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Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Cross-cultural Subject

Vince Marotta

The paper critically engages with contemporary theories of cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural subjectivity found in the areas of intercultural hermeneutics, intercultural social theory and the discourse on the stranger. Drawing on Gadamerian hermeneutics the paper takes some preliminary steps in formulating an alternative conception of the in-between subject and cross-cultural interpretation that incorporates the ambivalence of boundaries, the enabling dimension of essentialism and acknowledges the role that fore-meanings and fore-structures have on cross-cultural understanding. In contrast to existing theories I conclude that the cross-cultural subject is situated within the intercultural encounter rather than dwelling above it.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Subjectivity; Gadamer; Hermeneutics; Intercultural Understanding; The Stranger

Introduction

One of the concerns of cultural anthropology and the sociology of migration has been to explore the nature of cross-cultural understanding in a global and multicultural world. With the influence of poststructuralist thought in the social sciences, and the accompanying critique of the modernist project, what constitutes knowledge as well as cross-cultural knowledge has become contentious. The essentialist and dualistic mode of understanding that has characterised the West's encounter with difference has been systematically criticised by critical anthropology and postcolonialism. 'The West' has set the conditions in which otherness/difference is/has been constructed and as such produced the conditions of inequality between it and its 'others'.

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In contrast to this unequal encounter with otherness, current thinking emphasises that understanding and engaging with difference should be a dialogical endeavour. This dialogical encounter raises pertinent issues concerning the nature of understanding, in particular an intercultural understanding. Firstly, by drawing on Gadamer's seminal text *Truth and Method*, the paper makes some tentative steps in formulating the conditions for intercultural understanding. Secondly, we compare this Gadamerian informed intercultural understanding with the one emerging in the fields of intercultural hermeneutics/philosophy and intercultural social theory. Thirdly, the paper illustrates that the discourse on the stranger both contributes to and extends our understanding of intercultural hermeneutics. This diverse, but at times overlapping literature theorises a cross-cultural subject who dwells across various cultures and is characterised by openness to otherness, by a fluid and hybrid identity and by anti-essentialist and anti-universalist practices. Finally, drawing once again on Gadamerian hermeneutics, the concluding section of the paper critically interrogates these key characteristics. Overall, the paper suggests that facets of Gadamerian hermeneutics, in particular the intermediate interpretative stance and the role that fore-meanings and fore-structures have in the interpretative process can provide the conceptual parameters for theorising an intercultural mode of understanding.

Gadamer and Intercultural Understanding

Gadamer's key text *Truth and Method* outlines the nature of the human sciences by addressing the complex question of how understanding itself is possible. It is through ideas such as 'prejudice', 'horizons' and 'fusion of horizons' that Gadamer contemplates the nature of hermeneutics and it is through these very same ideas that we can take some preliminary steps in exploring the nature of an intercultural mode of understanding. Gadamer's analysis of the interpreter's approach towards the text is a useful point of departure for conceptualising an intercultural mode of interpretation. He notes that when approaching a text the premise of hermeneutics is the "polarity of familiarity and strangeness" (*Truth and Method* 262). It is simultaneously the text's strangeness and familiarity to us or the play "between being a historically intended, separate object and being part of a tradition" which suggests to Gadamer "the true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area" (*Truth and Method* 263). This intermediate position, for Gadamer, clarifies the conditions of 'true' understanding and for our purposes has the potential to shed light on the nature of an intercultural mode of interpretation and the idea of the cross-cultural subject.

Gadamer argues that interpreters are not in complete control of the interpretative process because the 'prejudices', fore-meanings and fore-structures which are necessary for understanding are not self-evident to the interpreter. In Gadamer's words, the

> prejudice and fore-meanings in the mind of the interpreter consciousness are not at his free disposal. He is not able to separate in advance the productive prejudices that make understanding possible from the prejudices that hinder understanding and lead to misunderstanding. (*Truth and Method* 263)

It is in the act of interpretation that fore-meanings and prejudices become evident not prior to it. As we interpret and interact with the social world, our prejudices are increasingly fore-grounded. In response to the Enlightenment's view that 'prejudices' are detrimental to objective understanding because they are either based on blind obedience to authority (myth and tradition) or on one's ignorance or 'over-hastiness' (*Truth and Method* 241), Gadamer argues that 'prejudices' are constitutive of who we are; they shape and enable our very being. Unlike the one-dimensional view of the Enlightenment, Gadamer has a more nuanced conception of prejudice. There are productive prejudices – for instance, those that we become aware of because of the interpretative process – and then there are those prejudices which obstruct understanding (*Truth and Method* 263). The in-between nature of the hermeneutical practice means that nineteenth-century historicism's attempt to acquire historical objectivity through transcending distance was bound to fail. The assumption of historicism was that by transposing ourselves into the period under study and thinking with its thoughts and ideas, while placing ourselves – for instance, our prejudices and fore-meanings – outside this process true understanding becomes possible. In contrast, Gadamer argues that 'placing ourselves' within a historical situation and thus having access to the otherness of the other involves not a negation of ourselves, but bringing ourselves – with our prejudices and fore-meanings – to the situation. This 'placing ourselves' does not encompass empathy with the other, but moving beyond our own particularity and that of the other. It describes a movement to a "higher universality" in which the horizon allows one "to learn to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion" (*Truth and Method* 272). Understanding is the result of the dialectic between proximity and distance and these processes are intrinsic to a Gadamerian hermeneutics. Temporal distance – which refers to the attempt to transcend our prejudices – is immediately questioned when we encounter the Other. Being aware that understanding is affected by history, fore-meanings and fore-structures suggest that one's encounter with the otherness of the other is an encounter with oneself. When we place ourselves in another's situation, we also bring ourselves into this situation (*Truth and Method* 271). The coming together of two historical beings allows understanding to reach a "higher universality" where horizons are fused and the particularity of the self and the other is overcome (*Truth and Method* 272).

