FRAGILE CERTAINTIES: REFLECTIONS AND PROVOCATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT PRAXIS

Edgar Pieterse

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Fragile Certainties: Reflections and Provocations on Development Praxis

Edgar Pieterse

> …'resistance' can be truly effective, that is, can avoid simply replacing one tyranny with another, only when it *creates* rather than simply defends.[1]

> I've come to recognize that texts are only momentary stabilisations and then you give them back to the flow of meaning… Every reading of a text is basically a translation, not a transmission of originary truth from one moment to another. One must give them away freely… [Writing] must be surrendered to that flow of meaning that will continue to create and recreate something new of the old.[2]

> We dialogue before a horizon of complexities that permits the stories that convince us to take place. It is the conditions of that dialogue, the maintenance of that complexity, that we have custody for. We are responsible for them, there is no one else to guard them.[3]

This paper constitutes an offer to begin a dialogue that I hope will carry on for many years into the future as we explore the outer extremities of our unfolding revolution to realise human flourishing. The touchstone of the discussion is the amorphous – and some would say, discredited – notion of 'development'. Indeed, this leitmotif has done its utmost to seduce, confuse, surprise, badger, inspire, enliven and ensnare me in all manner of ways. As a consequence I am enrolling you, the reader/dialogue partner, in my attempt to come to terms with its elusive and compelling character. So, given my mixed feelings about this idea or discourse (in more fashionable and accurate parlance), it will be a somewhat circuitous journey. Hopefully you will find numerous reasons to jump in at points along the way to throw in your quibble, disagreement or confirmation for good measure, and maybe even good theory and practice.

I should point out at the outset that my writing is essentially a way of capturing an ongoing conversation with authors I read to be provoked, inspired, challenged, infuriated and informed. Given the exploratory and reflective nature of this paper I have woven many of the voices that ring in my head into the text to make these (admittedly, one sided) conversations more explicit.

Since the strands that I want to explore are so manifold and densely inter-connected, I have resorted to a heuristic device to order and systematise my thoughts, or at least the flow of the discussion. The device is a diagram with many thematic points linked with causal arrows – all in all simultaneously overburdened with too much theoretical possibility and simplicity. The conceptual diagram is the endpoint of the paper because it

[1] From Bill Ashcroft (2001: 5, emphasis added). [2] Stuart Hall, in Drew (1999: 239). [3] Iain Chambers (1990: 114) in his book, *Border Dialogues.*

is meant to serve as the switching mechanism of the dialogue from me to you. However, before I get into the detail of this, I will give some backdrop on where this is all coming from and why the dialogue is being instigated.

THE ART OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Like many of my activist contemporaries who lived absurdly hard lives in rigid times at the page-turn of the 1980s into the 1990s, I was involved in various action research projects that ostensibly prepared for life (and government) in the post-apartheid South Africa. All our papers and reports at the time had the obligatory 'for post-apartheid South Africa' in the title, or at least in the by-line. We were 'instructed' to plough away at preparing 'alternatives', with very little expectation that the historical moment would be knocking at the back door as soon as it did. When the brilliant day of freedom dawned in April 1994, almost unexpectedly in the wake of the bloodbaths that were the Vaal and KwaZulu-Natal killing fields, it all seemed positively surreal against the backdrop of a dark gloomy sky[4] that seemed to mutter: 'you will soon awake from the dream'. Mercifully, the dream was real, Nelson Mandela was indeed my President and I was miraculously reborn as a democratic citizen, even if uncertain about what exactly that meant in practice (beyond sliding my freshly marked crosses in a ballot box).

The most surprising experience of this post-1994 period was just how unprepared I/we were, despite having spent the previous five years engaging in various policy networks to craft the Mass Democratic Movement's vision of the future. Somehow, the future managed to outwit us and our overconfident ideas started to wilt in the heat of realpolitik tied to a negotiated settlement and accurate (more or less) data about livelihood practices of ordinary people beyond the sterile reifications of policy discourses. Suddenly, the entire arsenal of development concepts—participatory governance, people-centred development, and so forth—that were so carefully crafted in our many, many workshops and conferences seemed less solid, less potent as tools to effect the kind of changes that were required to give meaning to the aspirations of the time. However, before we could become too reflective about these surprises, we plunged head first into the 'new' imperatives of the time, crafting policies for the democratic state to lay the foundation for post-apartheid South Africa.

Most of my activist contemporaries migrated from civil society organisations to various nooks and crannies of the state with the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) tucked under one arm and the mandate of 'transformation' ringing in their ears. At this point I decided to migrate north to finish my professional training in development studies and create some distance between myself and the intensity of 'implementing a velvet revolution'. I was simply too exhausted, intellectually flat, and alienated from myself to conjure a single clear thought about how to find my way in the post-apartheid South Africa. I desperately needed remoteness to learn how to breathe again and nurture aspirations and pleasures that could not be boxed neatly as 'a contribution to the struggle' or 'policy development' or 'fixing local government' or 'building the NGO sector' – the

[4] Cape Town was uncharacteristically overcast, windswept and wet for April; I suppose in some ways a pre-emptive mourning of the election results that were to follow.

many codes for what amounted to my intertwined personal and professional *raison d'être* at the time.

The enclave of third world natives in The Hague that was the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) turned out to be a fantastic half-way house where I could rekindle thought, passion and, crucially, a sense of aspiration for the future.[5] As I worked my way through a broad spectrum of literature on postcolonialism, postmodernism, development theory, social movement theory, globalisation, alternative economics, NGO studies, political economy and feminism, good questions started to find their way to me.[6] For me, being able to aspire to alternative futures starts with being able to ask good questions that inexorably lead to interesting journeys of exploration. These journeys do not have an obvious or discernable end point. Rather, they are a direction. The problem with the early part of the transition (1988-1993) was that we became so over-confident in our thinking about the future—our arsenal of development and political concepts—that we forgot to remember the importance of asking the right questions and, by implication, of acknowledging our ignorance and conceptual vulnerability. In retrospect, the amazing part of this is that the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the reformulation of the ideological Cold War did little to dampen our confidence. On the contrary, in many ways the Left felt obliged to turn South Africa into the shining example of what revolutionary change could mean at the twilight of the 20th century.

The core reason for this confidence was our deep-seated sense of *exceptionalism*. Somehow, we were different. With the benefit of history, being late revolutionary bloomers and all, and the benefit of a significant modern economy, the future seemed just that more manageable. In practical terms, this sensibility was reflected in the almost unspoken, taken-for-granted belief that somehow our postcolonial experience will be different in that we will avoid the pitfalls of corruption, financial mismanagement, deepening inequality, ethnicisation of politics and all the other pathologies that 'typify' postcolonial Africa. We would be different. We would wear our alchemy of modernism and traditionalism with a sense of savvy about the vicissitudes of the modern world. The confident tenor of the RDP captures this sensibility aptly:

> ...this collective heritage of struggle, these common yearnings, which are our greatest strength, and the RDP builds on it. At the same time the challenges facing South Africa are enormous. Only a comprehensive approach to harnessing the resource of our country can reverse the crisis created by apartheid. Only an all-round effort to harness the life experience, skills, energies and aspirations of the people can lay the basis for a new South Africa… an election victory is only a first step. No political democracy can survive and flourish unless the mass of people remain in poverty,

[5] This formulation is directly shaped by the recent essay of Arjun Appadurai (forthcoming) on the importance of the capacity to aspire. [6] Looking at this list I realize that I never actually did any social theory or philosophy courses but due to the influence of my fellow students and one lecturer in particular, I ended up approaching the debates in development studies through the portal of critical theory with a focus on cultural studies, postcolonialism and the debates in social theory on post-modernism. A number of years later I would read the magisterial overview of development theories by John Martinussen (1999) and realize how fortuitous my learning pathway was. More recently, the incisive work of Sylvester (2000) would instil the same feeling.

> without land, without tangible prospects for a better life… How can we do this successfully? … A *programme* is required that is achievable, sustainable, and meets the objectives of freedom and an improved standard of living and quality of life for all South Africans within a peaceful and stable society.[7]

What my period of reflection at ISS brought home to me was just how misplaced our sense of exceptionalism was. Other developing countries have been chipping away at the granite block called 'development' for up to 50 years and left with more challenges than achievements to show for their efforts. Notions that we (the Left policy networks) thought were 'hip' and cutting edge turned out to be recycled experiments of development thinking and planning in the 1960s and 1970s. It seemed as if our development concepts and frameworks were more anchored in the shifting sands of history than the fertile soil of guaranteed success. The one lesson I took away from this confrontation was that our development theories and policy frameworks in South Africa had to be (re)thought *comparatively* and *historically*: a double movement that would instil a necessary sense of humility and caution about what makes sense in this place, at this time, at this particular juncture in history, given our multiple locations in numerous overlapping and isomorphic global flows.[8] At the same time it is also vital not to be hemmed in by the past, what is tried and tested, what we know 'works'. How does one then find an accommodating point between these sensibilities of humility and stretching forward into the unknown, the untested, and the zones of innovation? I will circle back to this question after the next section, which takes the discussion into more conventional formats—contextualisation and (development) theoretical delineation.

CONTEXTUAL SHRAPNEL

> I believe that for a long time now the notion of contextualization has been mystified, turned into some sort of talisman such that by 'contextualizing' social relationships and history, as the common appeal would have it, significant mastery over society and history is guaranteed — as if our understandings of social relations and history, understandings which constitute the fabric of social context, were not themselves fragile intellectual constructs posing as robust realities obvious to our contextualizing gaze. Thus the very fabric of the context into which things are to be inserted, and hence the explained turns out to be that which *most* needs understanding.[9]

Notwithstanding Taussig's caution, I want to draw attention, firstly, to some contextual markers that capture the tenor of our era (particularly globally) and, secondly, our governmental approach to taming the developmental challenges in South Africa. Both aspects are briefly and instrumentally illuminated to prepare the ground for the conceptual arguments that are to follow. Consequently, it deserves circumspection and further elaboration as we talk into the future.

[7] See: African National Congress (1994: 3-4, emphasis added to original). [8] See Arjun Appadurai's (1991) riveting account of disjunctive global cultural flows to get a sense of where the latter notion comes from. [9] From: Taussig (1990: 216, emphasis added).

If contextual statements are invariably ‘fragile intellectual constructs’, we may want to mix and match different types of representation by drawing on poetry, fiction, everyday stories, and verbatim voices of those whose social realities are being reflected. For now, a poem will have to do, along with some conventional statistical representations.

