) is a computer expert with an innovative project: combining virtual reality with data storage in order to create programs able to depict stories and environments so rich in information and variation that they resemble reality, if not (re-)create reality *both* as a representation and as a (new) original. It is obvious that this is exactly what art traditionally does and aspires to do—in particular Mukherjee's literature. It suggests that in the upcoming years, the most developed technology may come close to art by its own evolution to always greater information "density". But what impact may that have on multiculturalism and its "Imaginal Politics"?

In *The Holder of the World*, Venn's project can handle data density, aggregation of data and data interconnectedness. But his technology lacks a human being's intuitive and creative quality, which is indispensable for setting up such an ambitious program in the first place. The "links" which regulate the net-working and

connectivity among individual information units have to be established; and the "nodes," the basic units of information storage and interconnection, must be defined and set in relation by means of the links. Otherwise it is impossible to "navigate" through the overall "program" as an individualized journey.[2]

With these passages in *The Holder of the World* (1993), hypertext and hyper-media are anticipated and discussed as—merely technological—literary procedures in their options, potentials and limits. This is typical for Mukherjee's work of the 1970s to the 1990s. It is in fact "literary prose" that

> poses certain hierarchical problems for a computer, and for his [Venn's] program. (HW, 280)

To start with, knowledge as such is a question of a

> recapturing of past reality, not just the retrieval of information (HW, 280),

i.e. of the trans-disciplinary inclusion of a life of images, which in the case of Salem Bibi expanded

> three continents and thirty years. (HW, 279)

After all, *raw data* are not isolated, self-contained and neutral:

> There are assets and debits. There are hot leads and dead ends. (HW, 279)

Eventually, with the *fusion* of the technological-statistical with the literary-intuitive provided by Beigh, Venn is successful in devising a virtual reality of Hannah Easton, alias Salem Bibi. That enables Beigh to relive moments of Bibi's experience. Yet at the beginning it is still an uncertain project with many inbuilt problems for Beigh:

> I live in three time zones simultaneously, and I don't mean Eastern, Central and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future. The television news is on, Venn's at his lab, and I'm reading *Auctions & Acquisitions*, one of the trade mags in my field. People and their property often get separated. Or people want to keep their assets hidden. Nothing is ever lost, but continents and centuries sometimes get in the way. Uniting people and posses-sions; it's like matching orphaned socks, through time.
>
> According to *A & A*, a small museum between Salem and Marblehead has acquired a large gem. It isn't the gem that interests me. It's the inscription and the provenance. Anything having to do with Mughal India gets my attention. Anything about the Salem Bibi, Precious-as-Pearl, feeds me.
>
> Eventually, Venn says, he'll be able to write a program to help me, but the technology is still a little crude. We've been together nearly three years, which shrinks to about three weeks if you deduct his lab time. He animates information. He's out there beyond virtual reality, re-creating the universe, one nanosecond, one minute at a time. He comes from India. (HW, 5)

Mukherjee's "literary" focus on information technology is no accident. It is the realm of technology where India was an internationally leading player already in

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[2]Cf. Jonassen and Grabinger (1989, 5–6).

the 1990s. And it is information technology that at the same time is the most important interconnection between India and the U.S., namely between India and California where Mukherjee lived.

Mukherjee's undertaking of connecting art with technology in *The Holder of the World* remains nevertheless complex. A first level of potential meaning: the *unification* of the two realms of creation is accompanied by *two* further movements of *fusion*.

The *first* movement takes place in the dimension on which once again the liaison of the two worlds East and West is depicted. Beigh represents the West, America, and Venn the East, India. Venn's immigration to the Western world and Beigh's exploratory journey to India transform them both by venturing the respective *Other*. In this process, the relation with *the Other* does not remain on the surface, but runs deep. It sparks off reactions which change the interior structure of both protagonists, and thus reveal new cognitions which in turn lead to new, complemented, more comprehensive world views.

> Right now, somewhere off Kendall Square in an old MIT office building, he's establishing a grid, a data base. The program is called X-2989, which translates to October 29, 1989, the day his team decided, arbitrarily, to research. By 'research' they mean the mass ingestion of all the world's newspapers, weather patterns, telephone directories, satellite passes, every arrest, every television show, political debate, airline schedule… do you know how many checks were written, that day, how many credit card purchases were made? Venn does. When the grid, the base, is complete, they will work on the interaction with a personality. Anyone. In five years, they'll be able to interpose me, or you, over the grid for upward of ten seconds. In the long run, the technology will enable any of us to insert ourselves anywhere and anytime on the time-space continuum for as long as the grid can hold. (HW, 5–7)

But what world would that be? And what kind of "story" would really be created by it, if art and technology become one and the same?

> It will look like a cheap set, he fears. He watches 'Star Trek,' both the old and the new series, and remarks on the nakedness of the old sets, like studio sets of New York in 1940s movies. The past presents itself to us, always, somehow simplified. He wants to avoid that fatal unclutteredness, but knows he can't. (HW, 5–7)

But once science fiction becomes real, the protagonists discover, there will be more things to consider—for example, that despite all seemingly "god-like" powers of Human-Machine-Interaction (and recently Human-Machine-Convergence) the human condition will return, always and always again. Ironically, the most progressive technology will again put two basic aspects of *being human* at the center of literally "everything": Individuality, and the question how individual experience and technological world-creating can be compared and shared through with other individualities so that it can be mutually understood and integrated—which is of course the center question of multiculturalism. According to Mukherjee, even in an upcoming hyper-technological age where time-traveling may be available, individuality, and individual responsibility of one own's experience will remain the same:

Every time-traveler will create a different reality - just as we all do now. No two travelers will be able to retrieve the same reality, or even a fraction of the available realities. History's a big savings bank, says Venn, we can all make infinite reality withdrawals. But we'll be able to compare our disparate experience in the same reality, and won't that be fun? Jack and Jill's twenty-second visit to 3:00 p.m. on the twenty-ninth of October, 1989.

Every time-traveler will punch in the answers to a thousand personal questions - the team is working on the thousand most relevant facts, the thousand things that make me me, you you - to construct a kind of personality genome. Each of us has her own fingerprint, her DNA, but she has a thousand other unique identifiers as well. From that profile X-2989 will construct a version of you. By changing even one of the thousand answers, you can create a different personality and therefore elicit a different experience. Saying you're brown-eyed instead of blue will alter the withdrawal. Do blonds really have more fun? Stay tuned. Because of information overload, a five-minute American reality will be denser, more 'lifelike,' than five minutes in Africa. But the African reality may be more elemental, dreamlike, mythic. (HW, 5–7)

The result is, and for Mukherjee it is the same for science fiction technology as for contemporary literature:

With a thousand possible answers we can each create an infinity of possible characters. And so we contain a thousand variables, and history is a billion separate information bytes. Mathematically, the permutations do begin to resemble the randomness of life. Time will become as famous as place. There will be time-tourists sitting around saying, 'Yeah, but have you ever been to April fourth? Man!'

My life has gotten just a little more complicated than my ability to describe it. That used to be the definition of madness, now it's just discontinuous overload. (HW, 5–7)

In *The Holder of the World*, Venn, the Indian-born computer expert, devises a program for the storage of infinite knowledge and information wilderness that can be handled through virtual reality with its limitless storage capacity,

sucking all data into itself like an informational black hole. (HW, 214)

Its unbound possibilities of combinatorial retrieval are independent of spatial or temporal restrictions. As a new human-computer interface with unprecedented abilities, virtual reality with its unrestrained possibilities of world simulation, creation of alternate worlds could become, as the story suggests, a playground of experience, invoking and enhancing the average human power of imagination and visualization. In that way, technology may be an aid for literature and the arts—or will it be its substitution? Will art and technology become metaphors of each other, "merging the metaphoric with the literal"?

As the proponents of such a merger imagine, realities within realities may be created, belief suspended and creative potential enhanced.[3] Will we then ultimately all live in a "cosmic" time beyond time, i.e., in

three time zones simultaneously… the past, the present and the future,

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[3]Cf. Michael Heim: The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality. In: *Virtual Reality: Theory, Practice, and Promise*, eds. Sandra K. Helsel and Judith Paris Roth. Westport and London: Meckler 1991, 27ff.

as Beigh asserts? And will we be invigorated by a resulting

> cosmic energy that quickens and governs the universe? (HW, 219)

Will the art-technology interface give us the powers for a better, more multi-faceted and multidimensional self, and for improved collective design? That would make the art-technology or technology-art indeed a form of "social art" or "social sculpture".