Nonetheless, the hermeneutical in-between situation does not lead to a definitive understanding of the other's standpoint and horizon because, for Gadamer, interpreters are never confined by one standpoint and hence horizons are not closed or fixed. They are "something into which we move and that moves with us" (*Truth and Method* 271). In other words, the Gadamerian hermeneutical practice adopts

a particular epistemological stance that dialectically intertwines proximity/familiarity and distance/strangeness and arrives at a 'better' and more genuine understanding of social reality. Thus while horizons are never closed they are conceived in universalistic terms. At times, Gadamer appears to be celebrating a superior universality which is reminiscent of the Enlightenment project and is at odds with his vision of a less universalistic hermeneutical practice (Hekman).

Gadamer's discussion of the intermediate interpretative stance and his idea that we 'place ourselves' – with our prejudices and fore-meanings within this process – is suggestive of an in-between cross-cultural mode of interpretation. Such an intercultural mode of interpretation may encourage cross-cultural interpreters to move between horizons, and this mobility can foster an awareness that the interpreter's prejudices are shaped by their standpoints. A cross-cultural subject then understands that one cannot fully capture and comprehend the other in a dialogical encounter because another culture is never an enclosed horizon. Cultures like individuals are always involved with others, are always in motion. Although the in-betweenness of the interpreter fosters greater understanding, this is never complete understanding of the other's situation. To adopt an intercultural mode of interpretation is to acknowledge that the other is not an end but a means with which to enlarge our understanding and knowledge of ourselves and others. The intercultural mode of understanding would also appreciate that understanding is never complete and final. Actors in cross-cultural encounters would seek to enlarge their horizons – or in Gadamer's account – achieve a fusion of horizons but this fusion is not premised on a transcendental position because self and other are always situated.

Intercultural Hermeneutics

Thus far, we have shown the potential of Gadamer's ideas in *Truth and Method* in theorising an intercultural mode of interpretation. Nonetheless, others have also drawn on Gadamer to articulate an intercultural hermeneutics that emphasises the non-universal and non-essentialist forms of interpretation. This section considers the conceptual parameters of this intercultural hermeneutics that is informed by, but at times differs from, a Gadamerian approach; we will critically address these differences in the latter stages of the paper.

Ariarajah ("Intercultural Hermeneutics") explores the nature of this intercultural hermeneutics and notes that it entails a theory and method of understanding that occurs cross-culturally. However, the idea that intercultural hermeneutics refers to a method or a set of rules and procedures goes against the spirit of Gadamerian hermeneutics because the "intermediate position in which it operates" does not develop a method or a set of procedures, but seeks "to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place" (Gadamer 263). Leaving aside this tension between intercultural hermeneutics and Gadamer's argument for the moment, Ariarajah concludes that the former includes a willingness and one would assume an ability to

cross cultural boundaries which could lead to a "double belonging" (Ariarajah). Others have also drawn on this type of intercultural hermeneutics to construct a cross-cultural subject with a plethora of characteristics. For example, Roy and Starosta (16) argue that cross-cultural subjects can effectively communicate across cultures, are able to move from the particular to the universal, have an affinity with the unfamiliar and appreciate difference, are open to alternatives, can transcend the narrow concerns of the group, move beyond the tribal to the universal needs of humanity, and finally are sensitive to the unity and diversity of the human condition. The existence of these character attributes is commendable, but the authors provide no discussion on the extent to which these traits can coexist. Furthermore, if they do coexist, is this a harmonious and/or contradictory coexistence. These issues are not addressed in a substantive and rigorous manner.