Somewhere in our past
we believed in the future

that a better world would
discover foundation under
our feet, and we would be
forever singing, in its
kitchen.

Bricks pile up in the field.
Whether they will be enough
no one knows. How they fit
together is anybody’s guess.

Men with darkening skins
scribbled on by the weather
wait for their instructions.

From time to time limousines miraculously
appear: there is always somebody in a suit willing
to smile and shake hands

who lays the first stone.

Then the camera lights
and racing engines turn
around, shrink back
from where they came.

Those left behind stare at
their own hands
afterwards, puzzled at
precisely what has been
transacted, why they are
still being offered bonds

squint between gnarled fingers
pace out the hopeful distances:

there will be a flower
bowl.
my bed is going here.

As for now the door knobs
have no doors.

Their windows peer out
at no sky.[10]

Theatres of cruelty and violence

Rolling out litanies of statistics has become so commonplace in development reports and conferences that they almost assume a surreal character, bordering on the banal. Year after year, the UNDP's *Human Development Report* reminds us of just how unjust, unequal, divided, violent, discriminatory and unfair economic, political and social systems are within countries and especially between the so-called developed and developing countries. In the midst of the World Summit on Sustainable Development re-run (surely it must be, because everything sounds and looks so patently familiar and predictable) that is playing out as I am writing this, I cannot but be stupefied by the profound disjuncture between rhetoric and action of world leaders, multilateral agencies, transnational corporations and even civil society organisations. Despite the potential of statistical aggregates to assume a trite value, I believe it still necessary to perform the ritual, because it unsettles inward-looking preoccupations.

Underpinning the asymmetrical global financial system are particularly skewed patterns of ownership, trade and, consequently, distributions of wealth. Within this, those who are particularly disadvantaged find themselves in multiple positions of oppression, which also serve to reinforce one another. At a global scale, sub-Saharan Africa is the quintessential 'victim' and within African societies, rural black women (attached to the most excluded tribe) embody victimhood (survivors?) par excellence, because of the internal lines of stratification that coincide with power in their societies.

At a global scale, the following indicators reflect the extent of concentration of wealth: the richest 20% have 86% of world GDP, the middle 60% have 13%, and the poorest 20% have one percent. In 1999, the combined wealth (US$1.13 trillion) of the world's richest 200 people was nearly ten times that of the total income of the least developing countries combined (covering a population of 600 million people).[11] This wealth is by and large concentrated in OECD countries. For example, in 2000, the GDP of the world was US$31.5 trillion, with high income OECD countries accounting for US$24.1 trillion of this and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for only US$0.326 trillion. This discrepancy is even more shocking if one considers that high income OECD countries account for 900 million people and SSA for 659 million people.[12]

[10] "Housing Targets' by Kelwyn Sole, reproduced in Laura Chrisman (2001-2: 5-6). [11] Taken from Christie and Warbuton (2001: 111). [12] Source: World Development Indicators database, April 2002 of the World Bank.

Given the current structure of the global economy, the bases of competitiveness and the drivers of economic growth, it is clear that the rules of the game are rigged so that only the already wealthy will benefit at the expense of the majority of the world population (and the environment), except for small pockets of elites who effectively function as virtual citizens of the new globalised capitalist class. To illustrate this claim, let us consider trade flows and wealth generated from it in the wake of existing global agreements on new rules for importing and exporting. Thereafter, I will illustrate access to information technologies to demonstrate the same, grotesque, patterns of unequal access, which suggest a path-dependency of sorts to ensure that current global economic relations remain largely unaltered in the foreseeable future.

TRADE: Extrapolating from the agreements reached on reducing tariffs and subsidies in terms of the Uruguay Round, the following scenario of winners and losers became a reality from 2002 onwards: high-income countries will gain US$141.8 billion per annum, compared to US$37 billion for China, US$8 billion for Latin America and a loss of US$2.6 billion for sub-Saharan Africa.[13] In other words, despite Africa's desperate socio-economic conditions, it is accepted by the global community that economic integration on the terms of the North is worth doing, even though it will result in a net loss of wealth in the region. It gets even more surreal when one considers this fact against the reality of an average decline in GDP per capita for sub-Saharan Africa of 9% (compared to an average growth rate for all developing countries of 2.3%) during 1975-2000.[14] It is therefore not surprising that the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less that one dollar per day is expected to jump from 29.1 billion in 1998 to 40.6 billion in 2008![15] Furthermore, the region's share of global exports fell from 3% in 1950 to 1% in 1996.[16] This is a reflection of the fact that the bulk of the world's exports are mainly within and, secondly, between the three major economic regions (Western Europe, North America and South and South-East Asia). In economics terms, sub-Saharan Africa has effectively dropped off the globe.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES: Two indicators are sufficient to make the point in this instance. Firstly, sub-Saharan Africa had 3.7 million internet users in 2000 (more than two-thirds of this is in South Africa), whilst high-income OECD countries boast 276 million internet users. Secondly, the figure for fixed lines and mobile telephones per 1 000 people is 31.6 in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 1 126 for high income OECD countries.[17] Considering the increasing centrality of information technologies for economic performance in increasingly information-driven modes of production, the hypertext of Africa's (non)future is pretty much written on the LCD screen.

Yet, these statistical representations can cause one to loose sight of more intimate, everyday inequalities. In my view, an informed development praxis must be charged with a perpetual sense of outrage and anger about both kinds of humiliation and violence. To capture the chains of inequality down to the individual, there is very little that surpasses the devastating picture of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is projected that by the end of

[13] Adapted from: *New Internationalist*, May 2001, No. 334: 19. [14] *Human Development Report 2002*, p. 193. [15] Also from: *New Internationalist*, May 2001, No. 334: 18 [16] Sutcliffe (2001: 76). [17] Source: World Development Indicators database, April 2002 of the World Bank.

2001, 28.5 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were living with HIV/AIDS. This is over 70% of the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS globally (i.e. 40 million). Of the five million new HIV infections globally in 2001, 3.5 million (again, 70%) were in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, almost nine out of ten (87%) children (0-14 years) in the world living with HIV/AIDS are living in sub-Saharan Africa.[18] The Global AIDS Alliance has estimated that about US$15 billion per annum is required to address the pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa. This is four billion dollars more than the total official development assistance (ODA) to sub-Saharan Africa in 2000.[19] It is a well-documented fact that ODA has been declining for at least the last ten years with no reversal in sight.[20]

The frightening and sobering statistics on HIV/AIDS bring home the way inequality is tied in with identity-based discrimination and oppression.[21] Thus, the more markers of discrimination you bear, the more your chances are of being a casualty of the pandemic. For example, poor rural women with little or no education and no access to land or other productive resources are far more likely to fall prey to the virus than other people with less sources of disadvantage. Most of the socially produced and politically constructed ills of the world work by the same logic, which is why it is so politically urgent to foreground a much more open and confrontational social dialogue about difference and discrimination. For, as Wayne Ellwood opines, 'AIDS spreads along the fault lines of poverty, gender and class inequality.'[22]

The central point to take away from this is that identity and economic positions are inextricably bound together precisely because inter-subjective power relations are socially constructed and sedimented through political and economic systems, buttressed by culturally embedded ideological hegemony—'the process by which certain ways of understanding the world become so self-evident or naturalised as to render alternatives nonsensical or unthinkable'.[23] In Foucauldian terms, one would refer to these social processes as discursive grids of power/knowledge that regulate social interactions and especially, self-regulation. I raise this point, because it is important to assert the fact that all power is vulnerable to contestation and can be challenged through counter-hegemonic strategies. The challenge is to always keep the *fields of meaning* open through various strategies of contestation, which must include both deconstruction and the positing of alternatives that can become the new norm.

A moment in transition time…

In this section, I want to start with the current 'moment' in South Africa. Scattered next to me is an article by Joel Netshitenzhe, the head of Government Communications and the Policy Unit in the Presidency, on the imperatives of implementation of integrated development solutions. He assures us with the conclusion reached by Cabinet at their July 2002 *lekgotla*: 'steady progress is being made towards a humane society. There are no short cuts. The policies are in place. The critical challenge in this period is one of

[18] Source: UNAIDS (2002). [19] UNDP (2002). [20] Thanks to Mirjam van Donk for research assistance to find the relevant data under severe time pressures. [21] For a compelling elaboration of this argument, see: Baylies (2000). [22] Taken from his article in: *New Internationalist*, June 2002, No. 346, p. 10. [23] Appropriated from Chris Barker (2000: 351).

implementation.'[24] I find this formulation unsettling. How can policies ever be in place, be settled, be beyond question and revision? Is policy formulation not by nature a continuously iterative process driven along by the insights and contestations that arise from implementation? What does this particular discourse of 'implementation' mean exactly? Is it an attempt to hem in the remit of critique and debate? Before these questions can be resolved, a few more thoughts on the current development policy institutional architecture are probably necessary.

Some months ago I explored aspects of the political economy of the transition with a colleague in a paper for the Community Law Centre at UWC.[25] In this paper, we proffered the following summary account of recent developments. In idealised form, the logic of the government's development agenda since 1996 can be summarised as follows: i) Ensure macro-economic stability through GEAR and a government-wide and aligned medium-term budgetary system; ii) Achieve rapid institutional transformation of the public sector to gear it up for

delivery. This includes widespread public sector reform based on new public management principles and through:

a. Decentralisation of service delivery functions and roles to provincial and municipal government;
b. Improved policy coordination and alignment, with steering power located at the apex of government, the Presidency;
c. Creating a performance culture across the public sector and municipal government through a plethora of efficiency-inducing measures;
d. Stimulating greater citizen involvement through corporatist reforms (e.g. NEDLAC and local equivalents) and participatory involvement in various planning and monitoring systems, especially at municipal level through the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) system;
e. Expanding the reach of the state through a catalogue of partnership arrangements, mainly with the private sector, but also with civil society organisations as elaborated in various government policies.[26]

iii) Focus on delivering essential services as rapidly and efficiently as possible in line with the over-arching imperative of maintaining macro-economic stability.

