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THE SCRAMBLE FOR POST-COLONIALISM

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It is scarcely news to readers of this volume that the heterogeneous field of 'post-colonial studies' is reproducing itself at present as a spectacle of disorderly conduct. Perhaps this is as it should be for a field which takes for its academic objective a wholesale refashioning of the Western project of the traditional 'humanities'; but I think it is clear that the institutionalized field of post-colonial studies, at least, has arrived at a point of multiple intersections, of ruptures, of territoriality—and this suggests that the field has arrived at a point that really matters in its history. In this essay, I want to try to think through the dis/order imbricated in the post-colonial academic field, and in part to respond to the ways in which a policing energy seems to carry itself across a variety of articulations within the post-colonial problematic. The policing energy which interests me here is in the final instance an internalized apparatus for control and regulation, an effect of ideology, and I am not about to argue that 'out there' in post-colonialdom there are double agents, neo-colonialist conspirators, wolves-in-sheep's-clothing, whom 'we' must resist through some vigorous form of oppositional collectivity. But I am going to suggest that as the field of post-colonial studies is becoming professionalized as an institution for social critique and as an apparatus for producing cultural knowledge, it is beginning to perform within itself a regulating operation which has no necessary relation to, or investment in, a politics of anti-colonialism. This article, consequently, is an attempt to carry out some (ideological) refereeing in this structure of professionalized or disciplinary regulation: I want to address the question of who gets to play on the post-colonial field, who is asked to sit on the bench, who plays on the farm team, how and when a player is, or ought to be, called

'out'. Now obviously, I am in no sense outside of these questions; I too have an institutional stake in this game and am part of the disciplinary scramble. My refereeing persona here must necessarily be ambivalent, compromised by a double articulation in meta-regulation and in wager. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this exercise, I want to pretend to stand somehow outside the 'field'.

My thesis here is that in one register, the scramble now taking place within critical theory over the valency of the 'post-colonial' marker is at heart an institutional scramble, a debate whose specific provenance is an emerging critical and pedagogical field within the apparatus of the Western 'humanities'. My general argument is that the site of rupture for post-colonial studies is, in fact, predicated by a set of possibly unresolvable debates in the related field of colonial discourse theory, and more distantly in 'humanities'; and the conclusion I will be reaching for is a highly personal and I suspect ungeneralizable credo that has to do with the practice of anti-colonialist empowerment. But the question I will be pursuing on the way to this conclusion is why it is—and why it should be—that some radically differential, and in fact methodologically hostile, critical and teaching practices seek a grounding in something called 'post-colonialism' in order to de-scribe their various Empires and engage in an emancipatory and local institutional politics.

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'Post-colonialism', as it is now used in its various fields, de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and—and this was my first encounter with the term—as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what

used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies. The obvious tendency, in the face of this heterogeneity, is to understand 'post-colonialism' mostly as an object of desire for critical practice: as a shimmering talisman that in itself has the power to confer political legitimacy onto specific forms of institutionalized labour, especially on ones that are troubled by their mediated position within the apparatus of institutional power. I think, however, that this heterogeneity in the concept of the 'post-colonial' —and here I mean within the university institution—comes about for much more pragmatic reasons, and these have to do with a very real problem in securing the concept of 'colonialism' itself, as Western theories of subjectification and its resistances continue to develop in sophistication and complexity.

The nature of colonialism as an economic and political structure of cross-cultural domination has of course occasioned a set of debates, but it is not really on this level that the 'question' of European colonialism has troubled the various post-colonial fields of study. The problem, rather, is with the concept of colonialism as an ideological or discursive formation: that is, with the ways in which colonialism is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation. In a way—and of course this is an extreme oversimplification—the debate over a description of colonialism's multiple strategies for regulating Europe's others can be expressed diagramatically (see Figure 1.1).