An intercultural hermeneutics is also evident in the emerging discipline of intercultural philosophy which is characterised by impartiality, tolerance towards difference and non-universal and non-essentialist philosophical practices. Mall, one of its key proponents, argues that interculturality involves an anti-particularistic and non-monolithic reasoning. To be cross-cultural is to resist universalising practices, while adopting particular viewpoints in a non-essentialist manner (Mall "Philosophy and Philosophies" 20–21). Mall questions a hermeneutics which promotes an identity model of knowledge where only insiders can comprehend the insider's worldview and dismisses the hermeneutics of total difference because it accepts a view of difference as insurmountable and leads to "total incommensurability" (Mall "Intercultural Philosophy"). Mall overplays the distinction between these two hermeneutical modes of understanding because adopting an identity model of hermeneutics can lead one to emphasise the differences between cultures and their possible incommensurability. It is only when we move beyond these interpretative frameworks, argues Mall, that a genuine intercultural perspective is possible and this will "frees us from the constraints of our cultural viewpoint" (Mall "Intercultural Philosophy"). Richard Bernstein also argues for an approach to the Other that is reminiscent of an intercultural hermeneutics when he contemplates the development of an "intercultural imagination" in which "we are sensitive to the sameness of 'the Other' with ourselves *and* the radical alterity that defies and resists reduction of the 'the Other' to 'the Same'" (Bernstein 99). According to this formulation, interculturality involves a subtle balancing act between recognising the similarities underlying self and other – which will become the foundation for dialogue across difference – while maintaining difference and thus sustaining boundaries between self and other. The intercultural moment, at least for Bernstein, manifests itself through a paradoxical situation where one adopts universalising (identifying commonalities) and particularising (acknowledging distinctions) practices.

Some of the characteristics of intercultural hermeneutics are also echoed in Fay's conception of a multicultural philosophy of social science (*Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*). Multicultural philosophy attempts to move beyond dualistic thinking, inherent in the philosophy of social science, and adopt a dialectical mode of

thought which transcends the dichotomy between insider and outsider and self and other (Fay 224). Fay implies that a third position emerges in which a more genuine understanding becomes possible. In contrast to this position, the ideology of dualism imposes boundaries and denies that the boundaries between sameness and difference can be and are porous. The third position adopts a 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' stance to understanding and interpreting the social world and Fay claims that this allows us to become sensitive to slippages between, and cracks within, social and cultural boundaries. Fay is critical of philosophical traditions that conceptualise the relationship between self and other "as one of radical distinction" (228); in addition, he is concerned with philosophical theories which over-emphasise difference at the expense of the interdependencies which constitute the self/other relation. Fay implicitly draws on the symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology to resolve this conceptual problem because interactionism allows one to conceive the self as intrinsically connected to the other; consequently, self and other are mutually constitutive: the self cannot be conceptualised without the other. This interactionist view underpins a multicultural philosophy of social science in which understanding is conceived in comparative terms and thus "there is no *self*-understanding if no *other* understanding" (Fay 229). I only know what is distinctive about me when I interact with others and thus compare myself with them. Identity and difference are ontologically related because our relation to culturally different others contributes to our self-understanding. For example, the constitution of the 'migrant' is only possible in the presence of the 'native'. Identity is constructed across difference and thus cultural and symbolic boundaries are important in the constitution of subjectivity. For Fay, this comparative mode of understanding promotes a critical intersubjectivity in which difference is neither denied as in the assimilationist position nor reaffirmed as in the separationist account. Rather we are confronted with a difference that exposes an unknown world that may be complex, rich and innovative, but this alien world also exposes the failings and contradictions of our own world. Consequently, a critical intersubjectivity promotes critical self-reflexivity, increased learning and personal growth (Fay 234). Ironically, the interactionist position which emphasises the importance of boundaries in identity construction sits uncomfortably with a multicultural philosophy which questions the imposition of boundaries.

In the final analysis, Fay claims that a multicultural philosophy of social science is more sensitive to ambiguity, tension, change, difference and particularity (238). Drawing on the work of the cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldua, Fay implies that a multicultural philosophy of social science is similar to a "mestizaje consciousness" in which there is a greater tolerance for ambiguity, contradiction and the porous nature of cultural boundaries. As with other authors within this literature, Fay tends to assume that these characteristics are self-explanatory. What does it mean to say that a multicultural philosophy of the social science is 'sensitive' to ambiguity, tension and particularity? What type of ambiguity does Fay have in mind? How does a critical intersubjectivity lead to personal growth and increased learning? These questions

suggest that there is more work to be done within the areas of intercultural hermeneutics and multicultural philosophy in order for these to be plausible accounts of cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural interaction.

The themes of in-betweenness, double consciousness and the idea of multiple belongings are also evident in the emerging field of intercultural social theory. This field of knowledge draws less on philosophical ideas and more on anthropological and sociological thought.

Intercultural Social Theory

Recent empirical and theoretical discussions on ethnicity, culture and immigration have increasingly acknowledged that individuals can position themselves, and are positioned by others, in-between two or more cultures. The existence of these cross-cultural individuals coincides with an assumption that the in-betweenness of the cross-cultural subject fosters an intercultural mode of interpretation. Consequently, over the last two decades the ideas of hybridity and the cross-cultural subject have become the dominant explanatory concepts in studies on cross-cultural interaction and the migration experience (Marotta "The Hybrid Self"). In response to, and as a reflection of these new forms of subjectivities, an intercultural social theory has emerged which is critical of cultural boundaries and proposes an alternative social epistemology which transcends and criticises the ideology of dualism and essentialism. This alternative epistemology – it is implied – allows social scientists to adopt a complex interpretative model that effectively captures, but is also critical of our multicultural global world.