Within this over-arching framework, sectoral departments have been given a lot of scope to define the optimal policy frameworks (and associated programmes) to realise their respective objectives. As a result, South Africa boasts numerous policy frameworks that can be regarded as 'cutting edge' across a variety of fronts, such as environmental policies, the emerging local governance system, community-based public works programmes, etc.[27] However, these policies are often confronted with numerous obstacles at the coalface of implementation. And as we know from current media spats about access to HIV/AIDS treatment, the snails pace of land reform, the mineral energies bill, and so on, it is not

[24] See *Cape Times*, 8 August 2002, emphasis added. [25] See: Pieterse and van Donk (2002). The following section is transplanted from this paper. [26] As promoted in: the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (RSA 1995), the White Paper on Municipal Partnerships (RSA 2000) and the Strategic Framework for Delivering Public Services through Public-Private Partnerships (Department of Finance 2001). [27] Testimony and explication of the nature of these policies can be consulted in: DEAT (2001), Evaratt and Zulu (2001), and UNDP-SA (2000).

merely a matter of implementation but also of policy direction and efficacy. So, if the current discourse on implementation is not a satisfactory starting point for reflection, what is?

This brings me to the problem of *how* to have a meaningful dialogue about development thinking, policy and practice that will produce meaningful insights, inspiration and bases for acting collectively to achieve shared values and tolerate difference. One way of having this dialogue is to carefully unpack the many overloaded development concepts that we lug around with us in acting on the indeterminate complexity that is human striving to imagine and construct livelihoods. In the following discussion, I will display my conceptual framework for thinking about and pursuing meaningful development policies that may contribute to human flourishing and freedom. The idea is that this framework will serve as the starting point for an ongoing dialogue with development practitioners. It is meant to be provocative, and hopefully, a stimulant to think more explicitly about what it is that is driving and anchoring our practice as development activists in whatever organisational setting.

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL CANVASS OF DEVELOPMENT: PRAXIS IN A TRANSITION…

> Definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being.[28]

First things first… conceptualising power

Before I delve into the main discussion of the paper, articulated in seven propositions on development praxis, I want to take a short detour and come clean on my unstable and always unfolding theoretical grounds. Why unstable and unfolding, you may wonder? Simply put, I am attracted to theoretical frameworks that somehow always exceed my capacity to understand them. Yet, the very elusiveness of these frameworks resonates with my hesitancy to once and for all make up my 'mind' and 'soul' in the face of new and unexpected experiences that confirm the density of everyday complexity of personal, social-structural and economic systems. Consequently, concepts and their theoretical frameworks about power and structures of domination that recognise mutuality, complicity, agency and indeterminacy make most sense. Broad stroke narratives about homogenous oppressors and virtuous victims devoid of culturally mediated social imaginaries and agency are simply unsatisfactory and usually downright insulting to all concerned, not least to the 'heroic' subjects of such analyses. Yet, this proclivity does not mean I am not interested in understanding, naming and exposing the systems and discourses of power that are often so patently at the root of the theatres of violence and cruelty discussed earlier.

What unsettles me most is the fact that knowing who or what is the cause of inequality, dehumanisation and environmental degradation does not necessarily translate into neat answers about how to fix all that has gone twisted in our times. Furthermore, as a product

[28] Words of bell hooks (2000: 14).

of the activist cultures of the 1980/90s, I am also too aware of the chasm between political ideals of social movements and the contrary inter-personal practices that tend to mark these organisations. In other words, when I first encountered Foucault's suggestion that the alternative carries the seeds of new tyrannies, it immediately resonated. Consequently, I tend to be drawn to concepts and theorists that avoid simplistic explanatory models in favour of an ongoing search for new concepts to get ever closer to the indeterminacy that is social reality—strung together by the dialectical interpenetrative plays of structure and agency.

The constitutive provisionality that I am describing here should not be confused with a lack of interest or passion in making value-based political judgements. For, as Stuart Hall explains, '…you have to understand the *arbitrary* closure that is required to make sense of a thing theoretically; but nevertheless, you have to write as if it is possible to sketch in or indicate how this analysis might be transformed once we bring the other moments in…'.[29] My conceptual anchors for analysing power and its capitalist shadow, inequality, allows me to critique and cast informed and motivated judgement. But this is accompanied by a reflexive expectation that there may be other interpretations, other variables that hide beyond the vision of realism and empiricism.

My politics hinge on the belief that there must be a messy engagement with 'the enemy' that will by force lead to an engagement with a recognisable humanity, suggesting a possible intimacy with all that one abhors. Most reified structures of power eventually get reduced to flesh and bones that dwell in structures of brick and mortar, with an address, and a door that can be opened and walked through. (Strategically or tactically at a moment in history, it may be self-defeating to engage in direct engagement. But all theories of social change assume that there is a teleological point where the relentless deployment of resistance leads to a point of negotiation/engagement to establish the terms of power transfer.) Once one has climbed over the barricade to start to piece together the 'new society', one's own capacity for being 'the enemy' of someone else and having to shout through the barricades of the proverbial excluded announces itself. Understanding my own (potential and actual) complicity in prevailing power structures induces a political posture that is self-aware, modest, open to be proven wrong and especially open to see new horizons beyond the confines of one's own political convictions.[30] For me, this is the foundation of a politics that also *creates* as opposed to just defending, as suggested in the opening quote by Bill Ashcroft.

Most recently, I have been moving back and forth between the theoretical programmes (or diagrams, to be more precise) of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. The latter I find beguiling, seductive, inviting, but ultimately out of reach conceptually. Idiosyncratic notions of Deleuze such as multiplicities, becomings, lines, strata and segmentarities, machinic assemblages, lines of flight and intensities, and so on, offer productive opportunities for rethinking and reconceptualising the many incommensurables that

[29] See Stuart Hall as interviewed by Julie Drew (1999: 225). [30] A number of years ago I took the time to explicate the theoretical bases of this position. See Pieterse, (1997a and 1997b). No doubt, if I have to restate those positions today, it would have a range of new reference points. Nonetheless, the basic arguments in those papers remain valid 'to be surrendered to the flows of meaning', following Suart Hall.

present themselves in my work, my inner-selves and my various communities. However, for now I still have some distance to travel before I can grasp the elliptical and self-referential totality of his philosophical diagram. No doubt, what does attract me is that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (his co-writer on many books) 'do not envisage global revolutionary change but rather a process of "active experimentation" which is played out in-between economic and political institutions and the sub-institutional movements of desire and affect'.[31] This theoretical approach is clearly inevitable since Deleuze's basic principle is that society is always *en fuite* (leaking, fleeing) and may be understood in terms of the manner in which it deals with its *fuites* (leakes, lines of flight). It says there is no determination of ourselves that does not at the same time create zones of indetermination—indetermination with respect to our individualizations as persons, sexes or genders, classes or strata, even as members of the human species.'[32]

For now, I remain attached to the neo-Gramscian and postcolonial theoretical projects that allow me to work with a muscular conception of power that precludes my thinking and practice from slipping into reductionism, voluntarism or a defeatist sense of the brutal world we call our collective home. Bent Flyvberg provides a useful summary of the tenets of this conception of power and, by extension, of politics, and, by further extension, of development practice. The following segment illuminates 'the how' of power, as opposed to the conventional concerns of 'who' and 'what':

> (1) Power is seen as productive and positive and not only as restrictive and negative.
>
> (2) Power is viewed as a dense net of omnipresent relations and not only as localized 'centres' and institutions, or as an entity one can 'posses.'
>
> (3) The concept of power is seen as ultradynamic; power is not only something one appropriates, but also something one reappropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement in relations of strength, tactics, and strategies.
>
> (4) Knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are analytically inseparable from each other; power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power.
>
> (5) The central question is how power is exercised, and not only who has power, and why they have it; the focus is on process in addition to structure.
>
> (6) Power is studied with a point of departure in small questions, 'flat and empirical', not only, nor primarily, with a point of departure in 'big questions'.[33]

At this definitional note I will proceed to the main section of the paper.

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[31] Formulation is that of Paul Patton (2000: 7). [32] Culled from: John Rachman (2000: 12). [33] This segment is extrapolated from Bent Flevberg (2001: 132).

SEVEN PROPOSITIONAL STEPS TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE PRAXIS

What follows are the key pieces of the puzzle that I keep on rearranging and piecing together in ever more confounding configurations. On their own, each hypothesis appears so manageable, even elegant in its clarity and obviousness, although this is not always the case. However, when these hypotheses are thrown together in the maelstrom of thinking and doing development holistically, they metamorphosize into almost uncontainable complexities, stoking desires for metaphysical crutches.

To facilitate an immediate comprehension of the conceptual linkages that I wish to explore, I will briefly state the propositions here, after which I will explore each in turn:

(1) The state is a crucial actor in development, despite the supposed hollowing-out effects of globalisation.

(2) Globalisation as a multifaceted and intensifying series of flows must be acknowledged and engaged with as part of an alternative development trajectory.

(3) A vibrant, plural and autonomous civil society is vital to keep states and markets accountable and responsive to the needs of socially excluded and marginalised groups. However, civil society is not endowed with any a priori goodness and can also function to encrust dominant interests in society and perpetuate inequalities.

(4) Politics is at the heart of any development process and, by definition, development politics must articulate itself to various scales of social organisation on the basis of an incisive understanding of spatiality.

(5) Subjectivity and identity (re)construction are built into politics and the political. In other words, 'self-construction' and social-construction are mirror images. This existential fact compels us to bring the personal into the core of how we think and practice development politics.

(6) Given the immediacy of so much suffering and destitution as a result of mal/under-development, it is imperative to privilege economic enhancement and security in one form or another. At the same time, economic enhancement actions that dispose of concerns about safety, beauty, pleasure and spiritual rootedness— as is often the case in mono-dimensional development projects—are bound to implode or peter out.

(7) None of these lines of thinking and practice can stand outside of the imperative of *institutionalisation* – that is, the craft of constructing social relations embedded in appropriate rules, values and norms to achieve specific objectives shared by the participating actors. The mundane dimensions of institutionalisation tend to rein in our revolutionary ambitions and temper our social engineering impulses. The sheer complexity of making institutions and associated organisational vessels function effectively takes us back to the necessary questions of individual actors with significant autonomy that are part of multiple and overlapping social contexts, which are marked by distinctive cultural patterning.

Exploring each of these conceptual lines of flight raises unsettling questions about our emergent development project in post-apartheid South Africa. The final section foregrounds these questions as a passageway to our dialogue about realising *human flourishing* in times of a transition.