But even if we interpret *The Holder of the World* in such—rather simplistic and probably all too optimistic—ways, the underlying ambiguity can never be overheard. Line by line, Mukherjee weaves the ascent of technology and its potential "fusion" with art into the story, the eventual "merging" of differing "cultures": the "two cultures"[4] of the natural sciences and the humanities. The result would be a "more complex" self: a self that has learned from East and West and has grown by integrating both through a journey which finally integrates different times and spaces and thus develops new habits and experiences. Yet that such a self could become the new, upcoming "Holder of the World" and thus to some extent a timely realization of multiculturalism, appears in Mukherjee's early work both as an ideal and a caricature, a hope and a doubt. Neither of these two dimensions can be reduced to the other. Such ambiguity creates the "eroticism" of Mukherjee's story.

A final level of unification between art and technology in Mukherjee's work is enacted through the metaphorical representation of *gender difference*. Art, rendered by Mukherjee in rather traditional typological ways as the female principle, merges with technology, interpreted as the male principle. Beigh and Venn epitomize this difference. The woman is dedicated to aesthetic pursuits, whereas the man immerses in scientific-technological questions (coming close to a cliché). Their relationship brings both realms together by mutual personal interest. It eventually leads to Venn's virtual reality program using Beigh's research materials. Venn's program enables Beigh to make a "reality withdrawal" by living a different person's life for ten seconds. By turning back the time machine for several hundred years, she can relive moments of the past of that person with whom she has already partly merged through her imagination. When Beigh accompanies Venn to his lab she has a crucial experience, in which the humanistic and the scientific provinces are blended:

> The first thing I saw was *The Unravish'd Bride* hanging on the wall above Venn's desk, not that he has ever learned to sit at one.
>
> 'I think what I have may interest you, Beigh. This is my present to you.'
>
> He has absorbed my manuscript and all the documents, the travelogues and computerized East India records, the lavishly illustrated *namas*, or chronicles, of the emperors of the Mughal dynasty. He is a thorough researcher; all this is to be expected, even on his own time. Literary prose, as he calls my book, poses certain hierarchical problems for a computer, or for his program, but he thinks, just thinks, he may have found a way of rendering even my words into images. And the diamond is the clue: the fact that it is the biggest and

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[4]Charles Percy Snow: *The Two Cultures*. London: Cambridge University Press 1959.

most perfect crystal in the world may just be an accident, a kind of informational pun, but it gave him an idea.

'Would you like to find the Emperor's Tear?' he asked.

It's necessary that I undergo the search; the program is interactive, and when Venn tried it, all he got was a post card view of modern Madras. The program will give you what you most care about; your mind is searching through the program though you don't realize it - it is interacting with my thousand-answer questionnaire - until it finds a place it wants to jump in.

While he did his adjusting, I took down Hannah's - Pearl's - picture from the wall. The blond woman in a sari, the garish Mughal jewels, the diamond fused into the cupped hands of a proud potentate, the destruction, the fiery sky, the wounded, dying Jadav Singh. Venn slipped the helmet, the goggles, the special gloves on me. (HW, 280–281)

Venn eventually has found his "crystal garden," the "data plasma" which generates a fully interactive world of the life that Beigh has reconstructed

through three continents and thirty years. (HW, 278)

It is the life of Hannah Easton Fitch Legge, Salem Bibi, Precious-as-Pearl, the World-Healer, the Unravish'd Bride who are all the same person over time. For this reconstruction, Beigh has intuitively gathered a vast amount of notes by consulting five hundred books, studying endless paintings, engravings, trade records, journals, and investigating the travel and documentary picture taking. By using her collection of information, Venn is able to implement a computer-assisted time reconstruction. His achievement is

the recapturing of past reality, not just the retrieval of information. (HW, 280)

Therefore, his virtual reality program is not merely time-travel, but

time-retrieval, to put it in… [his] terms (HW, 35),

since it is

time on a scale of 1:1, with a new concept of real time… (HW, 138)

Exactly as literature and art always wanted to be. Protected with her helmet, screened with her goggles and shielded with the special gloves to cut out her actual world, via the virtual reality time machine Beigh plunges into Bibi-Hannah's reality and becomes part of the Moghul painting that she always so much admired:

'HANNAH!' I scream against the cannons and flying bullets. I can barely breathe from the sulfur clouds, my eyes burn, and I reach out to hold her, my hand closes on her shoulder and she turns, my hand is brown, with a tinkling gold bangle. She is a beautiful woman, more Pre-Raphaelite than I had imagined, with crinkly golden hair. I try to pull her my way, but she shakes her head, 'No, no, Hester - don't you see?' and now I do, though clouds of smoke are rolling in and the light is still faint, and a fine, misty rain is falling. What I see is the old man standing with his back to the battle, facing the inner courtyard where the small figure of the bent warrior is slumped, his face bloody, and the old man is holding the diamond aloft, turning its facets to capture the light of a hundred fires.

He turns - I know that face from a hundred portraits of Aurangzeb, or 'Alamgir, the World-Holder' - a look of demented satisfaction on his face. Victory is his, vengeance and

retribution and an open road to unlimited plunder and mass conversion, and suddenly his mouth opens wide, he tries to scream but the battle sounds are too loud, his attendants are all focused on the wave of Devgad warriors shooting at the fort from kneeling positions in the plowed-up field.

Now we are running along the parapet; I squeeze past the rows of sharpshooters, bumping them, they curse me as I pass, and suddenly I feel her warm hand and hear her command, 'Hester, take it,' and a heavy warm glasslike object is in my hand, and we are flying down the deep stone stairs set so far apart that descent is a kind of leaping into a darkened void, each landing jars my knees and my ankles, but I am fast and strong, I have never run like this, breathless now, pulling Hannah behind me, and we are out into the field in the middle of a firefight, fair game for either side. (HW, 281–283)

But the virtual reality gets even closer to real experience when things get more dangerous:

I scream with agony from the hot white flaming explosion in my shoulder that has spun me around and dropped me to the cool, wet soil. Hannah is on her knees, crying, Hester, Hester, Bhagmati, pray, pray, we must get back… I try to hold the diamond out, but it is slippery with my blood.

'Mukta!' I scream, the pain blacking me out, and now a second bullet fired down on me from the parapet rakes my leg, puncturing the fleshy portion of my calf, and I think almost with satisfaction, Well, that settles it, no more running for me.

'Go, I command you,' but I can't raise my head, and my voice is like a metal file rasping through my shoulder, astonishing pain, my words are pain, my breathing is pain, but I am like a dreamer aware of her dream even as she can't escape it. I feel in the folds of my sari for the knife I know I have, and it is there for me.

Hannah, my Pearl, is no longer visible. Light is spreading but it is not the light of dawn; it is the light of extinguishment… I plunge the knife deep in my belly, watch with satisfaction, and now with the mastery of my pain, the blood bubble from my beautiful brown flesh. More, I think, and plunge the knife deeper, plunge it as Hannah had into the back of Morad Farah, and make a burrow inside me. I feel the organs, feel the flesh, the bowels of history, and with my dying breath I plunge the diamond into the deepest part of me. (HW, 281–283)

The return from such virtual experience is as painful, as it is "real":

VENN SAYS he was about to pull me out of it, the screaming, running, writhing, my tears, my adrenaline and heart rate and endorphins all indicated a near-death experience; even the plunge in my blood pressure and pulse was consistent with mortal trauma. He understood me - apparently I was shouting partially in his language, which, of course, I don't know.

My shoulder still throbbed, and it continues to ache at night, and sometimes I feel in my gut that I really am incubating an enormous diamond. (HW, 281–283)

In *The Holder of the World*, technology becomes a metaphor for future multicultural literature. Here, virtuality creates "fused" identities which are perceived as real, although they are a technology-induced dream. Nevertheless, once these identities are acquired, they become so real in personal experience that they make up a part of one's own self. With this, a kind of *catharsis*, or purification occurs in the mind of the user. According to Mukherjee, if such purification could be achieved, it would make literature indeed the new multicultural art of the future.

6.1.2 Practical Experience Needing Abstract Knowledge— And Vice Versa

In *The Holder of the World*, gender-specific knowledge is explored with regard to the induced space-time-character Hannah. In the journey into the past (the Moghul painting), it is juxtaposed with the male characters Dr. Aubrey on the one hand and Hubert on the other. Although the female and male characteristics oppose each other when confronted, they eventually hint at a higher, complementary synthesis and enriched view of joint cognition.