Working within the area of migration studies, the proponents of intercultural social theory argue that an intercultural stance fosters both a distancing and "dwelling among" those they study and encourages an intersubjective dialogue with research participants from minority cultural groups. This dialogue "involves meeting *in* life-worlds and thus requires a skill in hermeneutic reflexivity" which "chart[s], interpret[s], or decode[s], the life classifications, typifications and common-sense categorizations in the life-world of its objects" (Diken 250, 251). In these accounts the metaphor of the in-between reappears when it is argued that this third position fosters hybrid practices and allows one to adopt a cross-disciplinary methodology; however, the nature of this cross-disciplinary methodology is left unanalysed.

Others conceive of intercultural social theory in terms of transculturality. This acknowledges that mixing and interconnectedness have always characterised cultures. Transculturality is both a description of the multicultural social world in which we live and an interpretative approach to this world. The transcultural is comfortable with hybrid and ambivalent social relations and consequently adopts an understanding of culture which is inclusionary rather than exclusionary. A transcultural perspective or a mode of understanding which encourages the emergence of transcultural subjects can combine the local and the global, the particular and the universal and transcend the oppressive nature of cultural boundaries that are evident

in Western contemporary societies (Welsch 205). This ability to move between different standpoints, to adopt a third position and thus an alternative social epistemology has been foreshadowed in the literature on the hybrid/intellectual stranger.

The Discourse on the Stranger

What has been missing in the preceding philosophical, anthropological and sociological discussions on the cross-cultural actor is a systematic account of the stranger and strangeness and their role in conceptualising an intercultural mode of interpretation. Although Gadamer does not explicitly allude to the stranger in *Truth and Method*, his conception of the interpretative process adopts a mode of being in the world that is reminiscent of the stranger's position. This conceptual link was first made by the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz who – echoing the latter thoughts of Gadamer – argues, "strangeness and familiarity are not limited to the social field but are general categories of our interpretation of the world" ("The Stranger" 503). The simultaneous experience of strangeness and familiarity allows for a different mode of interpretation which is both enlightening and transgressive. The experience of strangeness and familiarity, and the interpretative powers they generate, is evident in Simmel's and Bauman's conceptualisation of the in-between/hybrid stranger.

The Sociological Stranger

The sociological literature on 'the stranger' usually recognises the authority of the German sociologist Georg Simmel in formulating a sociology of strangerhood (Levine). Occasionally, this literature provides a reformulation of the stranger through specific social types. For example, the Simmelian stranger has been the basis for Park's 'marginal man' ("Cultural Conflict"), Wood's (*The Stranger*) and Schutz's 'the newcomer' ("The Stranger"), Siu's 'the sojourner' ("The Sojourner") and Stonequist's notion of the 'cosmopolitan individual' or 'the international mind' (*The Marginal Man*). Recent revisionist literature draws on, but moves beyond, the Simmelian stranger and its presuppositions. The category of the stranger has thus experienced a renaissance in contemporary social theory. Recent work has consistently shown the importance of the stranger in understanding the human condition and cross-cultural interaction. The stranger has become the paradigmatic figure for contemporary society (Harman; Karakayali; Stichweh; Tabboni), a society that, depending on one's theoretical and conceptual framework, has increasingly become categorised as 'high modern', 'second modernity' or 'postmodern'. The stranger also raises hermeneutical issues and thus can shed light on the sociology of knowledge (Jansen; Dessewffy). In these studies, the category of the stranger becomes an object of critical inquiry. The following section places itself within this latter tradition and continues Schutz's and Gadamer's approach of conceiving strangeness

and familiarity and their inter-relationship as the foundation for an interpretative stance. In addition, this interpretative position can shed further light on our conceptualisation of an intercultural mode of understanding and the cross-cultural subject.

The Stranger and Strangeness

Although the literature on the stranger has this potential, it lacks an analytic distinction between the stranger and strangeness. As will be shown later, this distinction has implications for our conception of intercultural understanding. Discussions on the stranger have implicitly or explicitly adopted a psychoanalytic, existential, sociological and spatial analysis, but occasionally these distinctions have been blurred and have led to conceptual confusion (Marotta "The Stranger and Social Theory"); the focus of this section is on the sociological and spatial dimensions because these dimensions bring into sharper focus the interconnections between intercultural understanding, the cross-cultural subject and the stranger.

