

**STRUGGLING WITH THE IMPASSE: HAS DEVELOPMENT THEORY BEEN  
ABLE TO RE-INVENT ITSELF?**

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In fact, our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk. Only by being given full play is it able to experience the other's claim to truth ... (Gadamer, 1989:299)

#### Abstract:

In 1985, David Booth wrote a seminal article in which he argued that development theory, mostly Marxist but also modernization theory, was out of touch with reality, incapable of generating viable policy, and riven with metatheoretical errors. He recommended a return to empirical case-studies, the comparative method, and an awareness of the problems of functionalist and essentialist argument. In the ensuing decade a further range of solutions were offered to bail development theory out of trouble: micro-theory, participatory action research, postmodernism, post-development theory, postcolonialism. Ten years after that, how much progress have we made? The dominance of Marxist and neo-Marxist theories has been replaced by an equally pervasive hegemony of Foucauldian discourse – in postmodernism, in postcolonialism, in post-development. While the framework has shifted quite sharply away from the problems inherent in Marxist theory, development theory has inherited from 'mainstream' theory, an equally insidious array of metatheoretical problems which have to do with relativism, agency, collusion. This paper proposes some solutions through Gadamer's hermeneutics.

#### The Old Impasse

In 1985 David Booth's influential article, *Marxism and development sociology: interpreting the impasse*, launched a wide ranging debate around metatheoretical aspects of Marxist theory. In the Third World, Marxist theory was consistently getting it wrong, was out of touch with what was happening on the ground, and bankrupt in the business of policy-formulation. Focusing on 'necessitism' as being at the heart of the problem, Booth explained:

Behind the distinctive preoccupations, blind spots and contradictions of the new development sociology there lies a metatheoretical commitment to demonstrating that the structures and process we find in the less-developed world *are not only explicable but necessary* under capitalism. (Booth, 1985:776, my own emphasis)

Elsewhere I have argued that functionalism and essentialism are the children of necessitism (Graaff, 2001). Let us take a moment to consider these two aspects in more detail.

Functionalist argument, to be distinguished from Parsonian structural-functionalist theory, argues that parts contribute beneficially to wholes, that much of the continued existence and nature of parts can be explained by their functions for wholes, and that, most importantly, these benefits are often unknown to social actors. They are in Merton's terms, latent rather than manifest functions. For our purposes, the important principle is the third one which states that functions often operate behind people's backs. This is significant because it allows functionalists to skip important intervening explanatory steps. By leapfrogging the detail of how actor's intentions and behaviour produce unintended consequences, they come to the too-easy conclusion of functionality.

Marxist literature around the erstwhile South African Bantustan policy illustrates the point. In one of the first articles in this current, Harold Wolpe could argue that Bantustans were functional to capital by lowering the cost of labour (Wolpe, 1972). The evidence for this came from the fact that mineowners had themselves argued against wage-rises for mineworkers on the grounds that their families were provided for in precapitalist rural economies. Capitalism had fashioned an articulation between capitalist and precapitalist modes of production such that the latter was functional to the former. How this quite delicate operation had been fashioned, Wolpe never spelled out. For this function relied on a very precise economic balance whereby the rural economy was poor enough to push workers to seek wage-labour, productive enough to provide for left-behind families, but not so productive as to make work unnecessary migrants males. That the apartheid government in its 'inevitable' administrative skill might indeed have succeeded in doing this, is not the question here. The point is that Wolpe never provided the evidence, not of the pursuit of such a policy, nor of its fluctuating success and failure over various historical phases, nor of its faltering first clumsy attempts, nor crucially of the rural populations equally hit-and-miss attempts to evade it. It was assumed that the statement of the principle of a functionalist relationship would be sufficient to clinch the matter.

As Booth had so accurately diagnosed, this first assumption rested on a second which depicted certain 'inherent' and 'essential' characteristics of capitalism. In Leslie Sklair's language:

The global capitalist system does have its built-in ends ... The growing internationalization of production ... both highlights the needs of the system and the structures and processes that have to be created in order to meet these ends. (Sklair, 1988, 700-1)

'(B)uilt-in ends', 'the needs of the system', 'have to be created' – these are all functionalist moves which bypass the need for detailed evidence. Later in the same article Sklair, in an involved argument which need not concern us here, proposes explicitly that Marxist theory 'rejects the burden of empirical proof' (Sklair, 1988)

Functionalist and essentialist argument of the time contained the further and hidden principle that power was a one-way process, that ruling classes, as managers of the

capitalist system, naturally got their way and their advantages, that working class or Third World resistance was negligible, and that individuals (that is, if they derived from a particular class origin) could not stand up against the system. In short, while Marxist writers said 'system', in this context they usually meant 'ruling class'; while ruling classes were notionally as subject to the compulsions of the system as working classes, they were subject in a very different manner and usually got their way (or their function).