Dr. Aubrey is a medical doctor and expert in leech arrangement. He represents the male institutionalized knowledge. He implements his theoretically learned knowledge, which for him is logical reasoning and logical treatment.

> 'I have treated these injuries,' said Hannah. 'You must trust me.'
>
> 'Madam, I am a physician and bleeder trained by the Royal College.'
>
> 'And I am a survivor of Indian massacres,' said Hannah.
>
> …She knew the herbs to boil with the bandages and the importance of changing the dressings and permitting the wound to drain. And all the while, she lectured the Doctor and the parents on the practice of medicine in the Bay Colony, how frontier warfare placed a premium on cranial nurses, how timing was all, how infection wiped out the most delicate surgery, how unpredictable paralysis could result.
>
> None of this seemed logical to the Doctor. He had only his own reputation and that of his domesticated leeches to worry about." (HW, 82–83)

Hannah has acquired her nursing and healing methods practically, based on first-hand experience, from her mother and from the Nipmuc Indians; additionally, she taught herself the sewing and healing of scalped heads. It was first

> condemned as shameful witchery owing far too much to nighttime aboriginal conjurings (HW, 49)

but when she saved a boy's life, she

> was to be congratulated - and forgiven - for her quick, if unconventional, thinking. What she did was instinctual, issuing from a good heart and not, as originally charged, an occult affinity. (HW, 83)

Nonetheless,

> [t]he leeches did their work, Dr. Aubrey… explained several days later when the boy awoke from his coma…
>
> All in all, the Doctor attested, the results were better than he had expected. Without the prompt intervention of a trained physician with a thorough knowledge of the bleeding portals, however, the boy would have been lost. (HW, 83)

Hannah's pragmatic knowledge, her woodland secrets, cannot be fully accepted. On the contrary, this "female" knowledge is associated with conjurers. In many of Mukherjee's novels, knowledge that is not well-established by the professional male domain, but brought forward by a woman's intuition and tactile understanding

remains suspicious. Either tolerated as blessing powers or brutally suppressed as uncanny witchery, non-institutionalized competences are regarded as irrational, non-scientific and non-natural—and in *The Holder of the World* lead to a hunt on Hannah:

> …those who heal by suspension of God's law can also inflict injury at long distance through the agency of the Prince of Darkness, and wasn't it passing strange that she hailed from Salem, the very town where the prevalence of witches had called special courts into session and brought down God's severest judgment on the most recalcitrant? She [Hannah] needed Dr. Aubrey's defense and public-spirited protection, and got it. (HW, 83–84)

Eventually, the unfathomed female knowledge survives only since it is safeguarded by the dominant male realm of reason. Although the relation is hierarchical, the practical, intuitive knowledge in turn exerts a considerable power on the well-defined, transparent reasoning. When the latter becomes dulled and when logics—or what is considered logical—is turned into paralogy, precognition takes over. The two realms *fuse*:

> The Doctor sought her [Hannah] out on other cases of head injury. (HW, 83)

Her woodland poultices eventually aid the Royal College training.

The other male character in *The Holder of the World*, Hubert, represents Hannah's second counterpart: academic, abstract knowledge versus real-world, concrete knowledge; explicit versus implicit understanding. Hubert has been educated in Newton's new sciences of Mathematics and Physics and holds a position as a researcher with the Royal Society. His method of obtaining knowledge is proceeded by experiment, whereas Hannah and "the discoverers she had known" follow

> certain knowledge and unbending ritual, like the forest Indians, or the ministers of God. (HW, 85)

Hubert lives in a world of ideas and theories. In fact, his

> ignorance in matters of the real world rivaled… no one's that Hannah had… ever met. (HW, 84)

Hannah's method of gaining insight by experimental application is a pragmatic way to acquire knowledge of the world, and her spiritual way involves intuition and precognitive abilities. In contrast, Hubert is the systematic, rational type, who only trusts in his material experiments. As a result, he gets access to reality by verification/falsification, dialectic reasoning and eventual synthesis:

> …knowledge of the natural world, or the spiritual world, seemed to her immense but finite, learnable. Hubert's knowledge, and his means of gaining even more learning, were of a different order. She knew many more things than he did. But what was knowable, in Hannah's sense, was also discountable. He was interested in learning only those things that his own experiments also created. He could not teach his methods, or his results, to her. (HW, 85)

Hubert, the scientist, approaches the phenomena of the world inductively. Yet by employing the scientific method of synthesis, in the course of *The Holder of the World* he blends together Hannah's enumerative, loose and seemingly disconnected knowledge. He devises

> a system whereby her knowledge of herbs and barks and certain surgical practices followed a logical pattern. They were not isolated facts. What had seemed a set of arbitrary facts, that bandages should be clean, water should be boiled, bleeding should be cauterized and not prolonged by leeches, that certain natural aids had medicinal qualities, and that these practices often induced favorable results, pointed to a larger synthesis of knowledge. (HW, 85)

The merging of two gender-specific, different kinds of knowledge and approaches to world-understanding is taken one step further with Hubert compared to Dr. Aubrey. Hubert approaches Hannah's world scientifically and thus induces a *fusion* between his and her world, whereas Dr. Aubrey, although consulting Hannah and protecting her, remains, although mainly subconsciously, in essence skeptical about her methods. The final step in the process of "fusion" is achieved when the male scholar and believer in positivistic results Hubert is known to also believe in supernatural forces:

> Hubert believed in a medical heresy so bizarre that even to speak it would imperil his standing as a scientist… He studied Life Processes, and his observations suggested to him the possibility that illness and infection and perhaps even disease itself were not related to spells and self-generated evils, but to invisible and invasive forces from nature. (HW, 85)

6.2 A Broader Concept of Multi-culturalism: Towards a Mutual Wooing of Art and Science?

The merging of technology and art, of science and the humanities is an essential motive throughout Bharati Mukherjee's early and middle work, as it is the desirable "fusion" of male and female knowledge and practice. In Mukherjee's worlds, all these mergers are part of an enhanced practice of multiculturalism. Positivistic separation and ranking invested with exclusive legitimation power are constantly being deconstructed in her stories.

In this, Mukherjee is a typical representative of postmodernism. The never-ending, although often futile attempt of reconciliation between the "two cultures" science and art is typical for the postmodern psyche; and this attempt was paradoxically prepared by the modernists, who were in their majority technophiles. Postmodernism, and multiculturalism with it, in this sense reveals itself not as a defiance of modernism, but actually as its fruit. It is not, as German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch puts it referring to Gianni Vattimo, a "trans-modernity" or "anti-modernity," but a "natural" succession, development and transformation of it.[5]

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[5]Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora 1987, 138.

With the arts—and art movements'—proliferation in the late modernist period, hermeneutics, constructivism and deconstructivism, which are the keys to the understanding of late 20th century art, including Mukherjee's literature, were beginning to represent a cultural counterpart to scientific knowledge. The two counterparts gradually approached each other, moving away from their antagonistic places towards each other until they interlocked at some crucial contact points: *interdisciplinarity* and *relativism*, understood in a positive sense as a critical valorization of humanistic, non-formal knowledge.

6.3 The Potential Fusion of Modernism and Postmodernism, or: Mainstream Goes Multiculturalism?

Overall, Mukherjee felt she took profit of the convergence between art and science starting from her very first literary works. As we have seen, from the viewpoint of Mukherjee's "Pop-art-like" work from the 1970s to the 1990s "postmodernism" can be termed as "most-modernism" with an increased emphasis on plurality. Postmodernism, as seen with Mukherjee's eyes, is an evolutionary, natural offspring of modernism, with "intensified" traits and without aspiration to universalize cognition, knowledge and truth, or homogenizing facts and forms of being under just one heading. On the contrary, the fetish of totality that hunted modernity is dismissed, and difference, paralogy and fecundity, the multiple forms of life and world are advocated, endorsed and disseminated. Compared to the modernist effort it is a more relaxed, tolerant and accepting attitude. And for Mukherjee, what is true for the relationship between modernism and postmodernism is exactly what a new relationship between mainstream culture and multiculturalism could be about: a mutually enriching convergence. Fusion of modern and postmodern traits to the point where mainstream culture goes multiculturalism, and vice versa, is what Bharati Mukherjee's "Imaginal Politics" are about.