The idea of strangeness has been associated with a spatial process that describes the proximity and distance between social actors (Simmel "The Stranger" 402). Strangeness therefore exists when those who are physically close are socially and culturally distant. A more nuanced understanding of strangeness is possible if we approach it in terms of a continuum. The intensity of strangeness may depend on where one lies on the proximity and distance continuum; for example, the intensity of strangeness is heightened closer to the distance point but diminishes as one nears the proximity end. On the other hand, the stranger, as a social type, describes individuals who are socially, culturally or racially different from the native population. In postcolonial, cultural and feminist studies this difference is synonymous with the experience of otherness and refers to an unequal relationship based on exploitation and oppression. The case of recent African immigrants entering Western societies who are visibly different exemplifies the overlap between the sociological stranger and the experience of strangeness. This, however, may not always be the case. Different strangers can be situated at different points on the continuum while the experience of strangeness may not coincide with being constructed as a stranger. For instance, young people may experience strangeness in the presence of their parents while not being categorised by the broader society as sociological strangers. They are physically close to their parents because they may live in the same house but they may feel socially and emotionally detached from their parents' values and ideas. Understood in these terms, strangeness becomes synonymous with feelings of alienation. Conversely, long-established Southern European immigrants in Australia such as Greeks and Italians show a high level of economic, political and social 'integration' into the host society and may be situated closer to the social proximity end than recent refugees from African nations.

The Hybrid Stranger

The work of Simmel and Bauman provides the most perceptive and original accounts of the sociological stranger. Both Simmel and Bauman conceptualise strangers as non-members or cultural outsiders who are generally excluded and marginalised from the 'in-group' or 'native group'. The experiences of the stranger, at least for Simmel, are epitomised in the life of Jews, gypsies, merchants and wanderers. Under this conception, the stranger reinforces cultural and social boundaries and the binary opposition between 'us' and 'them'. The category of the stranger is used by Simmel and Bauman to describe both the relationship between Self (host/dominant group) and Other (non-members from cultural and racially different groups), and to highlight the impact that cross-cultural contact has on the stranger's intellectual or cognitive disposition.

What we also find in their work is a conception of the stranger who is neither a friend nor enemy: Simmel at times associates the stranger with a "third party" who "indicates transition, conciliation, and abandonment of absolute contrast" ("The Quantitative Aspect" 145). Simmel alternates from a conception of the stranger which reinforces binary thinking to one which undermines it.

Similarly, Bauman argues that while strangers reinforce boundaries they also threaten the boundaries that modernity needs in order to impose stability, conformism and predictability on an unpredictable and fluid social world. In Bauman's words, strangers – from the perspective of the native – "befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen" (*Postmodernity and its Discontents* 17). The stranger represents "ambivalent people" (Bauman *Thinking Sociologically*) who "are, as it were, neither close nor distant". They are "neither friends nor foe ... [and] they cause confusion and anxiety" (*Thinking Sociologically* 55). Strangers make social, cultural and physical boundaries porous and unstable; rather than reinforcing boundaries, "ambivalent people" threaten their very existence. In turn, this questions the native's identity which depends on clear boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Under this conception, the stranger epitomises an in-between ambivalent position. These in-betweens or insiders–outsiders threaten the insider/host's identity; the hybrid stranger disturbs the pre-existing social and cultural boundaries which the host takes for granted. Bauman, echoing Simmel's ideas, calls these strangers the 'third element' or the 'true hybrids' that cannot be classified and are unclassifiable (Bauman *Modernity and Ambivalence* 58).

These hybrid strangers may attempt to assimilate into the host group but they find it difficult to do so because they do not share the native's assumptions or worldview. They become essentially people who question the taken for granted world of the host. This discrepancy between the stranger's assumptions and fore-meanings and those of the host results in a hermeneutical problem in which in-between strangers cannot assume that their interpretation of the new cultural pattern coincides with that of the natives: this interpretative gap constitutes them as strangers (Bauman *Life in Fragments* 126).

In-between strangers, who are physically close but socially distant, raise epistemological issues because they highlight the misunderstanding between self and other or between two culturally different life-worlds. This unresolved hermeneutic problem – the meeting with strangers – results in uncertainty, in particular uncertainty about how to read and respond to social situations. Consequently, the in-between stranger does not have complete access to the cultural and language code of the host and while this causes anxiety and stress, it provides the ground for a different and critical understanding of the host's world.

What is pertinent here is not that misunderstanding occurs between the host and the stranger, but that the process of strangeness or the experience of nearness and distance promotes an interpretative view of the world that is inaccessible to either the host group or those confined to their local perspectives. The position of strangers encourages a critical and 'objective' stance towards the host and one's own culture. As an outsider, the stranger can reflect critically on the host's practices, customs and values. Because of this experience, strangers are also able to revaluate and reflect upon their own group's traditions and worldview. Their exposure to the otherness of the host self allows them to reassess their 'home' culture as less stable and fixed. What was once certain is now contingent. This intellectual mobility provides strangers with the ability to transcend conventional and 'situated' knowledge. The implication is that the in-between, third position permits strangers to see things more clearly and/or differently than those who occupy opposing cultural perspectives. However, this 'objectivity' which, for Bauman, refers to a cosmopolitan, non-patriotic, non-commitment stance, leads to freedom, but a freedom which is occasionally experienced as loneliness (Bauman "Strangers" 21).