In the responses to this dilemma Marxist development writers moved to more comparative case-study methodologies, focused on bringing agents back in often via Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, and emphasized the importance of participation in development projects (Schuurman, 1993; Booth, 1994).

By the mid-90's, however, a much more significant shift had occurred in development theorizing, into Foucauldian discourse theory, as mediated by Edward Said's work, *Orientalism*. By the late 1990's and the early 2000's discourse theory had come to a theoretical dominance in development studies which almost equaled that of Marxist theory in the early 1970's. And with it came all the problems associated with discourse theory which had been apparent in Foucault's work since the 1970's.

In the following section I want to sketch one or two strands of this discourse problematic and show how they have transferred into development work. I want to argue that some of these problems are interestingly similar to those experienced by Marxist theory in the mid-1980's: functionalist argument, structural determinism, derogation of agency, problems in conceptualizing political resistance. Many of these problems, it is true, do not themselves derive from Foucault himself, but from his interpreters. But it is significant that Third World interpreters of Foucault have been drawn, seduced into this version.

## **The New Impasse**

### **Foucault's Functionalism and Subjectless Structure**

The first issue I wish to raise replays the problems of functionalism discussed earlier in this paper. There I argued that functionalists attempt to bypass individual purpose and action by talking, at the macro-level, of the benefits which parts have for wholes which individual actors may be quite unaware of. This is quite a legitimate exercise as long as the intervening steps in the sequence of causation are inserted. Causal links cannot be simply assumed without explicit detail.

Thus, in spelling out his critique of Marxist notions of power, Foucault speaks of power relations which are intentional but not subjective, "les relations de pouvoir sont à la fois intentionnelles et non subjectives" (Foucault, 1976:124); or elsewhere of power deriving from (objective) strategies rather than (subjective) projects. In short, here are social effects which operate not only behind people's backs, but without

subjectivity at all, as if power becomes a reified will which operates independently of social actors. In speaking of ‘the death of the subject’ there is the danger that structures will be seen to act without the participation of individuals (Taylor, 1986) <sup>1</sup>.

The point is that structures are nothing without individual action. In individual action they are reproduced from moment to moment, or they cease to exist. Which is not to say that those structures achieve what individuals intend, but unintended consequences (what Taylor calls ‘undesigned systematicity’) still need to be linked to individual actions which constitute them.

The undesigned systematicity has to be related to the purposeful action of agents in a way that we can understand. ... history, which we are trying to explain, is made up of purposeful human action. Where there are patterns in this which are not on purpose, we have to explain why action done under one description on purpose also bear to this other, undesigned description. ... A strategic pattern cannot just be left hanging, unrelated to our conscious ends and projects. (Taylor, 1986: 87)

This subject-less acting structure has caused a series of problems for Foucault in conceptualizing the subject. Not the least of these has been his theorization of the possibility of resistance. While on the one hand, there is the famous statement that ‘there are no relations of power without resistances’, this is an unelaborated principle. In practice Foucault spends much more time detailing the production of ‘docile bodies’ (in *Discipline and Punish*), and bodies ‘saturated’ with disciplinary technique (in *The History of Sexuality*) (McNay, 1994:102).

### **Foucault and Behaviourism: Individuals as Empty Spaces**

A further extension of this dearth of subject is Foucault’s conception that the inner life of soul, psyche, psychology, are all functions of the play of power on the surfaces of the body. This gives rise to a behaviorist notion whereby bodies respond flexibly and without history to the situational demands of knowledge interacting with power (McNay, 1994:103).