6.4 Outlook: Multiculturalism, Radical Pluralism and the Dangers of "Imaginal Politics" in a "G-Zero World"

Nevertheless, even this trajectory too is a coin with two sides—like every other since the start of modernity, i.e. since the beginning of highly differentiated social order patterns where contradictions find their ways to co-exist in often conflicting and processual ways without ever really coming to a "clean" solution or to a "final"

state. For Mukherjee, multiculturalism like postmodernism is a reservoir and receptacle of plurality, diversity, difference and variety. It nevertheless cannot escape the character of being productively contradictory in its core. The borderline between the realm of thorough, arbitrary, but to some extent "ordered" chaos and the alleged postmodern slogan "anything goes" (Paul Feyerabend) in its lowest, literal meaning, devoid of all moral and ethical principles, with the consequential uninhibitedness and lack of security and continuity, is frail. And when multiculturalism develops into a too radical pluralism, it may become in many cases inexistent, since it then tends to create shadow-, side- or counter-cultures besides and against the center culture without essential touching points between center and periphery. In this extreme case, multiculturalism can lead to cultural separation and ultimately ends in ghettoization.

The rise of a "G-Zero world"[6] with many centers and no clear lead power where always larger numbers of people are moving has geopolitically strengthened such trends since the 1990s. Where processes of de- and acculturation occur on too broad a scale and in too short a time, counter-reactions occur, as seen in the recent re-nationalization of Western democracies and other countries around the world, which has marginalized the idea of multiculturalism in reaction to its too radical increase and impact.[7] The transformation of "Imaginal Politics" into propaganda for an unordered world and the unconnected cultural fragmentation of developed societies by some representatives of (political) multiculturalism has shown the dangers of its ideologization and idealization, and populism has been one answer.

These reflections are taken very serious by Mukherjee. In fact, they are considered as critical. There is no novel or story of Mukherjee's of the 20th century that does not dedicate a good part of its pages to mirroring and reflecting the dangers of radical difference, which constitutes a human condition even more intensely in multicultural constellations and settings. Mukherjee's characters fail more often than they succeed. Life can prove to be too multifaceted and contradictory and thus become unbearable, life management impossible, the status quo insuperable, and as one possible consequence decline unstoppable, depending on a character's weakness, susceptibility and feeling of loss within an over-complex environment. Mukherjee's insight is that multiculturalism is always over-complex, although in transitory ways. Her characters represent the full scale from utter disorientation to godlike self-empowerment, from falling prey to the postmodernist's multicultural dangers to arrogant opportunism.

Indeed, the hazards of multiculturalism are without doubt many, and it would be naïve to deny it. In his piercing review of the books *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* and *Just Gaming* by postmodernist "pope" Jean-François Lyotard, Terry

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[6]Ian Bremmer: *Every Nation for Itself. What Happens When Nobody Leads the World*, loc cit.

[7]Fareed Zakaria: *Populism on the March. Why the West is in Trouble*. In: *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2016 Issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-17/populism-march.

Eagleton under the title "Awakening from modernity" bluntly (and to some extent cynically) remarks:

> There can be no appeal to general criteria of truth and justice beyond our incommensurable language games: we should seek to understand the deadhunters, not change them… [Since postmodernism's and multiculturalism's] stance towards cultural tradition is one of irreverent pastiche, its contrived depthlessness undermines all metaphysical solemnities, sometimes by a brutal aesthetics of squalor and shock.[8]

As true as this may be also for some aspects of any art of multiculturalism, it is certainly not an issue in Bharati Mukherjee's work. It is perhaps one of Mukherjee's most notable and lasting achievements that her literature always—and consciously —moves exactly at the borderline between deconstruction, plurality of viewpoints, "compression", "fusion" and metaphysics, without ever privileging any of these realms. In our view, exactly that makes her literature contemporary. And it makes her literature "literature"—in the sense of letters, that are more than letters and thus endure and remain to be re-questioned.

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[8]Terry Eagleton: *Awakening from modernity*. In: Times Literary Supplement, 20 February 1987, p. 194.

Conclusion
Mukherjee's Legacy and the Shifts
in Applied Multiculturalism

Abstract The conclusion deals with the shifts in the perception and reality of applied multiculturalism since the 2000s, i.e. in the framework of the global refugee and migration crises combined with increasing global mobility. It describes a changing framework with which the idea and implementation of multiculturalism, as delineated by Mukherjee in the 1970s–1990s, will have to be in dialogue if its future in re-nationalizing Western societies is to be secured.

Keywords Contemporary Debate about the Future of Multiculturalism ·
Re-Nationalization · De-Globalization

Without doubt, Bharati Mukherjee was a genius in her own right. She was as strong a voice, as charismatic a character, and as energy-rich in imaginary power as in practical will. As *The New York Times* wrote on the occasion of her death,

> Mukherjee [was] an Indian-born American writer who explored the internal culture clashes of her immigrant characters. 'The narrative of immigration is the epic narrative of this millennium,' she wrote in an autobiographical statement for the reference work *Contemporary Authors* in 2005. In many of her novels and stories, a young woman — shaped, as she was, by a patriarchal culture—strikes out for the unknown, sometimes by choice and sometimes not. In the existential crisis that ensues, a new self emerges — or a series of selves, with multiple answers to the question 'Who am I?'[1]

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[1]William Grimes: *Bharati Mukherjee, Writer of Immigrant Life, Dies at 76*. In: The New York Times, February 1, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/books/bharati-mukherjee-dead-author-jasmine.html.

Her husband, writer Clarke Blaise, stated that

> 'She changed everything' [pointing to] Mukherjee's impact on American literature, which
> Blaise said is now dominated by immigrant narratives.[2]

Blaise made a good point, though he may have slightly exaggerated both Mukherjee's impact on a broader cultural level and the role of immigrant narratives in contemporary American literary production, particularly when seen in a lasting perspective and against the changing framework of the Trump era, unexpected as it was by many.

Mukherjee was a historic personality. Her art was first and foremost an artistic attempt to make multiculturalism an experience accessible to the average reader, acquainting them with the imaginaries (and imageries) of "Otherness", incorporating them into the "familiar". By getting such experience and gaining insight into different, yet concrete human life-forms through literature, the reader would investigate different cultural existences, and thus become more receptive and tolerant.

Mukherjee's life-long conviction was that art could foster a culture of understanding between different stripes of the population, and that art had to be able to reach more in-depth than usual socio-political debates, in order to construct a better fundament for coexistence: an enlarged and enhanced imaginary comprehension. The use of literature in this sense was her understanding of "Imaginal Politics". Mukherjee conceived literature as politics, and politics as literature. In her view, not only is politics in essence made up of language gaming and thus to a certain extent an "art" in itself; but literature, in turn, is a "natural" form of politics because it is language in its purest and thus socially strongest and historically most lasting form. Mukherjee's literature did not want to be simply "politically engaged", since she considered such art as propaganda. Instead, her writing wanted to go further in creating new political realities by contributing to the in-depth understanding of different cultures and times through imaginary experience.

With all this, Mukherjee contributed to paving the way for a literature that without doubt still remains a minority program to the present day, when the bigger picture is taken into consideration. Mukherjee created no school, and her impact on the literary scenery despite some very renowned recognitions and awards—such as the U.S. *National Book Critics Circle Award* in 1988—remained limited. On the one hand this is due to her outstanding literary accomplishments, which intimidated some of her potential followers and students who saw in her work the beacon of a new literature for the age of global migration. On the other hand, it had some origins in her sometimes raucous and authoritative personal style; as well as in her undeniably difficult personal balance between the retrospective mystification and forward-oriented demystification of her cultural origins. Particularly her comparative cultural judgements about the East and the West were sometimes one-sided, even unwantedly biased and pejorative against the West, i.e. her home for most of her lifetime.

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[2]Sydney Fix: *Author, former campus professor Bharati Mukherjee dies at 76*. In: The Daily Californian, February 6, 2017, http://www.dailycal.org/2017/02/05/author-former-campus-professor-bharati-mukherjee-dies-76/.

Overall, Mukherjee's work helped multiculturalism to go more mainstream in the form of "minority literature". At the same time it worked out, with great scrutiny and critical power, the persistent ambiguity of multiculturalism as such. Any consideration that takes emancipative "political" literature seriously and honors its efforts has to foster no illusions in the first place, independent of whether art is in principle a "positive deception", as Mukherjee intended it, or not. Mukherjee was conscious that despite all her attempts, the issue of multiculturalism remained ambiguous. Indeed, its very principles remain as questionable today as much as in the first days of Mukherjee's career. Can a human being really have more than one culture? And can an individual truly become a full member of two or more different civilizations (known in German as *Kulturkreis*) at the same time, without—consciously or unconsciously—creating a (hidden or open) internal hierarchy between them?