For Simmel, strangers are also objective but this objectivity is not associated with the neutrality or value-free process that underlines positivism. Strangers dialectically adopt a frame of mind characterised as a 'subjective objectivity' which entails being both remote and near, detached and involved, indifferent and concerned (Simmel "The Stranger" 404). Strangers have a 'bird's-eye view' and are not confined to the particularities and biases of the opposing parties or cultural groups. This 'bird's-eye view' allows strangers to adopt and therefore understand the particular views of both parties, but be adequately detached from them to identify underlying common or universal interests.

Over the twentieth century, the sociological literature on marginal individuals or outsiders has reinforced the epistemological advantage of being a social and cultural in-between subject. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Chicago sociologist Robert Park was at the forefront in theorising cultural and racial hybridity and its association with a more complex and meaningful mode of understanding (Marotta "Civilisation, Culture and the Hybrid Self"). He observes that the hybrid self "becomes, relatively to his cultural milieu, the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint" (Park "Cultural Conflict" 376). Hybrid subjects adopt a cosmopolitan disposition because they are less nationalistic and thus "look across national boundaries" (Park "Race

Relations" 137). This alternative epistemology and perspective is not available to those immersed in the worldview of either the established or the outsider, either the native or foreigner.

In addition, work on the intellectual position of the stranger reinforces this alternative third epistemological stance. In particular, the idea of the intellectual stranger has informed discussions on the ethnological work of anthropologists. Nash ("The Ethnologist") argues that the 'ethnologist–stranger' is capable of detached involvement, not prone to perceptual distortions, can look from the inside out, and can tolerate ambiguity, inconsistency and unpredictability. In the tradition of Simmel and Bauman before him, Pels explicitly associates the 'third position' with a "social epistemology of the stranger" ("Privileged Nomads" 73). He is critical of the perceptual distortion evident in the 'outsider' perspective or 'standpoint epistemologies'. Standpoint theories based on class, gender and race argue that the dominated or marginal not only 'see differently', but they also "see better and more" (Pels "Strange Standpoints" 68). Pels asserts that such a position firstly ignores the essentialist nature of standpoint epistemologies; and secondly, these 'standpoints' are articulated by intellectuals whose 'marginal standpoint' differs from those they supposedly represent. In particular, Marxists' and Feminists' standpoint theories, according to Pels, conflate their own contradictory and marginal position with those they 'represent' ("Strange Standpoints" 77). Whether this is actually the case is not something we can address here; rather I am more interested in Pels' support for a 'third position' because it resonates with the in-between position of the cross-cultural subject.

In order to overcome the epistemological problem of the 'marginal position', Pels claims that intellectual strangers can transcend the dualistic thinking of first and second position, for example, bourgeois/proletariat, male/female, white/black, dominant/dominated and insider/outsider. In other words, by privileging dualistic frameworks and the contest between the first and second position, standpoint theories tend to silence a third voice (Pels "Strange Standpoints" 78). Pels notes that "marginal standpoints by themselves do not suffice; they must be intellectualized, pass through theory, which evidently requires the guiding presence of the professionals of theory themselves" ("Strange Standpoints" 78). Standpoint epistemology therefore depends on the work of the intellectual spokesperson's third position. It is "their representational work", writes Pels, "that ultimately 'defines the situation' for 'situated knowledge'" ("Strange Standpoints" 87). Intellectual spokespersons or 'the outsider within' mediates between the margin and centre; they are neither a 'nowhere (wo)man', a universal or particularised subject nor are they firmly rooted. Pels' intellectual stranger has some close affinities with cross-cultural subjects because they also move between inside and outside and are able to transcend the confines of their cultural position. The preceding analysis has shown that a cross-cultural subject exists across a variety of intellectual fields; the subsequent discussion draws on these diverse but overlapping fields to provide a critical investigation of cross-cultural subjectivity.

Cross-cultural Subjectivities

As the above discussion as illustrated there are various conceptualisations of the cross-cultural subject, but underlying these differences are some key themes. In the process of investigating these themes we draw on Gadamerian hermeneutics and make some critical comments on current views of cross-cultural subjectivity.

Formulations of the cross-cultural subject found in intercultural hermeneutics, intercultural social theory and the discourse on the hybrid stranger suggest that the cross-cultural subject and boundaries are mutually exclusive. The cultural and intellectual mobility of cross-cultural actors threaten the existence of fixed cultural boundaries. From the perspective of those theorising the cross-cultural subject, boundaries are seen as oppressive and disabling; boundaries are exclusionary and they suppress the ambiguities which the cross-cultural subject supposedly encourages and tolerates. Although the existing literature on cross-cultural subjectivity highlights how boundaries reinforce power relations, there is a tendency to adopt a one-dimensional view of boundaries because current formulations give undue attention to the oppressive nature of boundaries and overlook their ambivalence.