PROPOSITION ONE: *The state is a pivotal actor in constructing an enabling diagram of opportunities for social actors in civil society, the private sector and poor households to pursue their respective agendas around development in ways that reduce inequality, violence, destitution, alienation and social anomie.*

Pal Ahluwalia reminds us that 20 years ago, there was widespread agreement that the main villain in the disaster story that was African underdevelopment was the state. Then the World Bank was convinced that the central problem was the dominance of corrupt states in African societies, as opposed to the patently exploitative nature of terms of trade or the lack of investment into an industrial base that could rework the expansive range of raw materials into high value commodities along with sufficient investment in the human resource base of these countries. As a result of the World Bank's analysis, more than two decades of punitive and corrosive structural adjustment policies were introduced.[34] The consequences are calamitous and it will take generations to disentangle and shift course.[35]

Significantly, in 1997 (three years after our political democratisation), the World Bank changed course and embraced the centrality of the state: 'An effective state is vital for the provision of the goods and services—and the rules and institutions—that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives. Without it, sustainable development, both economic and social, is impossible.'[36] The main impetus for this shift in thinking came from the 'lessons' extrapolated from the South-East Asian experiences and the patent failure of structural adjustment policies. Thus, without fundamentally reformulating the deep assumptions of neoliberalism, the World Bank started to articulate a different, less economistic, more holistic doctrine about pursuing 'comprehensive development'. This opened the door to a technicolour universe populated by people with multiple needs (beyond individual economic satisfaction), political power, collective interests and capabilities.[37] For a moment it seemed as if the tenacious criticisms of social movements, critical scholars, third world politicians, NGOs, poets and artists had finally made themselves felt and moved from the margins to the centre. However, the thick

[34] Giovanni Arighi (2002) provides a comprehensive review of the economic development policies that have been promoted and pursued by African government since the 1960s. It makes for instructive and depressing reading. An interesting counterpoint to Arighi's analysis about the limitations of the Lagos Plan of African governments formulated in 1980 can be consulted in Mafege (2001). [35] See de Alcántra (1994) for a summary of the key tenets of structural adjustment programmes and their impacts. Furthermore, Ajit Singh (2000) provides a useful complementary analysis of the links between economic development policies of developing countries during the 1990s and their consequences for poverty reduction and employment. [36] See, World Bank, 1997: 1. A close reading of the *World Development Report 1997*, demonstrates an ambiguous re-embracing of the pivotal role of a strong state in that the bank equates a strong state with one that is effective in shaping the regulatory environment and one that knows its limits. In other words, the bank envisages a state that will allow for efficiency-inducing measures to enter social service provision, e.g. through forms of privatisation. [37] The unique mixture of economic and philosophical theory of Amartya Sen (1999) has played no small role in shaping these changes, especially in the thinking of UNDP but also the work of the World Bank. Richard Sandbrook (2000: 1072) provides a thought provoking critique of Sen's conceptual agenda which he labels, 'pragmatic neoliberalism' (distinct from neoclassical versions) that promises 'a harmonious route to the expansion of freedom, … by expanding personal liberties and humanely adjusting individuals to the exigencies of global market competition.'

(intellectual and cultural) membrane of institutionality meant there would be chasm between 'new' policy intentions and practice, not least because of the reassertion of American influence over the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[38]

It is vital to refer to these broader policy currents, because they framed and shaped the policy debates in South Africa on the role of the state, particularly with regard to a 'people-centred approach to development' à la the RDP. In the vision of the RDP, the state would fulfil a central, directive role to ensure that the basic needs of all South Africans are fulfilled, the economy is restructured to ensure equitable access for all and spaces are opened up for democratic participation in all aspects of governance. However, the romance of state-led, redistribution-oriented development strategies soon ran aground in the imperatives of macro-economic stability and the powerful reification that is 'investor confidence'. The embodiment of this shift (some would argue, maturation) was of course the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy of the government, a policy that would immediately become the central fissure in the Congress Alliance and the linked networks of civil society organisations associated with the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) of the transition era. Ever since, the central governmental ambition of the post-apartheid state has been to manage the tension between the opposing logics of the RDP manifesto and the GEAR template.[39] This is not the place to go into the tenets of this tension and its conceptual terrain. All I want to draw attention to is the fact that it is a tension that finds quotidian expression in a myriad of institutional reflexes, which underscores that the state is profoundly heterogeneous and dynamic. In valorising the role of the state in development it is vital to acknowledge and (conceptually) respect its constitutive diversity and internal contradictions. For, as Peter Evans aptly explains;

> reifying "the state" as a monolithic entity is just as dangerous as reifying "civil society". Much more than NGOs, social movements, or even political parties, states are complicated, contradictory creatures. The authoritative coordination that is fundamental to the generic nature of the state imposes some uniformities, but the panoply of agencies making up the public institutions of governance remain heterogeneous in their orientations and often pursue contradictory goals. Conflict and contradiction vie with cohesion and coherence within and among agencies. Public authorities are split into local and supralocal jurisdictions. Authority is

[38] See further the incisive analyses of Solon Barraclough (2000), Robert Wade (2001) and Guy Standing (2000) on the ambiguous nature of these policy shifts and especially the backlash that came from the Washington establishment which led to the departure of then Chief World Bank Economist, Joseph Stiglitz and consultant, Ravi Kanbur. [39] For those who operate within organizations of the state there is the ritualized practice of paying homage to both policies as if they are easily compatible and complementary. This discursive imperative also reinforces the larger culture of 'no debate' because critical reflection of GEAR could in itself, whether GEAR is actually amended or not, affect investor sentiment and set off a negative self-reinforcing cycle of doubt, disinvestment or cause an investment boycott. Nonetheless, in my work engagement with public servants over the years it is clear that these actors are fully aware of the damaging consequences of fiscal conservatism and consciously work to negotiate its unreasonable demands. Unfortunately many civil society actors stand too aloof from state agencies to identify and exploit these dynamics. A different and equally dynamic terrain is of course the congress alliance itself and debates within the ANC. But that is a discussion for another time!

> parcelled out among municipal, state, and national governments in complex and overlapping ways. Within any jurisdiction, and often cutting across them, agencies are divided by sector and function and have competing responsibilities and interests. The role of the state thus is really a variety of roles, often played out in contradictory ways.[40]

Once the constitutive heterogeneity of the state is accepted, it becomes possible to explore a myriad of strategic pathways to reinforce a transformative role for the state in the development project. However, from a praxis perspective it requires one to remain close to the ground and ask numerous 'flat and empirical questions' (in line with Foucault) about how state power works and reproduces itself materially and discursively. This implies close proximity as opposed to distance. Proximity does not have to be at the expense of critical engagement; it could arguably make it more focussed and nuanced. One of the most worrying aspects of the transition, in terms of the role and positioning of progressive CSOs, is the superficial radicalism that characterises statements about state intent, behaviour and practice. (Admittedly, this attitude finds its counterpart in similar attitudes about civil society amongst many state officials as well!). Development activists are quick to label, stereotype and box both government policies and actors, without taking the time to listen, deconstruct and dialogically reconstruct in more transformative ways – an approach that Peter Evans and his colleagues typify as 'state-society synergy'. It is worthwhile briefly unpacking this idea, because it provides a fruitful avenue to recast state-civil society engagement.

State-society synergy refers to instances of engagement whereby 'public agencies and mobilized communities enhance one another's capacity to deliver collective goods'.[41] This approach proceeds from the assumption that state agencies do not have the full ensemble of knowledge, skills, resources and access to (poor) citizens to design and implement development programmes effectively. Similarly, civil society groups also do not have a monopoly over access (to citizens) and relevant skills to pursue a secessionist approach to development programming. However, the notion of synergy should not be confused with consensual models of development or a theoretical approach that assumes a voluntarism on the part of state agencies to act in the interest of poor citizens. As Evans explains, 'engagement does not preclude conflict. In many cases, conflict can be an important stimulus to synergy.'[42]

Strategic engagement with the state, or rather, with particular actors within specific state agencies, can produce favourable outcomes, but it must be conceptualised against a much larger canvass of political engagement. In a recent paper, I explored this canvass in greater detail and investigated how locality-specific or issue-specific engagements with the state must be embedded in a host of contiguous actions that can mapped as five overlapping domains of political practice: (i) representative political forums; (ii) direct action or mobilisation against state policies or to advance specific political demands; (iii) the politics of development practice, especially at the grassroots where synergistic relations can be

[40] See Evans, 2002: 20. [41] Evans, 2002: 21. [42] For a compelling theoretical exposition on why conflict and contestation is vital for state-society engagement, especially in the context of dialogical forums, see: Edmunds and Wollenburg (2001).

forged; (iv) symbolic political contestation as expressed through discursive contestation in the public sphere; and (v) corporatist political forums that are comprised of representative organisations, typically the government, the private sector, trade unions and community-based organisations.[43] The underlying theoretical assumption is that such engagement can produce both complementary and conflictual dynamics and both are vital elixirs of radical participatory democracy.

This conceptual approach boils down to a more nuanced understanding of state power, its reproduction and symbolic imperatives as it pulsates through the panoply of state agencies at various scales of government. The development imperatives that arise can be summarised as follows:

a. Decentralisation of service delivery functions and roles to provincial and municipal government;
b. Improved policy coordination and alignment, with steering power located at the apex of government, the Presidency;
c. Creating a performance culture across the public sector and municipal government through a plethora of efficiency-inducing measures;
d. Stimulating greater citizen involvement through corporatist reforms (e.g. NEDLAC and local equivalents) and participatory involvement in various

PROPOSITION TWO: *In thinking and practising (local/national) development, one must accommodate the increasing salience of regional and global flows of resources and power as time-space distanciation is decreased through technological transformations. These dynamics effectively intensify the asymmetrical integration of developing countries into such globalising circuits.*

Globalisation is indeed an ever more pressing social, political and economic fact, with heterogeneous cultural consequences and determinants. However, its dynamics and impact can, and should, be resisted in favour of systems of power that can be more equitable and socially just. However, mounting such resistance, and especially counter-imaginations, requires a grounded understanding of what one is dealing with. Such an understanding tends to be a rare phenomenon. Instead, crude arguments about western homogenisation and new waves of imperialism are peddled as the sum total of a complex set of relations that can be discerned as elements of a globalising dynamic. I want to sidestep the rather expansive definitional arguments about what globalisation entails and especially its significance for particularly place.[44] As a shortcut, I draw on Michael Pacione's succinct characterisation:

> Globalisation involves both an intensification of *worldwide* social relations through time-space compression of the globe, and local transformations involving enhancement of local identity as well as of *local* consciousness of the world as a

[43] See: Pieterse, forthcoming. [44] Martin Lewis (2000) provides a brilliant antidote to the plethora of 'popular' (read, airport lounge) books on globalisation which demonstrates just how misleading and often ludicrous the hyper-globalisation arguments can be. For a recent overview of the theoretical debates on globalisation, see Robertson (2001).