As both concept and practice of multiculturalism have matured since the 1970s and 1980s, reality seems to rather teach that it is not possible, as most polls and investigations by leading think tanks such as Chatham House London or by German universities, media and foundations have indicated over the past years. Many of them pointed, in particular, to the broad failure of the biggest experiment to date in trans-civilizational applied multiculturalism outside the U.S.: the integration of millions of Muslim immigrants in Europe since the end of WWII, and in particular since the 1970s. A majority of Europeans, according to an extended Chatham House Survey of 10,000 people across 10 European nations in 2017, was of the opinion that Islam and Western lifestyle are incompatible in principle, independent of the success of integration policies, and that all further immigration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped.[3]

Skepticism has gained further momentum since 2014–15 because of the concrete experiences with irregular mass migration to Europe in the framework and aftermath of "Europe's broken borders"[4], particularly with regard to mass refugee streams and the growing numbers of economic migrants who for example in Italy made up around 80% of all those arriving at the Southern peninsula's shores in 2015 and 2016. The refugee and migration crisis has since made Europe the global focal point of the most recent debate on multiculturalism, in lieu of the U.S. and Canada. Consequently, the conservative government of Donald Trump has been trying to take on the European experience to forge "new immigration policies" for America since January 2017. The current U.S. administration concentrates, in particular, on the example of Europe's lead nation, Germany, which has taken the lion's share of refugees and migrants to Europe already since the 1970s and especially since 2015.

Despite the most impressive and lasting efforts over decades, Germany's story with multiculturalism has not really been a success story as at yet. Despite positive

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[3]Matthew Goodwin and Thomas Raines: *What Do Europeans Think About Muslim Immigration? Chatham House Survey of more than 10,000 people from 10 European states*, 07 February 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration.

[4]Lukas Kaelin: *Europe's Broken Borders. How to Manage the Refugee Crisis*. In: *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2015-09-02/europes-broken-borders.

examples and achievements of integration, multiculturalism has shown its threatening face to many Europeans since 2015, for example by the disputed tolerance of German authorities of polygamy by Syrian immigrants within the limits of the German *Grundgesetz* (basic law, i.e. the liberal and democratic constitution). The German constitution forbids polygamy by law for everybody on German soil, yet it is *de facto* tolerated by the German federal and local authorities in multiple cases for Muslim immigrants for whom their second or third wives were permitted to enter the country (and thus the European Union) for family reunification.[5] Many see such "multicultural generosity" (which was not harmonized with other EU countries despite the principle of free, borderless movement within the EU) as the formal concession of parallel societies, since in practice it means that the modern constitution of a liberal society is no longer valid for everybody, but only for part of the population, whereas others live according to different, pre-modern rules within the same nation and society, thus creating "holes" within the rule of law and undermining the very basics of Western societies based on the equal treatment of everybody before the law.

Others see *such* "multiculturalism" as harmful for the fundaments of Western democracy and the equal social order idea in principle, since polygamy depreciates the woman in comparison to the man, is against the equality principle and overrides the fundamental values of individualism, human and personal rights as stipulated at the origins of the modern West in humanism, rationalism and enlightenment.

Debating such examples, in recent years an array of academics, opinion-makers and intellectuals such as Syrian-born Bassam Tibi[6], Peter Sloterdijk[7], Manfred Osten[8], Ruud Kopmans[9], and Gunnar Heinsohn[10] have come forward in Germany

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[5]Bild Deutschland: *Bei „Spiegel TV": Flüchtling spricht über seine zwei Ehefrauen. Eine davon durfte er nachholen, obwohl die Vielehe in Deutschland verboten ist*, 18.02.2018, http://www.bild.de/regional/hamburg/bigamie/syrer-spricht-ueber-seine-zwei-frauen-54849262.bild.html.

Cf. Bild Deutschland: *Zum Wohl der Kinder, die schon hier leben: Syrer darf Zweitfrau nach Deutschland holen*, 26.01.2018, http://www.bild.de/regional/hamburg/asylrecht/syrer-darf-zweitfrau-nach-deutschland-holen-54601704.bild.html. Cf. John Roth: *Mein Nachbar hat 4 Frauen und 23 Kinder*. In: Bild Deutschland, 19.10.2016, http://www.bild.de/news/inland/ehe/mein-nachbar-hat-vier-frauen-48362758.bild.html.

[6]Bassam Tibi: *Europa ohne Identität? Europäisierung oder Islamisierung*. Ibidem Verlag 2016.

[7]Peter Sloterdijk: *Der weite Weg zur Weltgesellschaft*. In: Handelsblatt Hamburg, 13.01.2017, http://www.handelsblatt.com/my/politik/international/essay-von-peter-sloterdijk-der-weite-weg-zur-weltgesellschaft/19245112.html. Cf. Peter Sloterdijk: *„Es gibt keine moralische Pflicht zur Selbstzerstörung"* ["There is no moral obligation to self-destruction"]. In: Cicero, 28.01.2016, https://www.cicero.de/innenpolitik/peter-sloterdijk-ueber-merkel-und-die-fluechtlingskrise-es-gibt-keine-moralische; and Michael Hesse: *Peter Sloterdijk: Der Philosoph spricht über Sozialdemokratie und Migration*. In: Berliner Zeitung, 31.05.2016, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur/peter-sloterdijk-der-philosoph-spricht-ueber-sozialdemokratie-und-migration-24148132.

[8]Manfred Osten: *Manfred Osten im Gespräch mit Peter Sloterdijk: „Krisenszenarien im 20. Jahrhundert"*. Mahler-Festspiele 2017, Kulturzentrum Toblach, 13.08.2017.

[9]Martin Beglinger: *Multikulti führt zu Abkapselung*. In: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 27.06.2017, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/medien/einwanderung-multikulti-fuehrt-zu-abkapselung-ld.1302919.

[10]Gunnar Heinsohn: *Europa wird den globalen Kampf ums technische Wissen verlieren*. In: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 30.10.2017. Cf. Gunnar Heinsohn: *Wohin mit den jungen Männern? Im Gespräch mit Ijoma Mangold und Adam Soboczynski*. In: DIE ZEIT, 21.11.2015.

warning of excessive "tolerance against the intolerant" and describing a too far-reaching multiculturalism as the biggest—because irreversible—threat for Western civilization and the fundaments of liberal democracy. All debaters, both proponents of excessive tolerance in the hope of "learning effects" over time and critics, agreed on one point: that the interface between migration and multiculturalism is the "great meta-theme of our time",[11] and that it will impact the future of Western societies perhaps more than any other factor and development in the long run.

There are other factors that have impacted the public Western view on multiculturalism in recent times. Overtourism[12] has also contributed to the decline of the idea of multiculturalism in Western societies, as it has been mingled rather indiscriminately with increasingly negative perceptions (and pejorative socio-cultural narratives) of mass migration. With flying and, in general, global civil mobility becoming common characteristics since the 1990s and particularly since the 2000s not any longer limited to the wealthy—such as in Mukherjee's case—but accessible to a growing share of the global population,[13] differences between tourism and migration have disappeared in the perception of many Westerners. In the framework of this development, balances in cultural and religious encounters and exchanges have dramatically shifted; as a consequence, so have the perceptions and judgements of multiculturalism by resident populations not only in the West, but world-wide.

This has been also due to a certain monopolization of the idea and realities of existing and future travel and "open borders" options by ideological, mainly leftist political stripes, i.e. by the so-called "leftist-green narrative" in European and Western elites who, following the ideals of the 1960s and 1970s leftist revolutions in Western societies, tended to propose a Western "borderless society" in rather too over-confident ways, not noticing that they created a "deep asymmetry" between the open societies of the West and the closed societies of rising powers such a China, Russia, Turkey and the Middle East. These started to exploit the one-way

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[11]Michael Hesse: *Peter Sloterdijk: „Das Megathema unserer Zeit heisst Migration".* In. Frankfurter Rundschau, 01.06.2016, http://www.fr.de/kultur/peter-sloterdijk-das-megathema-unserer-zeit-heisst-migration-a-356434.