This ambivalence is effectively captured by Simmel. He identifies the significance of boundaries in understanding social interaction and the human condition. He states that, "the concept of the boundary is extremely important in all relationships of human beings to one another" (Simmel "The Sociology of Space" 142). Simmel goes further and contemplates that boundaries – in their multiple manifestations – constitute the very essence of what it means to be human. The human condition is understood in terms of its propensity to transcend and erect boundaries. Social, cultural, physical and symbolic boundaries, according to Simmel, define who we are, but they do not necessarily limit us. This argument allows Simmel to paradoxically conclude that "we are bounded in every direction and we are bounded in no direction" (Simmel "The Transcendent Character of Life" 355) and that "the human being is likewise the bordering creature who has no border" (Simmel "Bridge and Door" 10). Although boundaries provide the grounds for the constitution of the self, they do not confine us. Boundaries capture the underlying paradox of the human condition because they signify both the heteronomy and autonomy of subjectivity.

Boundaries are ambivalent because they hinder and enable; they can be the source of liberation but also confinement; they can provide the conditions to construct an identity by establishing difference between self and other, but they can also provide the grounds to suppress and exclude others. Humans are a boundary constructing species, but we are also able to defy the boundaries/expectations/values that we impose and are imposed on us. Symbolic, psychological, social and cultural boundaries allow us to organise and order our world. Simmel has shown that distinctions and differences are essential to the human condition. It is how we deal with these differences that make boundaries menacing and oppressive or liberating and empowering. The constructive nature of boundaries is evident in the role that fore-structures and fore-meanings play in the intercultural mode of interpretation.

When engaging and interpreting otherness one's fore-understanding cannot be placed on hold and neither are they prior to the act of engagement and interpretation. Thus the nature of understanding a text or an alien culture is always a "productive attitude" (Gadamer 264) and thus it imposes some form of boundaries. The cross-cultural subject cannot disengage from its own fore-meanings because they constitute the very act of interpretation. The role of fore-meanings and fore-structures has led Gadamer to contemplate the importance with which the "anticipation of meaning" (Gadamer 261) has on the process of understanding. The anticipation of meaning implies that we have preconceived sets of expectations which we carry in our heads and these boundaries/expectations are either confirmed or refuted in cross-cultural encounters. Taking Gadamer's ideas as our point of departure, boundaries understood in terms of fore-meanings and fore-structures may hamper but also facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Conceiving boundaries/fore-meanings as ambivalent allows us to acknowledge both their productive and restrictive role. In cross-cultural encounters the anticipation of meaning leads to boundary constructing processes in which the self and other are equally involved in the construction of meaning. However, when cross-cultural encounters are unequal and based on a power relationship then the anticipation of meaning on the part of the dominant self becomes the standard with which meaning and understanding are constructed.

Theories of the cross-cultural subject have emphasised that dwelling amongst cultures leads to 'objectivity' and impartiality, but the nature of this 'objectivity' differs across the literature. Intercultural hermeneutics claims that the objectivity of the cross-cultural subject transcends the group/tribal mentality and is not constrained by cultural or standpoint epistemology; the hybrid stranger's objectivity, on the other hand, is defined by cosmopolitan detachment or the continuous movement between involvement and separation. This conception of the cross-cultural subject is compatible with an intercultural mode of understanding theorised by Gadamer in which involvement and separation are not two distinct positions but rather coexist within the interpretative process. Occasionally, the literature on cross-cultural subjects such as Mall ("Intercultural Philosophy") argues that they are able to free themselves from the restrictions of their own cultural viewpoint. This, as Gadamer has noted, is difficult to achieve because understanding occurs through one's own fore-meaning and prejudice. To be free from standpoints and thus be 'objective' is bound to fail.

Bernstein, on the other hand, comes close to a Gadamerian hermeneutics and implicitly acknowledges the role of standpoints or 'situations' in his idea of an "intercultural imagination". This imagination acknowledges the sameness and difference of the Other. Firstly, we reduce the Other to the Same because the interpretive process, as Gadamer as noted, partly involves drawing on one's historical horizon and thus some form of reduction does occur. When "we bring ourselves" to the situation/encounter and attempt to understand the otherness of the other we bring our prejudices and fore-meanings. But paradoxically we do not reduce the Other to the Same because the horizons and the 'radical alterity' of the Other is not

closed but mobile and open. The issue here is not that the Other is reduced to the Same but that adopting an intercultural mode of interpretation assumes that some form of reduction occurs. The aim is to minimise the social, economic and political impacts of reducing the Other to the Same. In other words, in contrast to the existing literature on cross-cultural subjectivity, to be cross-cultural is to adopt an intercultural mode of understanding that provides no guarantee that the encounter with difference will be an equal one.