> whole... In the global/local nexus, global forces are generally held to be most powerful and their control more spatially extensive. Local forces are seen to be relatively weaker and geographically limited in effect, although certain local actions have global consequences … Global forces are mediated by locally and historically contingent forces as they penetrate downwards, coming to ground in particular places… The processes of globalisation have been ongoing in human history, but the rate of progress and effects have accelerated since the 'early modern' period of the late sixteenth century, and more especially over the last few decades in tandem with the transition towards postmodernity.[45]

Typically, globalisation is equated with transnational corporation (TNC) influence and growing dominance in third world territories. There are two reasons why globalisation tends to be equated with economic globalisation. Firstly, rapid information technological transformations, largely propelled by the invention and continuous refinement of the microchip as the linchpin of the micro-electronics revolution, has led to phenomenal growth in economic output, trade and ownership concentration as the economies-of-scale thresholds shift upwards from localities to worldwide circuits. As a result of this recent technological advance, TNCs have become larger and better organised on a worldwide basis, in the process becoming larger economies than many nation states. Secondly, this shift in ownership and spatial coverage of corporations has fuelled a dramatic increase in the promotion of consumer-capitalism through standardised marketing based on (hybridised) western tastes and aesthetics. This is particularly acute and visible in marketing techniques and branding obsessions aimed at the youth market across the globe, but equally virulent when it comes to standardising the management and deployment of savings and investments of ordinary people.[46]

Yet, there is much more to globalisation than the economic, partly because economic relations are mediated by culturally-embedded sensibilities, socially defined relations and politically regulated institutions (even if regulations in certain countries are more informal than formal). Arjun Appadurai's inventive typology of five global cultural flows provides the reference point to rethink globalisation well beyond the economic, and especially beyond the narrative of homogenisation, to begin to appreciate the disjunctive and contradictory nature of multiple, overlapping global flows.

> The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centres and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (in terms of migratory theory), or of consumers and producers… The complexity of the current

[45] Michael Pacione, (2001: 9, sequence of points rearranged). Raymond Lee (1994: vii) in turn provides a fascinating account of these recent processes from the perspective of the South through a systematic exploration of the question, 'whether postmodernism will reshape the modernization agenda of developing countries'? [46] See Naomi Klein's best seller, *No Logo*, for a trenchant dissection of the paradigmatic function of branding and emerging forms of resistance. See Adam Harmes's (2001) exposé on the Anglo-Saxon experience of the rise of a mass investment culture whereby the perceived interest of tens of millions of workers is linked to finance capital as pension and mutual funds are invested on stock markets.

> global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that have only begun to theorize. I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be terms (a) *ethno*scapes, (b) *media*scapes, (c) *techno*scapes, (d) *finan*scapes, and (e) *ideo*scapes. The suffix –*scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterise international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles.[47]

The purpose of appropriating a more differentiated approach to globalisation is to explore a more variegated politics that can combine opposition, reappropriation and projection of alternative discourses. More presciently, it allows one to de-link narratives of freedom, emancipation and social justice from the stitching of the nation state and understand the fundamental inter-dependency between nations, and especially between localities. In other words, the significance of globalising processes is that it shows up the exhaustion of 'the nation' as the primary reference point for thinking human flourishing. It incites a willingness to imagine a song of freedom than transcends xenophobia, exceptionalism and their cousin, nationalism. In this tearing of the nationalist script, the significance of the African Renaissance discourse (especially as an echo of earlier pan-africanism) comes to the fore. Again, I have to defer a discussion of the African Renaissance notion with the hope that one of the contributors to the eventual volume will pick up the baton.[48]

It seems obvious to me that the agendas of holistic development[49] and social justice can greatly be enhanced by the strengthening of progressive networks of global civil society organisations. Localised struggles can be bolstered in practical and symbolic terms when they are articulated with a larger project of social justice because in that way they get closer to the structural roots of the problems they mobilise around. At the same time, global civil society can be democratised and made more accountable because they have to link principles to 'real-life' struggles as opposed to puritanical imaginations of professional revolutionaries. Put differently, given the global theatre of violence and injustice (along with its local inflections and determinants), there is an imperative to think of development as part of a larger project of fostering a democratic global civil society and social justice. How? Some elements of the answer seem obvious to me, and it is therefore surprising that it is not a more overt part of our everyday development speak in South Africa. Some elements may seem easy enough at first glance, but giving tangible expression to them is another story.

The basic components of the change agenda are reasonably clear, which suggests a strong potential for strategic alliances between civil society actors, the state and even certain parts of the business sector:[50]

[47] Extracted from: Appadurai (1996: 32-33). [48] One, potentially productive starting point for this debate could be the perspective of Hein Marais (2001: 248-52) on the issue. From a completely different angle, the deck-clearing arguments of Achille Mbembe on the African intellectual condition may be a more fundamental starting point. [49] This notion is drawn from the conceptual arguments of development theorist, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001). [50] Since the Rio Summit interesting ideological shifts have been unfolding in the private sector. For example, the CERES principles represents an important advance for the promotion of green

a. Decentralisation of service delivery functions and roles to provincial and municipal government;
b. Improved policy coordination and alignment, with steering power located at the apex of government, the Presidency;
c. Creating a performance culture across the public sector and municipal government through a plethora of efficiency-inducing measures;
d. Stimulating greater citizen involvement through corporatist reforms (e.g. NEDLAC and local equivalents) and participatory involvement in various planning and monitoring systems, especially at municipal level through the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) system;

The question is how does this political platform of global reform relate to necessary contestation about the content and trajectory of reforms associated with the African Union, NEPAD and alternative civil society agendas? A first look suggests that civil society activists and left public intellectuals are being too eager to draw on their usual tropes of anti-neoliberalism to deconstruct and critique NEPAD in particular. There is an important discussion to be had about mutual accountability, democracy, citizenship, peace, and so forth—thematics that is being dispensed along with the bathwater. Surely we can formulate counter discourses that are not ideologically pure and pristine but willing to engage with multiple meanings and layers of possibility?

PROPOSITION THREE: *If empirically approached, civil society is a vital arena to engender democratic values and habits, foster sociality, and construct a dense social base to keep the state accountable to its citizens and constitutional obligations. Civil society can furthermore play a vital role in engaging with the private sector to reduce the negative externalities of markets and ensure greater equity (in income and access to social opportunities).*

> Civil society, it seems, is known primarily by its absence, its elusiveness, its incompleteness, from the traces left by struggles conducted in its name. More aspiration than achievement, it retreats before the scrutinizing gaze […] The less substance it has, the emptier its referents, the more this is so; which is why its polyvalence, its ineluctable unfixability, is intrinsic to its power as panacea. It is the ultimate magic bullet in Age of Millennial Capitalism. For it promises to conjure up the most fundamental thing of all: a meaningful social existence.[51]

One of our most complex burdens of the anti-apartheid struggle is the ambivalent attitude that pervades society about civil society—seen as a general good by many, yet also deployed with great ambivalence and scepticism. Sentiments from within leading civil

technologies and its transfer to the South, consumer safety, risk reduction and transparency in terms of corporate conduct and consistency with environmental sustainability and social equity. A number of other such instruments also exist as summarized in: Cleveland, et al. (1995). Later on these initial 'greening debates' have matured into debates about 'corporate citizenship' which denotes a more muscular approach to the responsibilities of firms to adhere to human rights and the promotion of sustainable development, including their core production and trading practices. Yet, as the recent WSSD discussions revealed, even these 'enlightened' corporations are resistant to any strategy that goes beyond *voluntary* compliance. Simon Zadek's (2000) work in this area constitutes an important reference point for the debates.

[51] See: Comaroff and Comaroff (2000: 230 & 234).

society organisation are often laced with a bittersweet mixture of nostalgia, regret and anticipation for the heroic futures yet to come… but seemingly always bound to run aground in a morass of petty politicking and factionalism. Sentiments from quarters in the state range from outright patronising to vilification, or even blind desperation, which is born out of hope that civil society holds the magic key to translate policies/resources into tangible outcomes that improve the quality of life and habitat of marginalised constituencies. In the mist of contradictory sentiments, the development sector seems to slump from one crisis to the next, amplifying one misunderstanding after another, with the occasional 'success story' that remains far removed from systemic influence. In part, this situation is almost inevitable given the constitutive diversity and pluralism of civil society and multiple fault-lines of power and inequality that pervade social life. In another sense, we clearly need to shift the ways in which we think about civil society and the imaginations and actions it gives rise to.

An essay by Nelson Kasfir, *The conventional notion of civil society: a critique*, may provide a useful starting point for spurring a shift in thinking that could lead to fresh conceptual insights and expectations. Kasfir's basic point is that conventional (Eurocentric) theories of civil society are over-invested with moralistic ideas about particular types of democratic reform. Embedded in these approaches is a series of assumptions that equate a vibrant civil society with political democracy, because through the existence of a vibrant civil society abuses of state power can be prevented or at least minimised. However, to fulfil this brave function, only certain types of associational forms can qualify to enter the gates of *civil* society: '…organisations that are taken to be distinctly independent from the state, sufficiently financed and expertly led to overcome opposition to democracy and participate in its consolidation… They must respect the rules they wish to enforce on the state. They may not pursue anti-democratic goals.'[52] Kasfir goes on to suggest that if one takes this approach to its logical conclusion, there would be almost no social basis for the emergence of civil society in postcolonial contexts. Yet, these societies are teeming with associational life that cuts across many boundaries and are inherently politically ambivalent (or agnostic) as a strategic positioning of sorts to ensure maximum access to resources and opportunities for their members. In light of the disjuncture between the social reality of African societies and the theoretical *expectation* of political theorists, Kasfir argues that it is imperative '…to open up the notion of civil society by not insisting that it explains democratic reform and instead using civil society to gain a wider understanding of particular societies and their relationship to their states.'[53]

Goetz and Lister concur with the thrust of Kasfir's critique of much of the political theory deployed to characterise African polities in the 1980s and 1990s. For them, a 'sociological/ descriptive approach' to defining civil society makes most sense. Consequently, they advance an understanding that 'identifies civil society as a realm of public activity, including very informal kinds of interaction, where individuals pursue group-based mediated concerns with their own constituencies, or with other groups, which can be in co-operative or conflictual ways… In pursuing group interests, such groups usually end up coming into contact with public authority—with the state—interacting in disputes over

[52] Kasfir (1998: 2).
[53] Ibid. (1998: 3).

the distribution of power and resources in society.'[54] This approach is more fruitful to capture the influential social bases of power in postcolonial settings – social bases such as ethnicity or regionalism or religion, which are often shared by the state and civil associations in complex configurations of exchange and checks-and-balances. The value of civil society as a conceptual construct is first and foremost to help us understand better what is actually going on, and secondarily, how social dynamics can be shaped to advance more equitable and socially just policies. Going in blindly with prescriptions wreaks more damage than taking the time, and conjuring the respect, to figure out what social patterns may mean in particular places where specific groups and individuals deploy multiple strategies of engagement to exact presence, some autonomy and access to resources, with the knowledge that any gain tends to be temporary and unstable.