[12]Jonathan Tourtellot: *"Overtourism" Plagues Great Destinations; Here's Why.* In: National Geographic, October 29, 2017, https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2017/10/29/overtourism-plagues-great-destinations-heres-why/. Cf. Statista: *Overtourism in European destinations—Statistics & facts,* https://www.statista.com/topics/4316/overtourism-in-european-destinations/; and Eurac Research Bozen-Bolzano-Bulsan: *Overtourism. How Can Tourism Be Managed For The Benefit Of Locals?* International Conference. In: Eurac Research, Center for Advanced Studies, 13 March 2018, http://www.eurac.edu/en/news/events/Pages/eventdetails.aspx?entryid=127507.

[13]Roland Benedikter and Katja Siepmann: *Airborne Globalization. A Visual Arts Project Gives Flying A Human Face.* In: Global-E. A Global Studies Journal. Edited by the Global Studies Consortium for the 21st Century Global Dynamics Research Cluster by Professor Michael Curtin in cooperation with Victor Faessel PhD, Managing Director of the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, at the Global Studies Program of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Volume 8, Issue 6, July 1, 2014, http://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/july-2014/airborne-globalization-visual-arts-project-gives-flying-human-face, and http://globalstudies consortium.org/global-e/c8a700f719abea34633dbc19728accc7.

"welcome culture" at the expense of global democracies in order to "export" the parts of their populations that they wanted to get rid of.

Also, compared to Mukherjee's 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the sheer numbers of migrants since the 2010s are in no way comparable to those she experienced and described. In 2018, according to estimates by global authorities up to 1.5 billion people were migration-willing, with an estimated 1.5 to 2 billion people on the move by 2030,[14] while Europe counted about 460 million (without Great Britain) and the U.S. a 320 million resident population. The effect of greater distances covered by new global mass-mobility combined with increasing numbers is that "natural" borders between cultures and civilizations are decreasing noticeably, thus leading to clashes between always farther-stemming unknowns and incomparables and a general decrease in acceptance by resident populations. In addition, various illiberal and authoritarian governments are using global mass-migration flows connected to religious and cultural transfer by propagating non-assimilation for their emigrated populations in order to realize their openly declared strategies of "demographic imperialism"—as officially proclaimed by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ministers since the 2010s. Erdogan aims to "take over European societies"[15] through increased birth rates and "religious wars"[16] by non-assimilating Turkish double citizens, thus trying to get a grip on Western open societies since these, in his view, are most permeable through demographic shifts caused by mass migration without assimilation.[17] All this combined has further impacted the willingness of Western populations to follow up with the multicultural ideal and narrative.

In turn, signal measures intended to set symbolic examples for the reform of asymmetric globalization to restore symmetries in migration relations and internal stability of Western societies—such as travel bans for a number of Muslim countries because of culturo-religious means,[18] and the prospects of building physical walls against illegal migration,[19] as ideated by U.S. president Donald Trump— have contributed to further harden the climate for progressive multiculturalism.

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[14]Stefan Kornelius: *Deutscher Geheimdienst: BND-Chef sieht Russland als „potentielle Gefahr".* In: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 14.11.2017, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/deutscher-geheimdienst-bnd-chef-sieht-russland-als-potenzielle-gefahr-1.3749160.

[15]DIE ZEIT: *Recep Tayyip Erdogan: „Macht fünf Kinder, nicht drei!" Mehr Kinder, mehr Einfluss – so rechnet es der türkische Präsident Erdoğan den Türken in Europa vor. Schließlich seien sie die Zukunft des Kontinents*, 17. März 2017, http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-03/recep-tayyip-erdogan-kinderkriegen-europa-aufruf.

[16]Kronen Zeitung: *Türken drohen mit "Religionskriegen" in Europa*, 16.03.2017, http://www.krone.at/559552.

[17]Lennart Pfahler: *Erdogans Drohungen gegen Europa werden immer wahnsinniger – doch seine Strategie scheitert.* In: Huffington Post, 07/08/2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.de/2017/08/07/erdogan-drohungen-europafeindlichkeit_n_17696686.html.

[18]Tom McCarthy an Oliver Laughland: *Trump travel ban: supreme court allows enforcement as appeals proceed.* In: The Guardian London, 5 December 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/04/donald-trump-travel-ban-on-six-mostly-muslim-countries.

[19]Gregory Krieg: *What kind of border wall does Trump want? It depends on who's asking.* In: CNN, January 17, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/11/politics/donald-trump-positions-on-the-wall-daca/index.html. Cf. Fortune: *Everything We Know About Donald Trump's Proposed Border Wall*, January 19, 2018, http://fortune.com/2018/01/19/donald-trump-border-wall/.

Last but not least, the mass refugee question with numbers for which the current asylum laws, for example in Europe, were never intended (they were designed for an average influx of thousands of people per year and not for millions), objectively overstretches the potentials of reception.

All this adds to changes within the character of the Western left itself which traditionally favored multiculturalism as a concrete change-agent toward a first global society of humankind. The left of the 1970s and 1980s was a "heroic" one actively defending the values of individualism and the open and liberal democratic constitutions in militant ways against the "enemies of open societies" (Karl Popper). Yet in the eyes of many Westerners, the current post-postmodern left seems to be exaggeratedly tolerant of the intolerance of imported authoritarian cultures and religions of (mostly irregular) immigrants and *de facto* allows second, illiberal and non-democratic orders within the Western liberal and democratic order to emerge, such as by *de facto* tolerating the *Sharia* in parts of Islamic communities (for example, with regard to children marriage) on European soil, or at least treating it differently before the law.

All this has contributed to the currently rather sad, incoherent and disputed picture of multiculturalism in the Western public debate so different from the framework of Mukherjee's early and medium work.

Such recent debate cannot be ignored. When evaluating Mukherjee's work, it makes no sense to be naïve and to deny the many problems the "art of multiculturalism" still faces and, on the contrary, increasingly encounters given that multiculturalism has changed its face since the 1990s. It did so by becoming a mass phenomenon closely tied to the massive increase of global irregular mass-immigration and refugee waves. The perceived tie between multiculturalism and illegal immigration in particular has a negative connotation for a vast majority of Western, Asian and South American populations. An equal and just distribution has not been achieved, since the vast majority of refugees and migrants follow a one-way street to the West only, while players such as China, Japan or South America often formally agree with international migration agreements but go on to accept almost no one. China, three times as populous as Europe, took 583 recognized refugees in 2015, Japan 27, while in the same timeframe Europe accepted millions.[20] This asymmetry between the West and the rest of the world is one reason why the U.S. under Donald Trump has retreated from the negotiation of a new global migration agreement by the U.N. and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2017-18, saying that this is too crucial an aspect for the future for America to leave to others, and that the international migration agreements were, in the end, always the burden of the West only, and thus "incompatible" with American policy and interests. Since apparently nobody wants to migrate to Africa or the Middle East and just a few to South America, Western democratic destinations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and others have long chosen to pursue a restrictive immigration policy. After the departure of the classical

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[20]Gunnar Heinsohn: *Europa wird den globalen Kampf ums technische Wissen verlieren*, loc cit.

immigration country USA under Donald Trump, this threatens a situation where Europe de facto remains the only area where migrants may go in masses. Yet as mentioned, international bodies such as UNESCO, and also the German *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (Secret Service), estimate that until 2050, up to 2.5 billion people will be physically able to move, and the vast majority will be aiming to migrate to the West.[21] Since Europe by 2050 with around 450 million inhabitants will count only as 5–7% of the global population, it will be impossible for it to master such a constellation alone. Thus it will have to reform its own migration and asylum laws in order not to be overwhelmed and end up with civil conflicts caused by the sheer number of immigrants within a short timeframe, and in order not to leave the single European nations to the rise of right-wing populist parties who want to destroy the European unification project through renationalization and the closing of borders.

All this means that a reform of globalization is unavoidable and urgently needed, including at its core the issue of migration impacting the multicultural dream so heavily in recent years. Justice in the distribution of the "multiculturalization" of the globe and the restriction of illegal migration in favor of legal paths will be crucial for the future destiny of multiculturalism, as well as for the future reception of and debate on Mukherjee's work and the respective "Imaginal Politics". Political processes will influence the further perception of multicultural art like that of Mukherjee's. Whether multiculturalism succeeds in practice on a broader level or not will impact the historical judgment about it, including Mukherjee's life-long effort.