Moreover, the literature on cross-cultural subjects suggests that they encourage anti-essentialist practices. In the field of intercultural hermeneutics, the cross-cultural subject adopts a non-universal and non-essentialist position while in intercultural social theory this subject accepts and tolerates ambiguity hence undermining the essentialist ethos of predictability, consistency, unity and fixity. Likewise, the hybrid stranger questions the essentialist idea of 'absolute contrasts' which promotes clear and fixed distinctions between self and other. The tendency here is to assume that essentialism is destructive and that the dichotomous mentality is corrosive and oppressive. This view, while plausible if we accept that essentialism is a means by which political and social hierarchies are maintained, needs some qualification. Essentialist practices have led to hierarchies in which one side of the distinction man, white, native is described in positive terms while the other side woman, black, stranger is conceived as both negative and subservient to the first term. The cross-cultural subject – in its various manifestations – is alleged to do away with repressive and exclusionary distinctions, but this does not mean that all distinctions, and the essentialist practices on which they depend, have been eradicated. The experience of 'dwelling among' requires the awareness of other cultures – hence the need to make distinctions; secondly, once cross-cultural subjects make distinctions they by necessity adopt a dichotomous mentality. Being conscious that one is moving between cultures presupposes an awareness of separate and distinctive cultures. Without distinctions the 'inter' in the 'intercultural' would be incomprehensible. The idea of the intercultural here does not eliminate the need for essentialist practices and hence distinctions. The problem is not essentialist practices, but whether these practices are used to exclude and repress the other rather than respect and value the other on their own terms. As Spinosa and Dreyfus argue, "Dwelling within an essentialist telos need not produce the ethically deplorable exclusions of essentialism" (763). In contrast to previous accounts, we need to rethink the idea of the cross-cultural subject and its relationship to essentialist practices. As understood here, the cross-cultural subject does draw on essentialist categories but these could be used productively to construct a meaningful social world and to provide the conditions in which we can recognise and value otherness. Otherness has to be recognised – hence distinctions – before it can be respected and valued. The point is that to recognise the otherness of the other can only occur within a dichotomous framework. Thus, we need to re-consider the nature of intercultural subjectivity by acknowledging that the intercultural subject will be involved in both enabling and restrictive essentialist practices.

The Ideology of the Third Position

The literature on cross-cultural subjects also claims that they reside in an epistemological privileged third position. They dwell between the insider and outsider perspective, between the local and global, and between the particular and universal. Is such a position possible? The following examination suggests that this is likely but not in terms of how the cross-cultural subject has so far been conceived.

The discourse on cross-cultural subjectivities raises interesting questions about the politics of representation and experience. Can occupying this in-between third position allow one to better represent the interests of Others and one's own culture? Advocates of the intellectual stranger believe that the insider and outsider are prisoners of their epistemological framework and hence they are not able to transcend their respective biases.

In contrast to standpoint epistemologies, advocates of the cross-cultural subject argue that they can synthesise and have access to a 'total perspective' not available to those immersed in their particular/local or global/universal frameworks. Cross-cultural subjects are able to transcend 'standpoint epistemologies' because they develop a 'double perspective' or 'double belonging' which encourages an alternative mode of thinking unavailable to those who are fixed within their particularistic or universalistic framework. Cross-cultural subjects have the intellectual disposition to float between the local and the global, between the particular and the universal and thus become impervious to the politics of location.

Even if we accept that cross-cultural subjects are able to transcend standpoint epistemologies, the in-between perspective collapses into another standpoint. In other words, while the role of the cross-cultural subject can be closely associated with the stranger's ability to be both distant and close, to simultaneously adopt a subjective and objective stance, interpreters, as Gadamer has shown, are not devoid of prejudice and fore-meanings in their understanding of the social world. These fore-meanings are not prior to understanding rather they are constitutive of the interpretative process.

Contemporary accounts of the cross-cultural subject minimise or ignore the role of fore-structures and fore-meanings when discussing the dwelling potential of being in-between. Cross-cultural subjects, however, may find it difficult to be free-floating when they engage and interpret the world; this is especially the case if we accept Gadamer's argument that we cannot escape our fore-meanings and historical horizons. As historical actors, cross-cultural subjects do not occupy a boundless social and cultural vacuum. The literature on cross-cultural subjectivity assumes that one's historical, social and cultural position is inconsequential when engaging with the social world of others and that essentialising and universalising practices are confined to those who are located. Nevertheless, this is open to objection from Gadamer's argument because we can never place ourselves outside or dwell between situations because these situations or 'standpoints' become the very conditions of understanding.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the literature on cross-cultural subjectivity and has identified several key features which the literature implies constitute the cross-cultural subject: for example, a transcendence of boundaries, the development of 'objectivity', adopting anti-essentialist practices and occupying a privileged third position. This in-between third position, according to existing theories of cross-cultural subjectivities, has promoted the negation and transgression of the dualistic and dichotomous mentality. Drawing on Gadamer's ideas, in particular that the dialectic of strangeness and familiarity captures the intermediate nature of hermeneutics, that understanding involves 'placing ourselves' in the situation and that the interpretative process involves fore-meanings and fore-structures, we have facilitated a critical conversation with current thinking on the cross-cultural subject. This critical conversation highlighted that the claims made by contemporary theories of cross-cultural subjectivity are overstated and do not effectively capture the ambivalence of boundaries, the enabling dimension of essentialism and the way in which the intercultural mode of interpretation is predicated on a cross-cultural subject which places itself within rather than outside the process of understanding. To be cross-cultural is to place oneself within the intercultural encounter not dwell above it.

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