... Foucault slips too easily from describing disciplinary power as a tendency within modern forms of social control, to positing disciplinary power as a fully installed monolithic force which saturates all social relations. This leads to an overestimation of the efficacy of disciplinary power and to an impoverished understanding of the individual which cannot account for experiences which fall outside the realm of the ‘docile’ body. (McNay, 1994:104)

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<sup>1</sup> Poulantzas and Walzer both criticize the functionalist argument evident in Foucault (McNay, 1994:105; Walzer, 1986), while Habermas complains of a metaphysical, reified and undifferentiated will to power (McNay, 1994:105)

A great many of the problems in Foucault's work stems from his lapse into a Levi-Straussian form of structuralism. By that I mean that for Foucault the key to understanding the surface phenomena of social reality are deeplying rules and relationships. Social reality is an expression of this subterranean foundation. This is much like saying that the rules of grammar determine the everyday appearance of language. People are very seldom aware of the various rules they are mobilizing at any moment in their varied use of language, but investigation can show this fairly easily to be so. The task of discourse analysis is to perform this revelatory investigation.

Exactly how these murky entities influence social life is a matter of some confusion. Foucault dislikes the notion of the unconscious, i.e. that there is a sphere of repressed knowledge that needs to be unearthed.

... we do not presuppose that beneath manifest statements something remains hidden and subjacent ... There is no subtext. And therefore no plethora. The enunciative domain is identical with its own surface. (quoted in McNay, 71)

He also dislikes notions of causality. These rules are said to determine 'the conditions of possibility' of social existence, even at times their 'conditions of existence'. The difference between these two is critically important. In language, the rules of grammar do not determine exactly what one says. They determine therefore 'the conditions of possibility', the spread of what might be said. But rules of grammar do not normally determine exactly what is said, i.e. the conditions of existence (Freundlieb, 1994).

The implications for notions of individual creativity and subjectivity are ominous. For Foucault individual actors are like empty spaces within which structures interact. Individuals are made up of multiple subject positions. It is the interaction of these subject positions which constitute what people do. A subject position, says Foucault, 'is a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals'. (McNay, 77) In his essay "What is an author?" Foucault asks in the same vein

And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking? (Foucault quoted McNay, 79)

### Foucault on Freedom and Agency

Given the obliteration of agency and subjectivity in the early Foucault, are there notions of freedom which can help us here, particularly from the later Foucault in his writings on the History of Sexuality. Here I will argue, with Charles Taylor, that there is a recognizable and feasible notion of freedom that can be of use to our argument. This has connections to my later discussion of Fanon, and has interesting overlaps with Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons.

A first move here is Foucault's re-conceptualization of the place of madness in its relation to reason following Derrida's 1978 critique (Young, 2001). In his original history

of madness Foucault had sketched the ways in which madness had been marginalized, excluded from Reason, both spatially (in separated institutions) and metaphorically (as the Other). It was Derrida's crucial insight that, despite its apparent exclusion, madness should be seen as integral to, but veiled within, the sphere of reason. This disguised presence allows for the possibilities of ambiguity and disruption and manoeuvre within the monolithic facade of reason. In his subsequent work Foucault acknowledged this point and worked now instead to show precisely how notions of the Other were implicated in notions of the Same.

The parallels between the exclusion/suppression of madness and the marginalization/Othering of the colonized have not been lost on postcolonial writers. Bhabha in particular has made much of the fruitfulness of the slippages inherent in colonial, historicist and Enlightenment discourses (Young, 1990). We shall see later on that this ambiguous and problematic relationship between Same and Other gets a different twist from Gadamer.

A second move from Foucault is his re-thinking of the space for manoeuvre within the embrace of discourse. In his enlightening discussion of this issue, Taylor shows that Foucault is adamant in his dislike of the notion of 'negative' freedom, or 'freedom from', since this implies an unencumbered space which lies beyond the reach of discourse (Taylor, 2002). There is no such space. By contrast, Foucault works with a notion of 'positive' freedom or 'freedom to'. But it is a compromised freedom.

For Foucault discourse is constitutive of freedom and subjectivity. It is precisely through discourse that subjectivity achieves its various capacities to act. Without the structure of language, for example, we would be unable to speak. At the same time, however, this enablement implies constraint. The capacity to act means very specific instruments of action. The important implication is that action outside of these parameters is often inconceivable. The ability to act in this way means also at times the ability to act only in this way. The variety of discourses then entail 'packages' of enablement and constraint.

How do actors, constituted from the interior of discourses, achieve the insight to manoeuvre inside discourses? For Foucault, following Nietzsche, there are two possibilities here. The first follows from the self-realization that discourses are historically arbitrary. It is a crucial part of the work of discourse analysis both that in their chronological development discourses are shown to be random, and that the criteria for their self-justification, their 'regimes of truth', are equally random.