The general understanding in Figure 1.1 is that colonialism works on a left-to-right order of domination, with line 'A' representing various theories of how colonialism oppresses through direct political and economic control, and lines 'BC' and 'DE' representing differing concepts of the ideological regulation of colonial subjects, of subordination through the manufacture of consent. Theories that recognize an efficacy to colonialism that proceeds only along line 'A' are in essence 'brute force' or 'direct political' theories of colonialist oppression: that is, they reject the basic thesis that power manages social contradiction partly through the strategic production of specific ideas of the 'self', which subordinated groups then internalize as being 'real'. Theories, however, that examine the trajectory of colonialist power primarily along line 'BC' —a line representing an ideological flanking for the economic colonialism running along line 'A' —focus on the constitutive power of state apparatuses like education, and the constitutive power of professional fields of knowledge within those

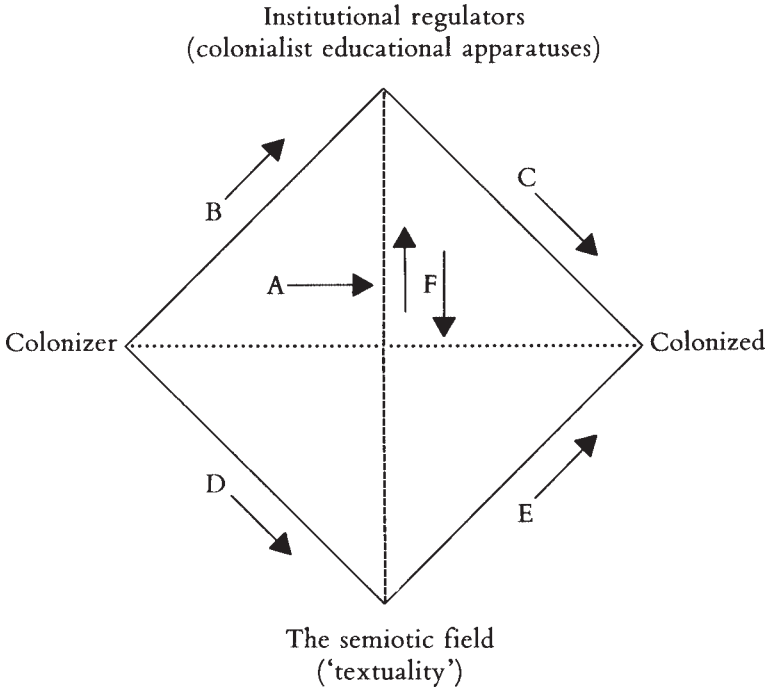

Figure 1.1 Diagram representing the debate over the nature of colonialism.

apparatuses, in the production of colonialist relations. Along this line, Edward Said (1979) examines the political efficacy of 'orientalism' within colonialism; Talal Asad (1973) and many others examine the role of anthropology in reproducing colonial relations; Alan Bishop (1990) examines the deployment of Western concepts of 'mathematics' against African school-children, Timothy Mitchell (1988) examines how the professional field of 'political science' came into being through a European colonialist engagement with the cultures of Egypt; Gauri Viswanathan (1989) examines the foundations of 'English' literary studies within a structure of colonialist management in India. This work keeps coming in, and the list of radically compromised professional fields within the Western syllabus of 'humanities' options grows daily longer. Theories that focus primarily on line 'DE' in this diagram examine the ways in which ideology reproduces colonialist relations through the strategic deployment of a vast semiotic field of representations—in literary

works, in advertising, in sculpture, in travelogues, in exploration documents, in maps, in pornography, and so on.

This pattern, as I have laid it out so far, does not seem especially controversial or problematic, but the difficulties arise at the moment of conceptualizing the *relation* between colonialist professional fields and institutions (at the top of the diagram) and the whole field of representation (at the bottom of the diagram) — the field of 'textuality' and its investment in reproducing and naturalizing the structures of power. To take up one example of this paradigmatically: in Edward Said's work on Orientalism, colonialist power is seen to operate through a complex relationship between apparatuses placed on line 'F', where in the first instance a scholarly educational apparatus called 'Orientalism' —at the top of the line—appropriates textual representations of 'the Orient' in order to consolidate itself as a discipline and to reproduce 'the Orient' as a deployable unit of knowledge. So, in the first instance, colonialist power in Said's argument runs not just through the middle ground of this diagram but through a complex set of relations happening along line 'F'; and since Said's thesis is that a function at the top of this line is employing those representations created at the bottom of the line in order to make up 'knowledges' that have an ideological function, you can say that the vector of motion along line 'F' is an upward one, and that this upward motion is part of the whole complex, discursive structure whereby 'Orientalism' manufactures the 'Orient' and thus helps to regulate colonialist relations. That is Said's first position: that under Orientalism the vector of line 'F' is upward. But in Said's analysis, colonialist power also runs through line 'F' in a downward movement, where the scholarly apparatus of Orientalism is understood to be at work in the production of a purely fantastic and entirely projected idea of the 'Orient'. The point is that in the process of understanding the multivalent nature of colonialist discourse in terms of the historical specific of 'Orientalism', Said's model becomes structurally ambivalent—under 'Orientalism', the 'Orient' turns out to be something produced both as an object of scholarly knowledge and as a location for psychic projection.[1] I have graphed this ambivalence as a double movement or vector along line 'F'. For Said, the mechanism that produces this 'Orient', then, has to be understood as something capable of deploying an ambivalent structure of relations along line 'F', and deploying that structure towards a unified end. And so Said (and here I'm