Particularly, the relationship between multiculturalism and integration remains a widely unsolved problem despite all attempts toward its improvement. Interestingly, according to investigations of 2017–2018, at least in Europe this seems to be more a mental problem of the immigrants than of the resident populations. That is again what the example of the by far "most welcoming nation on earth"[22] Germany teaches. According to Hans Werner Sinn, one of the main economic experts of the German government,[23] despite estimated investments of around 450 billion Euro for the refugees over the coming 30 years and yearly expenses of at least 3 billion Euro alone for integration courses such as language and the primordial basis of cultural understanding,[24] apparently little has been

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[21]Stefan Kornelius: *Deutscher Geheimdienst: BND-Chef sieht Russland als „potentielle Gefahr"*, loc cit.

[22]Doris Akrap: *Germany's response to the refugee crisis is admirable. But I fear it cannot last*. In: The Guardian, 6 September 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/06/germany-refugee-crisis-syrian.

[23]Hans Werner Sinn: *„Flüchtlinge kosten 450 Milliarden Euro"*. In: The European. Das Debattenmagazin, 29.12.2017, http://www.theeuropean.de/hans-werner-sinn/13034-professor-hans-werner-sinn-warnt-eindringlich.

[24]Bild Deutschland: *175 Kurse & Projekte, 12 Ministerien: Wirrwarr bei Integrationskursen*, 19.02.2018, p. 2.

achieved with regard to a positive integration particularly of Muslims. On the basis of years-long "embedded" investigations, experts reported in February 2018:

> The cultural integration of the majority of Muslims in Germany has failed. The liaison, tie and commitment to state and society is underdeveloped in the vast majority. And: due to the principle of dual citizenship, some Muslim countries actively subvert the German integration policy. In no other group of migrants is the distance to the German Federal Republic bigger than with the Muslims. Why? There are five reasons. First: 70% of Muslims in Germany are conservative or even fundamentalist. Only 16–45% do not have (religious) problems living the Western lifestyle. Only 40% succeed in establishing normal and regular contacts with the rest of society. Second: Conscious non-integration. Because of religious and political reasons, governments in Ankara (Turkey) and Teheran (Iran) undermine integration. The Shiitic Mosque Associations in Germany are directly dependent on the Mullah-Regime in Teheran, as are the Ditib-Mosque-Associations from [Turkish president's] Erdogan's Ankara. Third: Liberal democracy, patriotism and love for the country of origin. In Germany, particularly poorly integrated are Muslims stemming from Turkey [living in Germany since the 1970s, note by the author]. The fact that almost two thirds of all those stemming from Turkey in Germany [1.4 million Turks in Germany were entitled to vote] voted in the referendum about the presidential dictatorship of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan [on 16 April 2017] for the abolition of the democratic constitutional democracy [in Turkey] shows that despite living in Germany for generations, they have not internalized the values of democracy and open society. Reasons for this are bad economic situations, educational (self-)marginalization, frequent travels to the country of origin and close emotional ties with the old homeland. In addition, the sheer size of Turkish immigration communities in Germany does not make it necessary to build contacts with the greater rest of society.[25]

It has often been remarked by European leaders that without identification with the new home country by immigrants the social arrangement of Western, in particular European welfare states is doomed to fail, since an over-proportional number of the immigrants lives from the welfare state which is based on a social solidarity principle that requires identification with the common "social sculpture". As German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has pointed out, this requires a certain form of adherence to the national and European social values and commitment to the whole of society. That seems to be the case only for a minority of Muslims in Germany, and throughout Europe, although they are among the main beneficiaries of the European social arrangement.

There are two more reasons for the recent new soberness about the "failure of integration" which posits serious questions about the future of multiculturalism as such that cannot be ignored by a serious, scientifically informed debate:

> Fourth reason for non-integration: Schools fail. Schools with a high share of migrants are overburdened. Integration, inclusion and improved language training – this is too much. Fifth: Germany remains far away for those who are coming. Ninety percent of Muslims want to preserve their cultural identity also in their new home country. That is legitimate.

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[25]Peter Tiede: *Fünf Gründe, warum es mit der Integration so nicht klappt!* In: Bild Deutschland, Springer Berlin, 19.02.2018, p. 2.

> Yet more than half of them believe they have a closer relationship with their country of origin than with their new home country Germany.[26]

As European academic researchers have repeatedly pointed out, non-integration in open Western societies has become less a problem of discrimination but rather one of a lack of willingness and need by the migrants to adapt.[27] One provocative yet crucial question to posit to "Imaginal Politics" and their envisaged educative effect in the coming years is, then, to whom they shall be directed: rather to the resident populations or to the immigrants?

Mukherjee's answer of course would be: to both. Yet reality indicates that it is in the first instance those immigrating into open democratic societies coming from authoritarian societies and religions who have—literally—to "change their mind" to be able to adapt to new cultural, religious (laical and secular) and societal lifestyle circumstances in order to avoid conflicts between civilizations and group interests. Imaginal Politics through the artistic work on mutual understanding may help, but are still largely ignored by decision-makers. Investigations like that of Chatham House 2017 were also widely ignored by the elites—and if received, often paradoxically directed against the resident populations, not to the problem of coexistence between different cultures, including fundamentally different imaginary narratives. The differentiation between *multi-cultural* and *multi-religious* society (which is the main problem in current Europe) has never been undertaken sufficiently by Western authorities—yet would be crucial for such an endeavor of taking multiculturalism to the next stage. The rise of conservative and right-wing (which is not the same) parties throughout Europe, in the person of Donald Trump in the U.S., as well as Brexit have shown that a reform of current approaches to "uncontrolled migration" (Herman Van Rompuy, first president of the European Council 2009–14 and former Prime Minister of Belgium) is necessary if a liberal and open policy is to persist. That includes a reform of the ways Imaginal Politics have been understood, employed, self-identified and aimed in the past decades, if they were taken seriously at all. The undeniable prevalence of the leftist-green narrative over public political correctness in Europe and over a large part of the academic Western elites in general has led to a rhetoric that in most cases tried to instruct the resident populations to adapt to the new multicultural circumstances, but rarely the incoming migrants, particularly not those from diverse religions such as Islam. What the Western elites preached since the 2000s was mainly directed to the postmodern, rational, enlightened Western populations: to be tolerant towards partly non- and anti-democratic incomers, while at the same time Muslim populations rarely adapted to the Western lifestyle, in the majority never fully embraced the open society and democracy or were even asked to do so.

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[26]Ibid.

[27]Dorothea Siems: *Muslimische Migranten müssen sich besser anpassen*. In: Die Welt, 12.05.2016, https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article155260658/Muslimische-Migranten-muessen-sich-besser-anpassen.html.

In retrospect over the past fifteen years, this approach did not further multiculturalism, but harmed it. This is the teaching again of the German example where research has shown that third-generation Muslims, most of them of Turkish origin and many equipped with a double German-Turkish passport, are not better, but less integrated—and more Turkish-nationalist, anti-open-society and pro-Erdogan—than the first and second generations, despite all efforts of the host society.[28] While some interpret this as the "definitive death" of multiculturalism and its final revelation as an "impossible dream" of the leftist-green narrative, others see huge potentials of improvement in how integration and migration may be tackled within a greater vision of "imaginal education" that better respects the host country's civilization, but includes difference, tolerance and integration at its core.

All this indicates that since Mukherjee wrote her literary masterpieces of the 20th century, both the notion, the public perception and the practice of multiculturalism have shifted. The result is a problematic situation which shows that "Imaginal Politics" in the applied sense is still just at its beginning when it comes to multiculturalism. And so is, in consequence, the "art of multiculturalism" in the broad sense. It now must be emancipated from left-right inclinations to become a real, i.e. balanced and mitigating tool in the promotion of a better, more integrative and more just society. As Mukherjee's work clearly shows, the duty and challenge lies on both sides. It is not a one-way street for anyone, although global migration as such remains widely a one-way process into the West as mentioned. Yet if the idea of "Imaginal Politics" as a positive way forward for the interface between multiculturalism, politics and art wants to have a new, serious chance after the disenchantment of large parts of Western populations with multiculturalism, a new international agreement with more realistic responsibilities and options will have to be implemented.

And Bharati Mukherjee, a pioneer of a progressive approach? She would certainly have opted for a "middle way", based as much on reason and realism as on creative, artistic and imaginary faculties which in her view belonged together. On the other hand, Mukherjee never explicitly foresaw, addressed nor answered questions regarding the concrete *normative* essence of the multicultural perspective for postmodern societies, or about the very future of multiculturalism itself if globalization was to continue on an ever-larger scale. She rather concentrated on her own version of "Imaginal Politics"—and developed one of the most distinguished and impressive *explorative* literary achievements of the end of the 20th century. From the present view, her work both opens up the options and potentials of an "art of multiculturalism", and delineates its (sometimes unexpectedly narrow) margins and limits.