Armed with this insight, says Foucault (in Taylor's telling of it), there arises the possibility of movement within discourses, within the packages of enablement and constraint, and the possibility of comparing such internal manoeuvrability across packages.

This is not a position that is unique to Foucault. But what constricts Foucault's notion when put alongside those of other writers like Giddens and Thompson, is that Foucault abjures the notion of ideology. His reasons for this are well-known. Ideology derives

from Marxism and its attempt to retain a conception of truth. Ideology is false consciousness standing over and against truth. And Foucault will have no truck with either truth or false consciousness (McNay, 1994:107). At the same time, however, this jettisoning of ideology blocks him from a particularly useful aspect of the notion, namely, that ideology critique of false consciousness reveals the ways in which power insinuates itself into the psyche. This move opens the way into the use of psychoanalytic perspectives on deceptions of the self which postcolonial writers have found particularly fruitful. All of this is some considerable distance from Foucault.

Up to this point I have argued that inherent in Foucault, more particularly in his earlier writings, there are disturbing signs of a negation of agency and of the possibilities for action. These pernicious results derive from his use of functionalist argument and from his behaviourist approach to psychology. Both of these moves have crossed the boundary into development studies and replicate the blockages so characteristic of the impasse found in the discipline in the 1980's. Foucault's later writings in the individual and agency are more fruitful, but now significantly out of sync with his earlier writing on discourse. Unhappily many development writers, mediated through key writers like Said and Ferguson, have been caught in this anomaly. In the following section I look at just these two writers (as a start to a longer ongoing project) and show how they reflect the problems in the master text.

### **Functionalist thinking in Said and Ferguson**

In *Orientalism*, Said builds up an impressive array of documentary evidence to show how 'the West' constructed a coercive representation of the Orient, which it then used to colonize and fashion the Orient in reality. Orientalist discourse, then, is a murderously totalizing force which allows of very little deviance from its rigours. As Young argues, this rather begs the question as to how a representation (which Said is at pains to show to be 'false') can also be effective in reality (Young, 1990, 2002). But having posed the principle, Said then has great difficulty in rescuing either agency or the intellectual from its coils. This he can only do by positioning individuals or intellectuals outside of the influence of discourse. How exactly they manage to effect this escape is a matter of some difficulty for Said.

For Young, Said's problem is not so much in theorizing escape, but the prior one of theorizing closure. How does one think about a discourse which eliminates any hint of variation or resistance? Certainly not from Foucault – although it would have needed the distinction between the earlier totalizing Foucault and the later more open Foucault. Here Young is pointing at his own solution to the dilemma which is that colonial discourse contained within itself contradictions and fissures which the creative writer/intellectual could exploit.

The point to make about Said is that he has created an all too recognizable structure called discourse which constitutes and constrains individuals within its power and subjects them to its own logic. Up to this point it is trite sociology. More importantly, the exact connection between intentional strategy and unintended outcome is not elaborated

anywhere. The structure manages to achieve this through its own reified will, a will whose comprehensibility is the privileged insight of the intellectual.

Ferguson, for his part, comes at the issue of development in Lesotho with a view to theorizing the persistent 'failure' of development. His answer, in explicitly Foucauldian terms, is that there is a development machine which has a logic that transcends intentionality. This logic is not apparent to the people who constitute the machine, but nevertheless the machine has regular 'side-effects' which indicate its 'intelligence'.

... the anthropologist knows well how easily structures can take on a lives of their own that soon overtake intentional practices ... (interests) operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures so deeply embedded and so ill-perceived that the outcome may be only a baroque and unrecognizable transformation of the original intention. (Ferguson, 1992: 17)

Ferguson quotes with approval from Paul Willis' s seminal book, *Learning to Labour*, in which the oppositional intentions and projects of working kids lead them through a series of unforeseen connections back to working class jobs.

So far so good, for Willis makes the connections completely transparent between intentions and unintended consequences. If social scientists are to play god and reveal hidden meanings and latent functions on behalf of other mere mortals they need to be detailed and clear. Willis does this in exemplary fashion. And it cannot be done through the unexplicated logic of the machine or of capitalism or of systems needs.

But this is where Ferguson comes unstuck. For his other main source of reference is Foucault's analysis of the persistent failure of the penal system to effect the rehabilitation of prisoners (Ferguson, 1992:19).