following Robert Young's analysis of the problem) ends up referring the whole structure of colonialist discourse back to a single and monolithic originating intention within colonialism, the intention of colonialist power to possess the terrain of its Others. That assumption of intention is basically where Said's theory has proven to be most controversial.

Said's text is an important one here, for as Robert Young has shown, Said's work stands at the headwaters of colonial discourse theory, and this ambivalence in Said's model may in fact initiate a *foundational* ambivalence in the critical work which comes out of this field. This ambivalence sets the terms for what are now the two central debates within colonial discourse theory: the debate over historical specificity, and the debate over agency.

The first debate—the debate over the problem of historical specificity in the model—concerns the inconclusive relation between actual historical moments in the colonialist enterprise and the larger, possibly trans-historical discursive formation that colonial discourse theory posits in its attempt to understand the multivalent strategies at work in colonialist power. Can you look at 'colonial discourse' only by examining what are taken to be paradigmatic moments within colonialist history? If so, can you extrapolate a modality of 'colonialism' from one historical moment to the next? Does discursive colonialism always look structurally the same, or do the specifics of its textual or semiotic or representational manoeuvres shift registers at different historical times and in different kinds of colonial encounters? And what would it mean to think of colonial discourse as a set of exchanges that function in a similar way for all sorts of colonialist strategies in a vastly different set of cultural locations? These questions of historical specificity, though always a problem for social theory, are especially difficult ones for colonialist discourse theory, and the reason for this is that this theory quite appropriately refuses to articulate a simplistic structure of social causality in the relation between colonialist institutions and the field of representations. In other words, colonial discourse theory recognizes a radical ambivalence at work in colonialist power, and that is the ambivalence I have attempted to show in Figure 1.1 as a double movement in vector at the level of line 'F'.

To clarify this, I want to make use of Gauri Viswanathan's important work on Britain's ideological control of colonized people through the deployment of colonialist educational strategies in nineteenth-century India. Obviously, the question of what happens

along line 'F' in Figure 1.1 can only be addressed by specific reference to immediate historical conditions, and every piece of archaeological work on colonialist power will want to formulate the vector of action here with particular sensitivity to the local conditions under analysis. Viswanathan researches this part of the puzzle with exemplary attention to history, and at heart her argument is that colonialist education in India (which would stand in as the ideological apparatus at the top of the diagram) strategically and intentionally deployed the vast field of canonical English 'literature' (the field of representations at the bottom of the diagram) in order to construct a cadre of 'native' mediators between the British Raj and the actual producers of wealth. The point here is that Viswanathan's analysis employs a purely upward vector of motion to characterize the specifics of how power is at work along line 'F' in the diagram, and what secures this vector is Viswanathan's scrupulous attention to the immediate conditions that apply within British and Indian colonial relations.