All in all, not only the achievements, but also the ambiguities of Mukherjee's effort have to be taken into consideration as exemplary, including her core

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[28]Ibid. Cf. Christian Kreutzer: „*Merkwürdige" 3. Generation: Wie fundamentalistisch sind Deutschlands Türken? Studie der Universität Münster.* In: t-online Politik, 17.06.2016, http://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/id_78149554/integration-der-deutsch-tuerken-die-merkwuerdige-dritte-generation.html.

methodological aspiration of merging literature and painting. Ambiguity, complexity, volatility, uncertainty and vulnerability (VUCA) lies in the nature of multiculturalism, and Mukherjee was conscious and receptive of this fact. In her view, art is not about covering the real ambivalences of individual and social life—for example, those inherent in the notion and practice of inter-religious coexistence—but rather has to mirror, render and represent them unsparingly and mercilessly to make them more conscious, exactly if it is to be considered art.

What will remain of Mukherjee's work in a changed global environment?

Not only the sheer beauty of her writing and her literary mastery, but also the primordial stubbornness and continuity of her effort, where the effort as such is to some extent the message to the new generations. Bharati Mukherjee was certainly no saint, and she never tried to be one. Her attempts were driven sometimes by universal love, sometimes by revenge for her own experiences, although both sometimes in half conscious manners. Yet even this may be typical for the Imaginal Politics of the future, their inherent contradictions, and their developmental potentials.

What is the perspective? And what may be orientations to pave the way forward?

Following Chiara Bottici's epochal definition of "Imaginal Politics" as being about "images beyond imagination and the imaginary",[29] we need a concept that can lead beyond the current cheap politicization of migration and multiculturalism. Such a concept could indeed depart from Bottici's approach, and in doing so, could include Mukherjee's work:

> Between the radical, creative capacity of our imagination and the social imaginary we are immersed in is an intermediate space philosophers have termed the imaginal, populated by images or (re)presentations that are presences in themselves. [We live in] the paradox of a world rich in imagery yet seemingly devoid of imagination. Bottici begins by defining the difference between the imaginal and the imaginary, locating the imaginal's root meaning in the image and its ability to both characterize a public and establish a set of activities within that public. She identifies the imaginal's critical role in powering representative democracies and [their] amplification through globalization. She then addresses the troublesome increase in images now mediating politics and the transformation of politics into empty spectacle. The spectacularization of politics has led to its virtualization, Bottici observes, transforming images into processes with an uncertain relationship to reality, and, while new media has democratized the image in a global society of the spectacle, the cloned image no longer mediates politics but does the act for us. Bottici concludes with politics' current search for legitimacy through an invented ideal of tradition, a turn to religion, and the incorporation of human rights language.[30]

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[29]Chiara Bottici: *Imaginal Politics. Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, loc cit. Cf. Chiara Bottici: *Imaginal Politics in the Age of Trumpism*. In: Global-e. A Global Studies Journal, edited at the 21st Century Global Dynamics Initiative at the Orfalea Center of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Volume 10, Issue 72, November 2, 2017, http://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/november-2017/imaginal-politics-age-trumpism.

[30]Chiara Bottici: *Imaginal Politics. Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, loc cit., summary, Columbia University Press, https://cup.columbia.edu/book/imaginal-politics/9780231157780.

All these are critical aspects that contribute towards a more self-conscious concept of both "Imaginal Politics" and multiculturalism as related to it. They may lead to a renaissance, or at least a rediscovery of Bharati Mukherjee's early and middle work of the 1970s to the 1990s as an early literary embodiment of the same, or at least a similar intention.

The scope of our analysis in this book has been to show how involved Bharati Mukherjee's early and middle work was in writing for exemplarily building bridges between different areas of the world, taking on the example of India and the U.S., and for the redefinition of both mainstream American and Indian identities through the infusion and inclusion of different historical backgrounds and cultural heritages, to some extent still (unjustly) mystified on the one hand and (unjustly) depreciated on the other hand. Through her specific method at the interface between literature and painting, an exemplary fundus of "imaginaries" is created. The result of imaginary pluralization is a humanization of multiculturalism; and the effect of humanized multiculturalism is "healthy pluralization" as opposed to difference without solidarity. At the center of this auto-poetic spiral stands, in Mukherjee's world, the term, technique and dream of "fusion". To a certain extent, "fusion" is both Mukherjee's overall method and her main objective—simultaneously in the artistic, cultural, and political realms. It is, as we had to learn over the past years, a dream difficult to realize; but it remains a dream worth dreaming, if it is adapted to new circumstances and an evolving historical context.

Mukherjee's work, dedicated to the art of multiculturalism, is without doubt political at its center: it is about imaginaries that may influence or even create new, better, more human politics of differentiation and integration. At the interface of conflicting, coinciding, and sometimes converging processes of world-making Mukherjee's work is about the building of intermediate "localities" between the local and the global in the form of a literature dedicated to "house" diversity. Mukherjee's work tried to provide a literary experience of a potential (and possible) "fusion" between the global, the national and the local. As such, it was as seminal as it remains experimental to the present day.

As a consequence, it is perhaps exactly this experimental aspect of Mukherjee's work that will endure. The early experimental term "fusion" remained, as we have seen, Mukherjee's buzzword designating metaphorically the process which should bring the relationship between civilizations forward. According to Mukherjee, as a multiethnic and culturally pluralistic nation, the United States as the Western lead nation has to display resilience and evince enough receptive capacity for *the Other*, in order to become able to integrate the increasing number of realities within its "globalized national". For her, the goal of Imaginal Politics is to combine *imagined identities* forging *imagined communities*.

To put it more precisely: Mukherjee's work was about enriching imagined identities that keep together imagined communities *by differences*. Mukherjee tried to tie the metaphorical with the literal through story-telling. Interestingly, the more globalized (post-)postmodern nations are, like those of the current West, the more they seem to face the necessity of reconciling and reconnecting with the local

through stories, life-accounts, and myths. That constitutes a fundamental challenge, to which the work of Mukherjee partially responds.

In her early and middle literary work from the 1970s to the 1990s, Bharati Mukherjee used a complex and multilayered network of themes and issues which never denied, instead often focused on partly tragic forces in play. The networks drafted by her were subject to permanent change which led to always new, surprising constellations and mergers. The often tragi-comic "fusional achievements" delineated in her stories symbolized an intermediate point that is never final, since "all literature is metaphoric," as Mukherjee repeatedly pointed out. In turn, in Mukherjee's eyes all reality is literary.

Thematically, in Mukherjee's short stories and novels earth and sky fuse; two worlds, the Occident and the Orient, meet; and their cultural, religious and spiritual concepts unite to a potentially more comprehensive, although unfinished worldview in the making. Civilization and primitivism as well as culture and wilderness do not exclude each other, but are tackled as belonging together. The unavoidably precarious lives of different human beings form a unity against the background of the wider world despite their deep differences; love and war originate from the same impulsive source; art and technology blend; science and the humanities complement each other; and abstract, quantified knowledge forms a synthesis with intuitive imagination. The world of ideas and the world of experience form an inevitable, obligatory compound.

Finally, in Mukerhjee's work the complexity of "fusion" under reality conditions is exemplified by advanced interdisciplinarity and intertextuality. The merger of two art forms, literature and painting, and the use of the radically different sources that are interwoven in Mukherjee's texts yield an artistic finesse and intricate metaphoric refinement. Mukherjee's adaptation of Moghul miniature painting of the 16th and 17th centuries for postmodern writing and the comparability of her style with Pop art of the 1950s and 1960s manifest her prolific, original implementation of metaphor. They reveal her dynamic claim for a creative refashioning of the Western literary canon. Her constant self-identification as an American writer, not an "Indian-American" one, underscored this claim.

Overall, Mukherjee's literary opus from the 1970s to the 1990s can be regarded as one single metaphor of how heterogeneity, difference and complexity of the non-identical may form a future "unity" under "fluid" conditions. Mukherjee's work may serve as a paragon of pluralistic integration with a high potential for interactive exchange. Perhaps most importantly, Mukherjee's early work does not leave out the dangers and difficulties impending the—necessarily contentious and contradictory—development of multiculturalism between the Skylla of differentiation and the Charybdis of seclusion. It ultimately appeals to the reader to strengthen her and his individual awareness within the given culture and the given moment in time. It sensitizes her and him to take responsibility for local contexts within the national and the global in the name of justice, dialogue and mutual understanding.

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