For the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous – and, on occasion, usable – form of illegality ... (quoted in Ferguson, 1992:20)

And elsewhere

... one should reverse the problem and ask oneself what is served by the failure of the prison; what is the use of the different phenomena that are continually being criticized ... (quoted in Ferguson, 1992:254)

The difference with Paul Willis is stark because Foucault is not interested in the purposes and intentions of prison authorities and planners, or even of prisoners themselves, which go awry. His is a machine which operates through motive-less practices and technologies which produce the conditions of possibility for individual action. Nor is Ferguson interested in the meanings and motives of the Lesotho government who profit so patently from these side-effects. Ferguson states his theoretical agenda in the following terms:

I will try to show how ... intentional plans interacted with unacknowledged structures and chance events to produce unintended outcomes which turn out to be intelligible not only as the unforeseen effects of an intended intervention, but also as the unlikely instruments of an unplotted strategy. (Ferguson, 1992:20)

What eventually gets forgotten in this itinerary is his spelling out of the intentional plans of the Lesotho government. What we are left with are subject-less structures with an intellectual who then divines their logic. The question then for both Ferguson and Foucault is, if 'ordinary' acting individuals caught up in the coils of the machine are unable to fathom its 'retrospective intelligence', how can social scientists? And are Foucault's attributions of functionality and usefulness not just as arbitrary as any made by the now discredited Parsonians and Marxists of an earlier era.

In sum, we have a situation where two key writers in/on development have been caught, by their reliance on the earlier Foucault. In using the unexceptionable principle of unintended consequences, they use the very problematic notion of functionalism to explain social structures. As in an earlier phase of the impasse in development theory, we need mechanisms for the rescue of agency and resistance and the role of the intellectual.

In the following section I sketch Gadamer's contribution, but via what might seem an indirect route. Because I will start with Gadamer's elaboration of how hermeneutic understanding occurs, i.e. the way in which the Same comprehends the Other. But how does this relate to the rescue of agency and resistance? The connection goes like this. One of the prime functions of humanism, colonialism, and the Enlightenment discourse is to create monstrous Others who are then 'justifiably' subjected to genocide, conquest and racism. Clearly, one of the central ways of asserting agency and resistance against this destructive discourse is to show how to relativize the monster, how to reconcile ego and alter, how to bring home the Other. This is what Gadamer does via his notion of the fusion of horizons and of meeting the Alien.

### **Gadamer and the hermeneutic perspective**

For Gadamer, everyday life is constituted by the challenge which the unfamiliar poses to the familiar, the Other to the Same, it is the task set for the accumulated knowledge and experience which we have in their meeting with the problems and tasks of everyday living. Life gets lived at that luminous edge where consciousness is engaged in the practical issue of getting on with the not-quite-expected problems of daily living. Those practical issues might entail making a sandwich or speaking to someone or reading a text. This process Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons.

Plato (through his mouthpiece, Socrates) points to this very issue in what has now come to be known as Meno's paradox in teaching. In Socrates' words:

It is thus impossible for a man to inquire either into what he knows, or into what he does not know. He cannot inquire into what he knows; for he knows it, and

there is no need for inquiry into a thing like that. Nor would he inquire into what he does not know; for he does not know what it is he is to inquire into. (Allen, 1984):163)

This is a paradox which engages Gadamer centrally, and for which he finds an answer in the notion of the fusion of horizons. In their everyday lives, people always find themselves embedded in a particular tradition. They start with what they know. But they are, on an ongoing basis, confronted by the challenge of daily reality, i.e. what they do not know. They solve this by application, by applying the knowledge that they have to situations and problems that they have not encountered before. The fusion of horizons between the known and the unknown is an ontological condition of existence. Horizons are by their nature permeable. *Meno's paradox is being solved at every moment of our living*. There is no problem in knowing the Other. What is at stake, however, is the quality of that knowing.

While we cannot escape knowledge of the other, we can avoid good knowledge. In everyday living, negotiating the challenges of living has the potential for taking on a mechanical and lifeless character. People can and do develop technical and 'scientific' formulae for solving problems even with issues of considerable importance. In this sterile mode of thinking the aim is, via 'rigorous and disciplined method', to find final truth such that no more needs to be said, to achieve mastery and closure, 'to render the world a harmless picture for our indifferent and disinterested perusal' (Jardine, 1992):119). It is in this sense that Gadamer says 'the method of modern science is characterized from the start by a refusal: namely, to exclude all that which actually eludes its own methodology and procedures'. (quoted in (Jardine, 1992):126)

In this situation, says Jardine, the task of hermeneutics is to 'return life to its original difficulty', to re-instill in the negotiation of life a sense of personal engagement and value, to bring back a consideration of the bigger issues of living like the meaning of life, death, birth, pain, or mortality. To the extent that these issues are not amenable to final solutions, engaging them entails a necessary measure of ambiguity and uncertainty. (Gadamer, 1975):362).