The problem, though—and here I mean the problem for colonial discourse theory—is that the foundational ambivalence or double movement that Said's work inserts into the model of colonialist discourse analysis always seems to return to the field; and it does so through critical work that on its own terms suggests a counter-flow along line 'F' at the same moment of colonialist history. That is, the residual ambivalence in the vector of line 'F' within colonial discourse theory seems to invite the fusion of Viswanathan's kind of analysis with critical readings that would articulate a downward movement at this place in the diagram; and one of the areas such work is now entering is the analysis of how English literary activity of the period (at the bottom of line 'F') suddenly turned to the *representation* of educational processes (at the top of the line), and why this literature should so immediately concern itself with the investments of educational representations in the colonialist scene. In examining the place of English literary activity within this moment of colonialist history, that is, a critic such as Patrick Brantlinger would want to argue for the valency of texts such as *Jane Eyre* or *Tom Brown's School Days* within colonialist discursive power, and colonialist discourse theory would want to understand how both kinds of discursive regulation, both vectors of movement along line 'F', are at work in a specific historical moment of colonialist relations. Because of Said's ambivalence in charting out the complex of Orientalism along line 'F', I am arguing, the field of colonialist

discourse theory carries that sense of ambivalence forward, and looks to an extraordinary valency of movement within its articulation of colonialist power. The ambivalence makes our understanding of colonial operations a great deal clearer for historical periods, but it also upsets the positivism of highly specific analyses of colonialist power going on *within* a period.

The basic project of colonial discourse theory is to push out from line 'A', and try to define colonialism both as a set of political relations and as a signifying system, one with ambivalent structural relations. It is remarkably clarifying in its articulation of the productive relations between seemingly disparate moments in colonialist power (the structure of literary education in India, the literary practice of representing educational control in Britain), but because it recognizes an ambivalence in colonialist power, colonial discourse theory results in a concept of colonialism that cannot be historicized modally, and that ends up being tilted towards a description of all kinds of social oppression and discursive control. For some critics, this ambivalence bankrupts the field. But for others, the concept of 'colonialism' —like the concept of 'patriarchy' for feminism, which shares this structure of transhistoricality and lack of specificity—remains an indispensable conceptual category of critical analysis, and an indispensable tool in securing our understanding of ideological domination under colonialism to the level of political economy.

The first big debate going on within colonialist discourse theory, then, is a debate over what happens when a model of 'colonial discourse' is carried beyond its scattered moments of archaeological research and is taken up as a general structure of oppression. I want now to turn to the second big debate going on between theorists of colonialist discourse; and that is the debate over the question of *agency* under colonialist power. Basically, the question of agency can be restated as a question of who or what acts oppositionally when ideology or discourse or psychic processes of some kind construct human subjects, and the question of specifying agency is becoming an extremely complex one in all forms of critical theory at present. Again, however, this debate has especial urgency within colonial discourse theory and, again, that is because this theory recognizes foundationally that the vector of line 'F' in Figure 1.1 remains ambivalent at every moment of colonialist discursive control.

I tried to explain the first debate—the debate over historical specificity—by demonstrating just how slippery the colonial

discourse model becomes when two different orders of archaeological work on the same historical period were conflated by the theory. For this second debate, however, the debate over agency, I think I can more effectively suggest the essential difficulty of this problem by tracing very briefly how one theorist, Homi Bhabha, attempts to address this ambivalence.

In his analysis of Bhabha's critical work, Robert Young suggests that the place of beginning for Bhabha is Said's radical ambivalence over the 'topic' of Orientalism. Orientalism is a discovery in Said's analysis; it is a discipline; but it is also a projection, a myth of desire or of disavowal. Said refers this ambivalence back to a single originating intention in Orientalism, but as Young sees it, this is where Bhabha makes his most important intervention into the field of colonial discourse theory, and begins to extrapolate ambivalence away from a term within the colonialist equation to a notion of flaw in the articulation of colonialist administration itself (Young 1990: 143). Colonial discourse, Bhabha will go on to argue, is *itself* an ambivalent discourse; as Young puts it, 'the representation may appear to be hegemonic, but it carries within it a hidden flaw invisible at home but increasingly apparent abroad when it is away from the safety of the West. The representation of the colonial subject…is not so much proved or disproved…as disarticulated' (ibid. 143) in the way it actually *works* at specific moments of colonialist history.