I have taken some time to make the case for a more 'empirical' approach to civil society, partly because it is what my experience in community development and political activisms dictates, but also because the message was brought home so forcefully by the recently published study: The size and scope of the non-profit sector in South Africa.55 This study found that South Africa boasts a large and vibrant civil society sector (nonprofit organisations [NPOs] in the terminology of the report) comprised of 98 920 organisations in 1998, of which, 'no less than 53 percent … can be classified as less formalised, community-based NPOs.'[56] The study further suggests that the majority of the organisations are located in poor communities and play a massive role in maintaining livelihoods and vital social networks of support and reciprocity in these neighbourhoods. Yet, the well-established, funded and 'sophisticated' non-governmental organisations are distinctive by their absence in these neighbourhoods and poor areas in general. These organisations tend to find themselves incapable of transcending lower middle-class or upper working class neighbourhoods in terms of their direct-contact work. This finding pulls the prized carpet of moral legitimacy out from under these organisations, suggesting a need for serious introspection about how these patterns are produced and sustained. My contention is that the overly moralistic and self-righteous ideological posturing of visible and resourced CSOs is an important contributing factor. At the heart of this attitude is a wrong conception of civil society and a failure to engage communities and social processes where they are at, as opposed to where we think they should be.[57]

At this point it may appear as if the aspirational notions in my propositional statements are thoroughly undermined by my emphasis on an empirical approach to accept civil society as a domain of particular collective practices, with no a priori goodness. Taking the time to understand what is actually going on (which is also by definition a relentless endeavour) does not preclude a political philosophy or ethical framework. In fact, it informs a more appropriate, culturally-attuned and spatially conscious politics. It also compels development actors to locate their own subjectivity and agendas within the social realities that they seek to alter – in other words, engage in reflexive praxis. This approach will become clearer later on when I explore some aspects of this kind of practice.

[54] Appropriated from: Anne-Marie Goetz and Sarah Lister (2001: 3). [55] See: Swilling and Russell (2002). All further references to the study hereafter is based on this reference. [56] Ibid. (2002: 20). [57] I don't develop this point any further here because it is taken up more fully in: Pieterse (forthcoming).

PROPOSITION FOUR: *Given the complexity of effecting progressive political, economic and cultural change to realise holistic development, it is vital to recognise the cultural embeddedness of all subjectivity and to articulate various scales of decision-making ranging from the local to the global.*

> For while politics is about the specific behaviours, strategies, and policies of political actors and institutions, the political is the constitutive framework and socio-political space within which politics happens and through which meaning is assigned to events.[58]

A few years back I was tasked with devising a methodological framework for structuring a political debate between the metropolitan council and other stakeholders in the business community and civil society about the future of Cape Town. Two things struck me particularly hard during this exercise. The first was the realisation that very few actors in the city were geared to think about the city as a single political entity that can be acted upon to achieve particular outcomes. Most social actors were preoccupied with very specific issues or sectoral concerns, usually in relation to one segment of the population or small geographic area. For me, this reflects a profound lack of understanding of the spatiality of power and politics. The second was the question about who is involved in political contestation and the over-reliance on formalistic dialogical forums to mediate difference and consensus. I was struck by the absence of young people's and children's voices, especially since most of the decisions that are meant to give meaning to the city visioning exercise will impact on them more than anyone else. Surely there is something profoundly amiss if our participatory democratic innovations regard the ideas and aspirations of the majority[59] of the population as incidental. However, the issues go deeper than merely a question of whose voices are catered for and whose are not.

These concerns have spurred further reflections about the nature of civil society organisation and political contestation. In general terms, the structure and feel of social engagement remains remarkably similar to the anti-apartheid era: the trade unions remain the largest organised force with the most capacity to influence and shape government policy and ANC debates. Following in their wake are the civics and other forms of street-level structures that are ideologically largely in sync with the 'nationalist project' of the ANC. On the other end of the political spectrum, one finds the array of (white) liberal civil society formations that are broadly in sync with the maintenance-of-historicalprivilege agenda of the political opposition. Public media coverage tends to mimic these hyperbolic political agendas at the expense of reflecting the construction of more complex, indeterminate subjectivities, except if they symbolise a mindless escapism through new forms of consumption or commercial projection. The over-commercialised

[58] Wayne Gabardi (2001: 95). [59] According to *The State of South Africa's Population Report 2000,* 54% (of which 33.9% [approximately, 17.2 million] are younger than 15 years of age) of the population is younger than 25 years of age (Department of Social Development, 2000: 73).

kwaito industry is a prime example of this phenomenon—having lost its political edge even before it had time to gestate.[60]

Nevertheless, reimagining the political during the transition must start with where young people and children are at and where they co-create their socialisation. This implies a foregrounding of a politics of representation. How can we use their spaces of the everyday to inject critical reflections on their futures, given what sense they are making of their present and their youthful histories? How can we learn to pay more attention to what matters to them and what embodies their sense of self, i.e. music, clothes, sexuality, friends, 'chilling' places? How can we enrol these sensibilities into collective practices that can also produce resources for the production of locality in relation to wider circuits of influence and determination? In wrestling with these questions, I find more hope in the work of under-funded and under-appreciated organisations like the District Six museum that seek to use memory, art and other mediums of representation to raise fresh questions about place, identity, history and futures. This is a politics of multiple scales and temporalities, because it uses the multiple determinants of subjectivity and aspiration as starting points for collective moments of reflection and projection. It is in such moments that the limits of the current political institutions and trajectories can come to be named and potentially transcended, at least through more expanded visions of aspiration for better, happier and more pleasurable futures.

This line of (optimistic) thought leads me straight to daily spaces of collective consumption—clinics, parks, multipurpose centres, schools, taxi ranks, water collection points, shebeens, spaza shops, pavements, public squares, libraries, street markets, dance halls and the like—and their significance for reconstructing citizenship. Why can investments in these public goods not be linked to strengthening political association and mobilisation in ways that amplify both democratic contestation and a sense of ownership and responsibility to nurture what adds to the quality of life of a community? As I am writing this, the militant critique of the emerging anti-neoliberal grassroots movements, such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum, announces itself in the form of a barrage of questions: Surely these points of social organisation and mobilisation will fail to address the underlying contradictions that produce the absence of collective consumption infrastructure? Is not the primary political imperative at the moment to mobilise the poor around an anti-corporate globalisation agenda, which will lead to a disposal of the current state that has been co-opted by corporate interests? Is a focus on cultural aspirations and meanings not essentially a diversion from the real-world politics of rebalancing state power to reflect the interests of the workers and the unemployed?

In many respects, I do not have answers for these timely and valid questions. Also, I do know that many direct action and social mobilisation processes unfolding under the banners of these social movements are good for deepening our democratic institutions. However, my experience suggests that overly narrow and sectarian political strategies that ignore social-cultural diversity and complexity tend to function on puritanical criteria for

[60] The over-confidence of this point is based on ignorance because my knowledge of the industry is minimal. Nevertheless, see the more informed perspective of Simon Stephens (2000). Also, like all cultural fields, this one is contested and more political sensibilities are also in play, e.g. the *Politburo* DJ-sound movement(?) of 'The General' and his 'co-conspirators'.

'acceptable' political agency. Also, local issues are relevant when they illustrate larger (class) contradictions in society. In other words, the local holds an instrumental value for clarifying class consciousness and inducing militant agency. Consequently, there is very little room for the valid, even if mundane, aspirations of fun, safety, beauty, pleasure, desire, flirtatious demonstration, dignity, escapism, voice, presence, and so on, that give meaning to subjectivity and sociality. For me, the challenge is to recast the political in ways that take cognisance of scale and temporalities in the everyday of ordinary (probably poor) South Africans through a deliberate focus on the rhythms of daily life, seasonal cycles and generational trajectories. Kelwyn Sole argues for the same sensibility in his recent account of the role of poetry in critiquing the terms of the South African transition:

> For 'developing' countries subjugated to an inegalitarian global system, the South African example suggests that such an investigation would demand not only a painstaking examination of culture, habit, repetition, scatology and the like, but an assessment of the effects of economic, public and civic institutions as experienced by groups and individuals with differing amounts of access to the state and the global economy. Whatever form of resistance to a structurally unjust system emerge over time, it will be the response of the ordinary people who have experienced, and have a close-hand knowledge of, the indignities as well as the gains brought by globalisation who will be crucial, in South Africa as elsewhere (Sole, 2001-2: 51-52).

From this vantage point, how can individual agency and collective actions be supported to explore, challenge and alter the inter-linkages of the economic, the political and the cultural? Clearly, this kind of political imaginary must start with children and young people who cannot but live, or at least dream to live, the constitutive inter-dependencies I am wishing for here. Some of the confusing implications of my argument may become clearer once I have discussed the remaining propositions, especially the next one on a self-reflexive praxis of *self-creation*.