Kerdeman has a slightly different interpretation of Gadamer's view of change. (Kerdeman, 2003). For her, the essence of transformation is that people are 'brought up sharp'. They discover that their long-held views are mistaken, that they need to re-assess their opinions in a way that is unforeseen and indeed unforeseeable. "Being pulled up short discloses attitudes, qualities and behaviours we would prefer to disown, deny or recognize only insofar as we project them on to others." (Kerdeman, 2003):296) Being pulled up sort is to puncture a condition of self-inflation which fails to recognize the limitations of being human.

"What a man (sic) has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitation of humanity ... into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man (sic) from the divine." (Gadamer quoted in (Kerdeman, 2003):297)

In the parable of the prodigal son, a young man goes out from his father's home, squanders his inheritance, and finally finds himself feeding someone else's pigs. Here Gadamer talks of meeting the alien.

It is oneself that one finds in the alien, even while feeding with the swine. There is always this sense of chastening and deflation when we discover that there is something more, something other than ourselves. But even in the humiliation of recognizing oneself in the other, there is also a sense of elation and expansion, of coming into one's own that Scripture depicts as homecoming and coming into one's inheritance. (Weinsheimer, 1985):70)<sup>2</sup>

Taylor's version of the fusion of horizons adds to the detail of our understanding of it (Taylor, 2002). In Taylor's telling, good understanding entails a long and quite difficult process of coming to see our own prejudices. It is not a simple change of attitude which can transform our practical living from one moment to the next. It is a time-consuming journey of small steps and it involves asking continually what the equivalents are in our own lives of the 'strange' activity of the alien. In his neat example, it involves, for the 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese, asking themselves what, in the Catholic religion, corresponds with the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. Instead of writing them off as worshipping the devil, which would assimilate them into unchanged Portuguese concepts, the Portuguese would 'allow themselves to be interrogated' by its similarities with, say, the Catholic mass.

It is in this important sense that good hermeneutic understanding involves an identity cost because it entails a change in oneself, and it is a change which often comes with some discomfort. When *ego* allows him/herself to be interrogated by the possible validity of *alter*, *ego* cannot remain unchanged. Some element in *ego*'s own armoury has shifted in order to understand.

One might be tempted to say that this position is very close to postmodern relativism (Taylor, 2002). It appears to promote a similar perspectival approach which leads straight to incommensurability. But there are two important differences between the Gadamerian stance and this postmodern relativism. The first relates to the inevitability of change. The picture of the Derridean relativist is that of a skilful swordsman with flashing rapier point exposing the flaws in the defences of seemingly monolithic positions. But the swordsman does not change. He remains heroically unscathed in his brilliant performance. For Gadamer the activity of swordsmanship cannot but be a transformative one.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth underlining that this meeting the alien is not the same as meeting the Other. In its most common form, meeting the Other derives from Freudian theory, the Other being the suppressed image of a significant Other, like a parent (Hall, 2001). As used by Edward Said, the Other is that which is feared and/or secretly desired, projected on to other (often foreign) people but likewise suppressed (Hall, 1992). Meeting the Other here sounds more like the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus (rather than the prodigal son), that which was hated and feared turns into something to be respected. Meeting the alien is more a deflation of hubris and arrogance than the transformation of hatred and disgust (Edinger, 1972).

The second difference with relativism is that, for Gadamer, there is a moral position to be defended here, and it consists in gathering as comprehensive a view of human potential as is possible. Portuguese conquistadores who understood the Aztecs would be in a different and better position from those who did not understand. But Portuguese conquistadores who understood Angolan slaves and Arab merchants and Aztec priests would be in an even better position. And it is their understanding of themselves which would be most important in the change.