In the language of the diagram I have been using, what Bhabha is saying is this: that the recognition of a fundamental ambivalence along line 'F' within colonialist ('orientalist') power simply cannot be 'managed' at the level of intentions, but rather needs to be taken seriously; and when this happens, the recognition of ambivalence at line 'F' begins to crack open the foundational assumption that this diagram moves in an entirely left-to-right direction, where the colonized subject is simply *made* by colonialist power: a subject without agency. Bhabha's counter-move, therefore, is to *develop* the ambivalence in this structure of colonialist discourse and to expose it as a radical ambivalence—an ambivalence working not just up and down line 'F' but also back and forward across all the lines on the left-right axis of the diagram. Bhabha's basic argument is that ambivalence is everywhere in the model, as an effect of colonialist discourse. This means not only that there must always be resistance to power within any moment of colonialist articulation; it means also that there must always be an agency to colonialist resistance, not because colonized people simply intend oppositional actions but

because colonialist representations are always overdeterminations, and are always ambivalent. This fracture of the monolithic left-to-right direction of colonial discourse is examined everywhere in Bhabha's work, and the genealogy he supplies for this fracture varies. But one of the ways in which Bhahba articulates this fracture is to show how the subject-forming strategies of Colonialist Self onto Colonized Other produce an 'impossible object', an impossible subject-position for both the colonizer and the colonized, because a purely 'colonial identity' is always already radically overwritten by the differential play of colonialist ambivalence. Since it is impossible to claim an origin for either colonizer or colonized 'within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision', Bhabha argues, the construction of subjectivities within colonialist relations must always return as a 'persistent *questioning* of the frame' (1990c:190, 189) — which on one level is the 'space of representation', and on another level is the frame of Western modernity itself. This space of questioning—itself an effect of colonialist discourse—is for Bhabha the space where colonial subjects become agents of resistance and of change. It is the space within which Bhabha locates the condition of post-coloniality itself.

2

As I said at the beginning, this paper is an attempt to understand the specificity of 'post-colonialism' within the frame of a professionalization of the field, and the problem I am about to address is the way in which a scramble over this field is threatening to disperse it into heterogeneous, in fact contradictory, ends. I think the motives behind this scramble for the territory of post-colonialism are grounded in the unresolved debates that trouble colonial discourse theory at present, and are predicated on the conceptual slipperiness of 'discursive colonialism' in terms of historical specificity and of agency. I am now going to try to unpack this institutional scramble for post-colonialism, this balkanization of the post-colonial field, in terms of these two problematic areas in colonial discourse theory, but I am aware that the spatial purchase of my analysis in the preceding section is not in itself entirely proof against exactly the kind of critique that students of colonialist discourse are training themselves to carry out. And so a critique

could go forward that would say, in effect, that the diagram I have just articulated in Figure 1.1 is an example of critical Orientalism at the level of the conceptual frame. You could point out how a framing device such as this one offers the ruse of 'knowledge' only by reifying a set of binary oppositions and by containing a disruptive field and the play of difference within it; you could critique this diagram as a spatialization that covertly reiterates a north-south axis to cross-cultural relations and thus conflates power with the West and powerlessness with the East; you could read the whole thing as a metaphor whose real power lies in its naturalization of a left-to-right reading flow at precisely the moment it permits the question of agency for the colonized, at the right side of the map, to be raised as both a possibility and a problem.

I want to use this mapping device, however, because it allows some kind of purchase on what I take to be the central problem, at present, in academic constructions of the 'post-colonial' marker, and because it keeps alive the central metaphor I have been moving towards here: the metaphor of post-colonialism as a geographical area, and one that is at present being carved up by critical methodologies which are seeking forms of absolute control over the terrain. For as I see it, the terrain of conceptual post-colonialism is especially vulnerable at present precisely because genuinely post- or anti-colonialist forms of academic work need to image themselves *differently* in relation to this diagram: sometimes they need to focus on the extraction of the colonized out of the field of this diagram (as in the work of Benita Parry); sometimes they will want to relativize the diagram by positioning it within a much longer history of relations which both precedes and exceeds colonialist contact; sometimes, as in the work of Homi Bhabha, they will attempt a wholesale reconfiguration of this diagram towards a renewed conceptualization of colonialist subjectivity and of agency on the part of the colonized. What I am saying, in other words, is that 'post-colonialism' —whatever else it is—functions in the academy as a political analysis of *what to do* about the 'problem' of colonialism both as a structure of historical power and as a debate within 'theory', and, because the nature of colonialism as a social apparatus is so vigorously under debate at present within colonial discourse analysis, the field of post-colonial critical activity cannot help recapitulating the debates which trouble the field of colonial discourse theory at its present moment of development within the university.