PROPOSITION FIVE: *Meaningful and sustained political engagement towards social transformation cannot be delinked from individual work to achieve 'self-creation'. The two dimensions of engagement and transformation are inter-twined.*

> You are the truth the truth that you seek…[61]

Whenever I engage with community development methodologies such as 'sustainable livelihoods', I am always amazed at what is expected from people who happen to live in poor households and communities. Let us ponder for a moment the proverbial African woman who is the head of a household and responsible for sustaining the household that is comprised of up to three generations, with not a single income-earner living in the dwelling. In the logic of community development methodologies, this woman must become sufficiently self-conscious to see the need to attend workshops and meetings to learn how to plot her livelihood assets (human capital, social and political capital, physical capital, financial capital and natural capital). Once she has plotted her relative position in

[61] Un-attributed; from inside the sleeve of Me'Shell Ndegeocello's CD, *Peace beyond Passion*, 1996.

terms of these five asset bases, she must then reflect on how she manages her assets and what informs her decisions. This process will allow her to understand the degree of control she has over her 'asset portfolio' and what the external factors are (including the policies, institutions and laws of government, the private sector and non-governmental organisations) that shape her position in this local community. This process of reflection and analysis, in conjunction with her fellow community members, can then lead to pro-active strategies to shift their relative position in ways that will influence external structures and their policies, and also internal relations and values that undermine equitable social relations. The internal aspects typically refer to gender relations, generational discrimination, ethnic divisions and any other identity-based processes of social exclusion.[62]

Government programmes and NGO intervention strategies are usually based on these methodological frameworks that imply such radical psychological transformations that I cannot help but wonder whether any of the (middle-class) development agents who drive these models would ponder even a tenth of the personal changes in their own lives if someone came to them and 'demanded' it. Reflecting on my own stubborn attitude, I am doubtful. It is in this context that I found the thoughts of Michael Edwards and Gita Sen on the issue of personal development, particularly suggestive.

In their essay, *social change and the transformation of human relationships*, they make the argument that social transformation towards human flourishing is only conceivable if there is a simultaneous and mutually reinforcing movement of change at three levels: [i] 'a set of principles that form an axiomatic basis of ethics and values; [ii] a set of processes—the functioning mechanisms and institutions that undergird the system; and [iii] the subjective states that constitute our inner being—our personal feelings and intuitions in the deepest sense.'[63] The remainder of the argument sets out the importance of bringing a debate about what a 'transformation of the heart' may entail into the mainstream of development thinking and practice. Crucially, Edwards and Sen insist that it is not an argument for social engineering, because personal transformation that is not voluntarily pursued is not sustainable. Their argument reminds me of the political theory of Wayne Gabardi who builds on a Foucauldian understanding of politics as creative struggle that cannot be separated from personal self-creation:

> To live a life without struggle is to live a passive existence, to not experience freedom, and thus to not experience self-creation. It is to conform to existing power relations, or to re-form them in the interest of a greater consensus, stability, identity, community, or humanity. To make creative struggle the core of one's sense of self is to both experience moments of creative individuality and to contest the ongoing accumulation and disciplinary deployment of power and government.[64]

[62] A useful summary of the livelihoods model is set out in Carole Rakodi's (2002) chapter. For an account of how this approach is also shared with influential NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE, see the comparative analysis in: Diana Carney, *et al*. (1999). [63] Drawn from Edwards and Sen (2000: 606). The following discussion draws on the same article. [64] See: Gabardi, 2001: 131-2.

This conceptualisation is vital. 'Self-creation' is such a wonderful verb. It captures the importance of working on the self as an integral aspect of the larger project of political transformation. This much I embrace fully and find incredibly challenging in thinking through the full implications for development praxis. At the same time, I am also unsettled by the potential for moralistic slippage in approaching development intervention, armed with yet another requirement for the 'beneficiaries' to comply with to be 'good participants' in the improvement of their circumstances. How would I possibly concretise the imperative for inner awareness, commitment to personal transformation and self-creation, especially in contexts of severe material want and complex social obligations? How can I as an outsider even begin to understand enough about the daily, historical, familial and communal dimensions of the identity considerations of participating individuals?

This tension leads me to make a distinction between what I accept for myself as a relevant standard for practicing development, i.e. functioning in a self-reflexive mode, whilst refusing the temptation to suggest that colleagues or beneficiaries adopt the same standards. Nevertheless, it does seem necessary to make some assumptions about the imperative of healthy inter-personal relations and the importance of foregrounding the imperative of *restoring dignity*. It is in this respect that I find the insights of psychoanalysis particular instructive.

Working on the self is essentially about psychological engagement or, in Susie Orbach's terms, *emotional literacy*. Orbach's work is particularly helpful since she explicitly explores 'how psychoanalytic ways of thinking refresh the political in useful ways'.[65] Despite the great disagreements that characterise psychoanalysis as a discipline (like any other), Orbach argues persuasively for its value:

> Through language and the talking cure, psychoanalysis has found a way to decode and uncover secrets embedded in symptoms that patients exhibit. We've learnt that the human animal is a social, interactive, interdependent being who will do almost anything to maintain its relationships with significant others. We've learnt that early experiences shape our responses to self and other, makes the world a benevolent, frightening, overwhelming, welcoming or benign environment. We've learnt that the familial, domestic, cultural, class, financial, religious, ethical background we spring from will be deeply structured into our individual's sense-of-self-determining sets of behaviours. We've learnt that good relationships—those which support individuation and connectedness, embrace vulnerability and strength—allow the individual to feel secure in themselves and make connections with others based on interest, love and communication. We've learnt that bad relationships—those that hurt rather than empower, disable rather than enable—become a magnet attracting and manacling the individual who has been attached to them, instilling in them an emotional repertoire which inclines them to re-create relationships impregnated with that emotional tableau.[66]

[65] Drawn from Orbach, 1996: 163.
[66] Ibid., 155-6.

When I first read this arresting précis of the value of psychological awareness I was struck by how blindly most development organisations stumble into the emotional complexity that is the social settings in (poor) households or organisations. Why do concerns about pleasure, beauty, risk and aesthetics feature so low on our list of concerns, if at all? Why do we prefer to operate at the level of abstracted generalisation about poverty, unemployment, inequality, violence and not at the pain-filled emotional landscapes of denial, fear, rejection, degradation, and so on? Of course, a big part of the reason for this is the lack of reflection on and awareness about what is going on in our own organisations and lives. Alan Kaplan has done a lot to unearth this set of emotional literacy concerns and rework them into a series of provocations for action to live development praxis differently – that is, in more empowering ways.[67] Yet, I fear that in the development universe it is still too tied to the mechanical application of wooden methodological tools. This raises the question about how one can shift the sedimented rigidities of conventional development.

Surely, what is needed is to dispense of concepts and mental models that suggest simple, homogenous, intelligible 'communities' in the singular. Having done my time in various nooks and crannies of development institutions, I am doubtful that development practitioners can overcome their deeply entrenched discursive systems and institutional proclivities. Instead, a radical confrontation with the complex richness of 'the everyday' is imperative. Artists and cultural agents can play a major role in instigating a respect and appropriate appreciation for the agency and complexity of lifeworlds[68] of 'the poor' or marginalised. As a case in point, consider the vivid voice and representations of Santo Mofokeng.[69] In an essay on Mofokeng's work, Sam Raditlhalo captures some of the photographer's unique skill of perception: 'As Mofokeng has expressed it, "the responsibility of photographers [what about development practitioners?] is the continuing, contentious struggle over the representation of South African history" is thus a crucial predicate in his work. For him the search is about looking for the evanescent, hidden aspects of black lives routinely marginalised, denigrated, forgotten.'[70] For, as Mofokeng explains elsewhere, 'In my work, I try to see in a different way, and in that way make people more aware of political issues… the things that people know about, but don't talk about.'[71]

The importance of cultural debates for development practice is not merely because artists are much more convincing and articulate in capturing the vicissitudinous layers of everyday life, but also because the debate about representation of black subjects have been raging full steam for some time now. Undoubtedly, there is a frustratingly self-referential quality to this debate, but it does open up a critical awareness that any representation of everyday black life comes with political responsibility. It is this

[67] See his two elegant volumes: Alan Kaplan (1996 and 2002). [68] This term is appropriated from Norman Long (2001: 241) who defines it as: ' "lived-in" and largely "taken-for-granted" social world centring on particular individuals. Such worlds should not be viewed as "cultural backcloths" that frame how individuals act, but instead as a product of an individual's own constant self-assembling and re-evaluating of relationships and experiences. Lifeworlds embrace actions, interactions and meanings, and are identified with specific sociogeographical spaces and life histories.' [69] Mofokeng's visual and textual voices are both exquisitely captured in a recent catalogue: *Santu Mofokeng* (2001). [70] Sam Raditlhalo (2001: 67) [71] Taken from an interview in: Pierre (1998).

sensitivity, or more precisely, critical awareness, that needs much more nurturing and contestation in the development field of representations through needs analysis, community profiles, integrated development plans and so forth.

The vexing issues of representation are linked to the debates signalled in the lucid overview discussion of Kelwyn Sole when he explores the diverse motivations of poetry in post-liberation South Africa. Sole invokes the wonderfully evocative concept, 'the everyday' to explore the focus of contemporary South African poets and cultural commentators such as Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs. According to Sole, this move also carries with it certain dangers, such as an over-emphasis on the detailed textures of ordinary day-to-day life without sufficient awareness or explicitness about the '…number of factors relating to the effects of the global economy and the topography of civil society and the "everyday" in contemporary South Africa.'[72]

These fertile debates in cultural and literary studies underscore why cross-fertilisation of ideas between development and cultural activists are so vital for interrogating the emotional structure of the transition at individual and collective planes and for recasting a future that is less burdened by the multiple pathologies that echo our deepest psychic corners as a people (and of course, as individuals, with fingerprint-unique subjectivities).

If we are to make sense of the significance of development practice during the transition, we will have to uncover what the unintended psychological assumptions and consequences are of our respective development interventions. Such a journey will probably start with a more personal narrative about our own internal trajectories and its inevitable zigzagging.

PROPOSITION SIX: *In times of deep structural unemployment, crippling income inequality and new lines of exclusion, such as the digital divide, it is imperative to use income generation and access to productive opportunities as catalysts for development. However, massive inroads can only be made if productive action is recast in cultural terms to recognise the potential of needs for safety, beauty, pleasure, community and mobility as indivisible from 'making a living' above the poverty line.*

I must admit that the sheer scale of the unemployment problem (effectively close to 40%) induces a profound sense of impotence and paralysis. This is even more so if one correlates unemployment with the depth of income inequality in South Africa—one of the severest in the world. There is simply very little in contemporary development economics or radical development theory, particularly perspectives that can transcend deconstruction and critique, that even comes close to give one a handle in thinking about solving the crises. Indeed, the causal factors rooted as they are in the systemic nature of neoliberal capitalist systems of production, exchange and ownership are obvious enough, but finding responses that work in variable historical-spatial settings with their unique social trajectories is another issue completely. The available options seem to be either transcending the pragmatic contingencies of actual social processes to 'imagine post

[72] All of the discussion here is drawn from Sole (2001-2: 50).

development'[73] alternatives or coming to terms once and for all with the fact that liberal capitalism is here to stay and finding pragmatic routes to realise sufficient prosperity and equity.[74]

Neither of these options assuages the frustrating lack of workable alternative to address the twin challenges of unemployment and inequality at a scale that can benefit millions of citizens, rather than pockets of momentary 'beneficiaries' who happen to access a public works programme here or a poverty relief project over there. Of course, I know that employment is tied in with long-range processes of knowledge development embedded in more and more educated citizens geared to deploy technologies to generate value and surplus. In the process, these citizens are expected to create the wealth to invest in even more sophisticated technology with greater capacity to produce and exchange. Given our recent (and continuing) legacy of Bantu education and active under-skilling of the majority of South Africans, whilst economic productivity is more and more slanted towards high-skill sectors, it is almost understandable that we are confronted with such enormous challenges. Yet, I cannot be relieved from the hunch that more can and *should* be done to undo the violence visited on so many households and familial networks that only know informalised or temporary work, if that.