How do this understanding of the fusion of horizons compare with Foucault's notion of flawed positive freedom? In Gadamer the idea of tradition does the same work as that of discourse in Foucault. Traditions are ineluctable and constitutive. They create the conditions under which subjects work. For Foucault the way to freedom is the demonstration that discourses, regimes of truth, are random. For Gadamer the key is the realization that, while one cannot escape the effectiveness of history, the questions that one asks are conditioned by continually new contexts. One can never ask the same question twice. And the capacity to accommodate the Other, not through assimilation in either direction, but through small steps of adjustment and forbearance.

### **Connections to postcolonialism: Fanon and the role of the intellectual**

The notion that discourse has a determining power over individuals and individual action has flowed across into postcolonial writing (Parry, 1987). The death of the subject in structuralism has come to mean 'a totalizing notion of epistemic violence' in postcolonialism in the writings of both Said and Spivak. While Spivak famously laments the subaltern's incapacity to speak, Said depicts oriental discourse as having complete power over the colonized. Even in Bhabha's attempt to rescue subaltern agency, he looks for opportunities of resistance within the ambivalences and hybridity of colonial discourse itself. While Bhabha's writing is valuable in showing 'multiple and contradictory articulations' within colonial discourse, and hence the space to be found there for interpretation and movement, he cannot allow the native space within an arena outside of the colonial discursive sphere<sup>3</sup>. It is ultimately to Fanon that we must turn for a notion of interaction and dialectic between colonial and native discourses, mediated by the intellectual.

But it is Fanon's further value that he not only turns the spotlight away from the supposed silence of the native, but that he now focuses our attention on the dangerous role of the intellectual. For it is the intellectual who herself is now the bearer of colonial discourse, who derogates the value of native culture, who even in speaking of resistance, disseminates notions of the native as Other. Here is collusion of a much more insidious kind, collusion masquerading as revolution and critical theory.

Fanon argues that it is the hard task of the intellectual to abandon both horns of the dialectical dilemma: that is, both her awe of colonial culture, and also her awe of pristine

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<sup>3</sup> Pecheux has a similar argument for discursive ambiguity in critique of Foucault (McNay, 1994:82-4)

historic native culture (in Fanon's language, Negritude), and to devote herself to the co-construction of a 'fighting culture' together with native revolutionaries (Gibson, 2003). This entails taking on the practical everyday tasks of surviving and resisting and producing, of 'sleeping with the natives in the mountains'. The native's historical traditions are only valuable to the extent that they assist in the pursuit of these immediate concrete projects.

In Fanon's conception here the enlivening of agency, the empowerment of the native, happens through the delicate cross-fertilization of intellectual and native cultures. But if this productive fusion is to happen, says Fanon, the intellectual must go through a difficult process of re-education. Unfortunately Fanon does not provide us with much detail on this process. There are echoes here of Paulo Freire's notion of the intellectual's 'Easter experience', that is, a self-sacrifice and rebirth in a new form. Likewise Cabral's notion of the intellectual's necessary 'class suicide' speaks to the same problem.

But it seems to me that Fanon is close to Gadamer here in conceiving of a space for peasants outside of colonial discourse. It is the different worlds of intellectual and peasant which fuse to produce a new consciousness. It is no longer simply a question of delving into the contradictions of the colonial discourse itself to unearth new possibilities.

There will be those who will argue that there is no 'outside' of colonial discourse, that the material conditions and coercive ideologies of colonialism have infiltrated into the very last corners of 'the Third World'. That is why, in one important sense, the subaltern cannot speak, because she cannot speak with an unpolluted voice. It is then, so the argument goes, only with the colonial voice that she speaks or can speak. But this is to fall into a one-way determinism, as if the native had no impact on the colonizer, as if the colonizer himself has a pure voice.

Gadamer shows us that there is no such thing as a pure voice, that no horizon can be closed off from 'outside' influence. There is no such thing as an inside insulated from an outside. At the same time, the interaction of horizons occurs by means of active interpretation. There is no uniform and single impact which one horizon has on another, whether from the powerful to the less powerful, or vice versa. Much like two countries with common spatial borders, there are parts of these two countries which are close to the point of contact and feel its influence most. There are others which are far removed from it and less overwhelmed. In short, there is no more inside and outside, but this does not negate the capacity for resistance and autonomy.

There is an ironic consequence of Fanon's (implicit) critique of Foucauldian and postcolonial totalizing discourse theory. Bhabha is right in displaying the potential slippages and instabilities in colonial discourse. But it is through the intellectual's self-reflexivity that transformation occurs. It is in rethinking the role of the intellectual herself that significant change can occur. If one can speak of a 'zone of occult instability' it is here that intellectuals can be fruitful, in rethinking the spaces and interstices within their own roles, in teaching, in writing, in research or in organizational activity.