For example, the ambivalence in vector within colonial discourse theory is likely to suggest two different forms of literary critical work which—in their model for a genuine 'post'-colonialism—seek to understand what happens politically when the colonized 'write'. One form of this critical work will assume the mantle of post-coloniality by seeking to retrieve the colonized from the hegemonic left-to-right flow of this historical moment, and to read on that place the figurations of an enduring cultural script. This form of work is likely to be archaeological, and will attempt to bracket the left side of this diagram from what it will call the 'real', the 'unwritten', history, that obtains on the site of the colonized. And this form of work—at least in terms of the Western academy—will also be seen as expressivist, as recuperative, as nationalist or culturalist, and as founded on liberal humanist notions of individuality. While this is going on, another form of literary critical work will posit a recursive vector to the politics of writing on the site of the colonized, and will articulate the ways in which anti-colonialist figuration runs along line 'CB' or line 'ED': the Empire writes *back*. In turn, this form of reading will be seen by the first school as occlusive in relation to the extra-colonialist purchase of the writing, and as championing a reactive as opposed to pro-active facet of Third World representations.

The methodological opposition here is of course institutionally predicated: it goes back to a long debate that continues to play itself out within the Western humanities. But because this opposition within post-colonialism is also, and more proximately, predicated upon another field—colonial discourse theory—two specific principles of organization are likely to structure methodological conflict that takes place within post-colonial critical work itself. First, the debate between oppositional schools of post-colonial criticism is likely to play itself out in the first instance as an academic debate—that is, as a struggle for academic terrain— where critical methodology stands in for cultural politics, and where 'post-colonialism' figures itself as an attempt to contain an interest in writing by colonized or ex-colonized peoples within very particular and specific strategies for textual reading. Second, the debate between oppositional forms of post-colonial analysis is likely to produce gestures of affiliation towards powerful articulations that take place within colonial discourse theory and its debates, so that the big names in colonial discourse theory (Bhabha, Gates, Spivak, and so on) will find themselves continually deployed as champions

of representation for cultural formations which they neither know nor work on, and for literary tactics in which they have taken no professional interest. In this second register, the most successful expressions of post-colonial agonism will tend to be located not randomly across what would technically comprise the possible points of difference within the field, but rather, precisely upon the pressure points that structure the debates within colonial discourse theory. Thus the problem of historical specificity for post-colonialism, and the question of tenor for a post-colonial concept of agency, will carry an echo within them as they organize debate within post-colonial studies, and will carry this organizing purchase into the scramble for post-colonialism within the institutional terrain.

Arun Mukherjee (1991) has quite rightly pointed out, for example, that my own work along the 'ED' line of the diagram I have drawn overlooks the mode of literary realism in India—in this she sees the lineaments of a neo-colonialist methodological return. In a similar vein, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge (1991) have criticized the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* for supplying a plenitude to recursive work along the 'ED' axis by conflating too many types of presumably 'colonized' subjects at the right hand side of the diagram—an orientalism, they argue, at the level of methodology. The methodological issue here, at heart, is the question of historical adequacy, but it is noteworthy that methodological disagreement within the field comes loaded with the charge of unconscious neo-colonialism at play within the work of the opposing critical practice. This has to do, I think, with the peculiar historical positioning of the post-colonial critical field, and in a moment I will return to this phenomenon.

First, however, I want to comment on the other pole in this conflict, and on the other privileged debate going on at the foundations of colonial discourse theory—the debate over agency. In this context, those critical schools which interrogate the subject-making apparatuses of dominant ideology are, institutionally at least, unlikely to smile upon critical work which buys into expressivist notions either of cultural existence or of resistance and opposition, since the theory behind this expressivism is one which would call down the theory of subject formation upon which they depend. And so a vociferous debate springs up in the scramble for post-colonialism between two avowedly anti-colonialist critical forms—ones which, taken on their own, are exemplary in their commitment to political resistance to the forms of colonialist power. Critics like

Barbara Christian, Barbara Harlow, and Benita Parry, for example, have consistently sought an identity-based notion of anti-colonialist opposition on the theory of alter/native voices and of intentional resistance in representation; and their work has quite visibly enabled all sorts of emancipatory critical activity in Third World and colonized locations. It has also run into some very sharp criticism from Gayatri Spivak, who has pointed out that the desire to recuperate those 'authentic' subaltern voices that colonialism has silenced necessarily buys into colonialist notions of expressive subjectivity which enable power by promulgating the concept of voice as articulation of full individuality. Under colonialism, Spivak argues, the colonized speaks only through speaking positions which imperial and other powers permit to its Others (Young 1990:165); under colonialism, the subaltern *cannot* speak in the authentic voice of the colonized. Criticism which argues otherwise necessarily participates in an inherently neo-colonialist function whose contemporary home is the Western university institution itself.