## Zizek and Auto-blockage

In Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, he writes

For in the first days of the revolt you must kill: to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man and a free man ... (Sartre in Fanon, 1968:22)

In the logic of the dialectic, if one pole of the dialectic ceases to exist, the other is also transformed. They were mutually constitutive. This is another version of the inside/outside dilemma. In this version of it, the way to break out of a dominant discourse is to destroy the agents who hold the power. Destroy the master and the discourse of slavery is likewise destroyed. Translated into a different format, the role of critical theory is to expose the hidden workings of ideological power. To expose the mechanisms by which the ideology achieves its effects is to destroy the ideology.

It is worth noting that this is not in line with Fanon's line of constructing a fighting culture. That strategy does not consist in destroying the dominant culture but of transforming it in dialogue with peasant culture. But let us return to Sartre's interpretation of it.

Zizek is sceptical of this claim. He wants to say that exposing the workings of power to social individuals does nothing to undercut the psychoanalytic impact of power relationships. Because both master and slave have come to need each other's presence, psychologically. Each has become a projection for the other. Although the slave might heartily wish for the destruction of the master, that same destruction will not bring freedom, nor cure the psychological need. For the slave has externalized his/her lack by investing the master with the blame for it. Removing the master does not remove the need. It merely removes the external sedimentation of it. It is only when the slave grasps his/her own inability to fill the gap that any progress can be made. Zizek says it like this:

That is why we could say that it is precisely in the moment when we achieve victory over the enemy in the antagonistic struggle in social reality that we experience the antagonism in its most radical dimension, as a self-hindrance: far from enabling us finally to achieve full identity with ourselves, the moment of victory is the moment of greatest loss. The Bondsman (slave) frees himself from the Lord only when he experiences how the Lord was only embodying the auto-blockage of his own desire: what the Lord through his external repression was supposed to deprive him of, to prevent him from realizing, he – the Bondsman – never possessed. This is the moment called by Hegel 'the loss of loss', the experience that we never had what were supposed to have lost (Zizek).

By Zizek's telling of it, then, critical theory has a naïve version of unmasking power. Now Zizek might here be telling a quite elementary story of negative and positive

freedom. In this he would be in sympathy with (the later) Foucault. Freedom is not attained by removing (negative) constraints. But there is perhaps a more subtle story to be told here. In this second story the Lord has become the Other for the slave, has become the suppressed internal shadow within the slave. Destroying the Lord then is does no more than destroy the external projection of the Other. It is the converse of the holocaust, in which the masters are massacred by the slaves. In Foucauldian terms, sanitizing European culture by removing madness (one pole of the dialectic) from it was a move of impoverishment.

... the reciprocal, participatory relation between reason and folly was severed, ultimately leaving on one side a rational certainty of self closed off from any experience of the numinous or the transcendent, and on the other such an experience trivialized as illness, reduced to the mechanisms of a psychological determinism. (Dews, 1984)

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that we are seeing a rerun of the impasse in Marxist development theory which we saw in the mid-1980's. That impasse was characterized by functionalist and determinist thinking which negated the possibilities of agency, resistance and for economic development. The spectacular rise of the East Asian tigers and dragons, accompanied by the fall of the Berlin wall, punctured the development pessimism so prominent in Marxist theories of the time. In its second reincarnation, the new impasse of the 1990's and 2000's repeats the earlier functionalist determinism but now under the influence of early Foucauldian discourse theory. These problems are very visible in two key works in development studies, those of Said and Ferguson. Ironically Foucault in his later work moved on from his earlier conceptions of subjectivity without rethinking his notions of discourse.

In the second half of this paper I have presented Gadamer's views of the fusion of horizons as a mechanism of intercultural hermeneutics. There are different versions of this, from Jardine's 'returning life to its original difficulty', and Kerdeman's 'being pulled up sharp' to Charles Taylor's notion of 'allowing oneself to be interrogated' by other cultures. This makes some advance on the later Foucault's notion of freedom. I also argue in this section that Fanon and Gadamer in their different ways allow us to escape from the inside-outside dilemma of postcolonialism. All of these moves attempt to reinstall notions of agency, of intellectual insight, and of resistance to the constitutive power of knowledge, discourse and tradition.

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