These, of course, are important debates in their own right, and within post-colonial studies I usually find myself in sympathy with both sides of the argument. But the point I want to make here is that the groundwork for this set of quarrels is established, first, by colonial discourse theory's debate over the crisis in historical specificity, and second, by an institutionalized debate within the Western humanities: a debate between proponents of nationalist literary groupings and proponents of literary theory, between historical forms of criticism and process-based structures of critical pedagogy, between theories of the subject (or of the construction of subjectivity) and expressivist schools of reading. This quarrel in the field of post-colonial critical work, that is, can at least partly be read as a consequence of these foundational debates within colonial discourse theory and within the 'humanities' institution, and so we should not perhaps be overly surprised if the terms for resolving these debates do not seem available to us only from within the frame of the post-colonial field, or only in the name of a political post-colonial resistance. Indeed, if my analysis is correct, this kind of debate within post-colonial studies need have no necessary relation at all to the question of a post- or anti-colonial tactical efficacy.

What interests me about these debates in terms of the crisis I am describing in the post-colonial critical field is the tenor, and I think the effect, of accusation and reply over the question of methodological difference. At heart, what seems to structure these

oppositions is a pattern in which proponents of post-colonial archaeological work are trained to criticize anti-colonialist articulations of counter-discourse theory for a residual neo-colonialism, and in return find themselves criticized by anti-humanist post-colonialists who have trained themselves to link that form of research to a neo-colonialist function through an allegorization of methodology. The general tenor of the rhetoric in this pattern of accusation and counter-accusation—the figurations by which basic methodological differences are subject to disciplinary policing strategies—is peculiar to post-colonial studies, and I think it is significant: the Other is always neo-colonialist: the voice of the colonizer in renewed function and in institutionalized form. But the question of whose apparent anti-colonialism turns out in fact to be neo-colonialism in disguise remains for post-colonial studies an open one—and if I am right, it remains an unresolvable one in strictly post-colonial or anti-colonial terms. This means that the question of anti-colonial work returning in the ghostly mask of neo-colonialist discursive practice remains also an abiding and lurking threat for future researchers, and for all those new students who might be turning to post-colonial studies precisely because of its political grounding in anti-colonial work.

3

I want to stress the presuppositional location of this post-colonial scramble—I want to articulate its foundations within the problematic of colonial discourse theory and within an unresolved debate within the Western humanities institution—because I suspect that at times workers in various orders of post-colonial analysis are made to feel a disempowering energy at work in their field—a disempowerment which stems from their sense that these debates ought to be resolved within post-colonial studies itself. And I also raise the question of an effect to these debates, not because I want to suggest they are anything other than crucial ones for the field, but because I think the terrain of post-colonial studies remains in danger of becoming colonized by competing academic methodologies, and being reparcelled into institutional pursuits that have no abiding interest in the specifics of either colonialist history or post-colonial agency. One of the most exciting research projects now going on in colonial discourse analysis, for example, is Homi Bhabha's theorizing of

colonialist ambivalence, and his attempt to carry that analysis forward to a wholesale critique of Western modernity. It is possibly instructive, therefore, that in the process of expressing admiration for his work, the post-structuralist critic Robert Young (1990) inserts Bhabha's project into a narrative of unpackaging whose terms of reference are entirely European in origin: the radical restructuring of European historiography, and the allocation of alterity to the theatre of the European postmodern.

Along parallel lines, it is also instructive that Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes in Spivak's deconstructive brilliance a remarkable conflation between colonial discourse and Derrida's concept of writing itself—an argument that there is '*nothing* outside of (the discourse of) colonialism' (Gates 1991:466) and that all discourse must be nothing other than colonial discourse itself. Gates warns of a hidden consequence in this elevation in ascendancy of the colonial paradigm by questioning what happens when we elide, for example, 'the distance between political repression and individual neurosis: the positional distance between Steve Biko and, say, Woody Allen?' His argument is that academic interest in this history and the discourse of colonialism bids fair to become the last bastion for the project of global theory and for European universalism itself, and he asks us whether we really need to choose between oppositional critics whose articulations of the post-colonial institutionalize themselves as agonistic struggles over a thoroughly disciplined terrain.

I would like to echo Gates's sentiments in the face of this balkanization; and in the absence of any real solutions to this crisis in the field I'd like to offer a two-part credo towards post-colonial work as it takes place within the Western academic institution. First, I think, post-colonial studies, if nothing else, needs to become more tolerant of methodological difference, at least when that difference is articulated towards emancipatory anti-colonialist ends. I am reminded that the great war within the Western 'humanities' is carried on the back of critical methodology and its competing orders, and that in many ways the subject-making function of the humanities is effected precisely in that debate. I have seen no evidence that the humanities carry any special brief for the global project of decolonization, and so I would desperately want to preserve this function of decolonizing commitment for post-colonial studies, despite its necessary investment in and ironic relation to the humanities complex. I am suspicious of the kind of argument that would insist on the necessary conflation of the diagram I put

forward in this essay with a colonialist allegorical function, but I can see how the argument could be made. The tools for conceptual disempowerment in the struggle over method are going to remain available within post-colonial studies, but I remain suspicious of ahistorical and, I think, intolerant calls for homogeneity in a field of study which embraces radically different forms and functions of colonialist oppression and radically different notions of anti-colonialist agency.

Tolerance is never simply passive and, ironically, the area of institutionalized post-colonial studies is finding itself increasingly invested in an academic star system of astonishing proportions, and through that star system it is learning to seek its instruction in oppositional tactics along lines that run increasingly and monolithically backward towards the centres of Western power. I cannot help noticing, for example, that, in what Hortense Spillers (1990) calls the 'politics of mention', our theoretical masters in Paris or Oxford or New Haven are read and referenced by exemplary theorists of the local—the critic J.Michael Dash at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies is an example—but those metropolitan theorists seldom reference these cultural and theoretical mediators in return. Post-colonial studies should have an investment in open talk across cultural locations, however, and across methodological dynasties; and I think we do damage to the idea of post-coloniality at an immediate political level when that investment in cross-talk runs only one way.

As for the second part of this credo, I believe that post-colonial studies needs always to remember that its referent in the real world is a form of political, economic, and discursive oppression whose name, first and last, is *colonialism*. The forms of colonialist power differ radically across cultural locations, and its intersections with other orders of oppression are always complex and multivalent. But, wherever a globalized theory of the colonial might lead us, we need to remember that resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local, and so the research and training we carry out in the field of post-colonialism, whatever else it does, must always find ways to address the local, if only on the order of material applications. If we overlook the local, and the political applications of the research we produce, we risk turning the work of our field into the playful operations of an academic glass-bead game, whose project will remain at best a description of global relations, and not a script for their change. There is never a necessary

politics to the study of political actions and reactions; but at the level of the local, and at the level of material applications, post-colonialism must address the material exigencies of colonialism and neo-colonialism, including the neo-colonialism of Western academic institutions themselves.

If the field of post-colonial critical studies resembles a geographical terrain upon which discordant methodologies scramble agonistically for purchase, it also remains the one institutional location upon which the idea of anti-colonialist human agency can trouble the monologic droning of Western self-reference, and can insert within that drone-note the babble of cultural alterity. I have no investment in any single or privileged location for that alterity, and I distrust that moment of institutional self-presence which convinces the anti-colonialist worker that the vectors of tactical methodology are either linear or isolationist. I like the noisy discordance of post-colonial differences, and I welcome its clarity. But I worry about a moment when the concept of the post-colonial becomes so thoroughly generalized that the specificity of colonialist relations simply drops out of the equation. And I worry about a moment when the concept of the post-colonial becomes so thoroughly specialized that within the Western humanities the clamour of that discord simply quiets, and then completely dies away.

NOTES

1 For its articulation of this residual ambivalence in Said's *Orientalism*, I am grateful to Robert Young's important analysis of colonialist discourse theory in *White Mythologies* (1990).