I am foregrounding the issue of inadequate productive work, because I am convinced that our development thinking is too littered with 'grand' ideas about 'holistic development', 'sustainable livelihoods' and other elegant models of ideal-type development that is in fact so far removed from the pressing challenges of everyday life that we are missing many opportunities to assist disempowered people to exercise their agency to much greater effect. This can be rectified through a simultaneous move in two, seemingly contradictory, directions: (1) valorising the informal practices and social networks of subaltern groups; and (2) exploring unexpected linkages with macro economies through a reform agenda that seeks to democratise regulatory institutions and organisations and articulating informal circuits with the formal.

In reflecting on collective social processes in poor neighbourhoods in South Africa during the last ten years, I am most struck and moved by the work of the Homeless People's Federation (HPF) and a similar organisation, the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU). Both of these organisations are firmly rooted in social justice values, but their praxis is shaped by the needs of their constituencies rather than a requisite consciousness that serves as a form of qualification for participation. The work of both organisations is primarily about addressing very tangible, immediate needs in a manner that accumulates sociality and reciprocity (some would label this social capital) so that capability is incrementally built for addressing ever more complex problems collectively. At the core of the 'model' is a social experience that immediate productive and shelter needs can only be addressed via collective social solidarity processes that each member must take responsibility for or else everyone suffers. This principle and practice of sociality is of course reminiscent of the ethnically-based familial networks in many parts of Africa that span vast distances as members are always on the move in search of better economic opportunities which sustain and strengthen the network. In other words, it seems to me

[73] In my reading, the most articulate and generative scholar on this theme is Arturo Escobar (1995).
[74] The latter view is compellingly argued by Alan Thomas (2000).

that there is a strong continuity between the organisational 'feel' of social movements such as HPF and SEWU and the existing social webs that tie together the rural and urban. In many ways, these 'traditional' webs are fundamentally about cultural continuity, mutual support, political influence and economic advancement.[75]

Informal economies are particularly marked by their culturally-rooted social structures because the regulatory institutions are not formal or litigable codes, but rather tacit agreements and implicit understandings held together by a mixture of norms of reciprocity *and* coercive means. To address the precarious economic situation of the majority of South Africans we have to figure out how best to amplify the informal in ways that also enhance the quality of life and 'structure of feeling' of the neighbourhoods where people dwell. Doing the latter can kick-start economic activity and enlarge organised sociality. Ways must be found to deploy state, NGO and corporate resources to invest in the functioning, aesthetics and popular identity of poor neighbourhoods— socially constructing 'multiplex places'.[76] Allow me to briefly ground this line of argument with one example taken from my own backyard.

The fastest growing economic sector in Cape Town is tourism. Guess who are the main beneficiaries? The coalition of mainly white business interests who own the leisure, transport and hotel industries. What model drives the business? A belief that ever more retired European visitors will fill tour busses and spend at least a week in Cape Town and then another one in the surrounding Cape Province, moving from one sanitised attraction to the next, hoping to experience the comforts of home away from home. The challenge is then to simply ensure that enough airlines fly here to transport the five million tourists per annum that are required to achieve economies of scale, whilst the local state ensures that the streets are secure to maintain the prized image that Cape Town is a 'safe destination'. Apart from being utterly boring, this approach is short-sighted and the height of unrealised potential.

Contrary to industry belief, the main attraction of Cape Town is not just Table Mountain, the beaches or even the Waterfront. Rio de Janeiro offers all this and more, and so do many other 'exotic' destinations. History, identity and the 'heroism' of a transcending and transforming society features large in the imaginary of strangers or tourists. A long-run boom in tourism lies in a strategy that will feed off the genuine vibrancy of the city and its people. In a city as socially divided and physically bifurcated as Cape Town, the requisite vibrancy can only spark off a confrontational engagement between various social groups on the causes of these patterns and how best to address them in immediate and long-term ways. Such a public dialogue will incite the kind of dynamism that can be harnessed for community-based (economic) projects, cultural festivals, sites of memorialisation and spaces of safety and nurturing. Memory-work in combination with future building can nurture situated responses to current crises that allows one to bring together the pragmatic and the strategic, the mundane and the sacred, and the elusive nexus of the

[75] These traditional webs are of course under increasing strain as the impact of HIV/AIDS makes itself felt and bites chunks of connectivity out as members die prematurely and generational succession is disrupted. Also, the explicitly urban consciousness of younger generations militate against the traditional bases of continuity, hurried along by new consumption aspirations and cultural reference points. [76] A term appropriated from: Patsy Healey (2000).

economic, social, political and ecological. I am absolutely convinced that if township tours are transformed from visiting shebeens and craft markets to engagement with spaces, events and places that seek to reinterpret the legacies of apartheid and neocolonial modernism, Cape Town will entrench its uniqueness and 'authenticity'. Reinterpretation and representation here is imagined by me as community-based installation of everyday functionality (public squares, libraries, schools, toilets, houses, durable and serviced shacks, catchment ponds, cultural centres, café's, restaurants, dance halls, places of shelter from the abuse by lovers and strangers, and so on) that is the product of social dialogue, critique and engagement across lines of prejudice and injustice.[77] This is what 'the others', the travelling voyeurs, are really attracted to, because it allows them to engage with their own desires and fears in safe, yet memorable, ways. (Obviously it helps if these excursions can coincide with comfortable, convenient and safe infrastructures of movement and lodging.) What am I saying here? Simply that if we completely re-imagine ourselves and our resources through the imperatives of building a socially just city that aspires to be an honest reflection of the diversity and inequality that constitutes the city, we can bring economic opportunity as part of social renewal and citizenship to many more ordinary people.

Admittedly, there are many 'ifs' and 'buts' in my fantasy, which brings me to the second imperative mentioned earlier—addressing the macro-economic dimensions. Whilst I am certain that there is a lot more scope for imaginative localised strategies of economic development that are multi-dimensional, I am also convinced that unless significant reforms take root at global, regional and national levels, local innovation will be limited in what it can achieve and consolidate. As pointed out earlier, macro reforms in this context refer to vital reform measures of the global trading, labour mobility and taxation systems, and especially democratisation of regulatory institutions as advocated by a large number of global civil society coalitions. A more immediate local-macro connection here is to explore how the informal-formal interpenetration can better be enhanced as a means of expanding productive opportunities and extending the commodity chains upstream and further downstream through more commodity processing loops. Both of these macro reform agendas take me back to the earlier discussion on scale-politics, which allows me to bring this section to a close and turn to the last of my seven propositions.

PROPOSITION SEVEN: *All aspects of holistic development aimed at engendering human flourishing must have an institutional expression at some point in their life-cycle. Therefore, getting institutional processes and systems 'right' to mould themselves around the 'real-life' trajectories, patterns, cycles and rhythms of ordinary people is a fundamental prerequisite to any measure of success or sustainability.*

[77] It will take up too much space to spell out my wishful thinking in full. The ideas of Michael Sorkin (1998) and Charles Landry (2000) in particular, and those of Arjun Appadurai (1996, Ch. 6), Arturo Escobar (2001), Michael Douglas (1998) and Leonie Sandercock (1998) can all be regarded as important primers. Furthermore, ongoing dialogues with Ahmedi Vawda, Steve Boshoff, Eve Annecke and Mark Swilling also stimulate all kinds of flights of thought beyond their wise intentions.

> …a location …is an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations.[78]

Capacity building is ubiquitous in contemporary development speak in South Africa. It rolls effortlessly off the tongues of people in government, corporations, NGOs, social movements and, especially, donor agencies. Tucked into the notion is an assumption that we have more or less figured out what is wrong with our society and how to fix it; the only outstanding obstacle is getting everyone to come to the party and play their designated roles to the best of their ability. This sentiment is particularly palpable in recent government pronouncements with its requisite emphasis on 'getting delivery' right. Frequently, the diagnosis suggests that 'institutional failure' due to the lack of 'capacity' is at the root of policy failure or unintended consequences. In my view, a profoundly mechanical conception dominates current thinking about organisational preparedness to undertake development work. As always, mechanical ascriptions tend to perpetuate apolitical understandings of social phenomena and this can be found in much of the discourse about capacity building in relation to the state and civil society organisations.[79] In the following discussion I want to make a case for strong organisations embedded in enabling institutional frameworks, but in aid of a much more fluid, rhizomatous conception of organisational practices in everyday lifeworlds.

But first, it is necessary to make the case that organisations are complex, multidimensional social constructs that reflect the interplay of structures (rules and culture), practices (procedures and hierarchies) and agents (with personal ideologies/beliefs and interests that are prickled by certain incentives).[80] Furthermore, these dimensions interact in relation to a shifting external environment that informs (contested) social practices within organisations about what is possible and what is not. Yet, despite these four, rather large, constituent dimensions of organisations, organisational development or capacity building strategies tend to take on simplistic forms. It is frequently assumed that the right amount of generic courses will solve a problem, or re-engineering will address inefficiencies, or new 'kick-ass' managers (with appropriate incentive bonuses) will deliver the elusive goal of 'optimal performance'. These simplistic ideas find favour across all social domains (the state, civil society and the corporate sector), undermining the emergence of more culturally and scale appropriate organisational strategies.

For me, there are three central challenges in addressing the constitutive nature of institutionality in development. Firstly, we need to appreciate and understand the imperatives of building sound organisations for development.[81] Secondly, we need to avoid creating iron cages for organisations through structuring instruments, such as logframes or

[78] James Clifford (1997: 11) in his volume, *Routes*. [79] See the suggestive conceptual framework of Bob Flood (1999) on how to approach public sector institutions with a greater awareness of complexity, power and agency in seeking to effect organizational change. [80] A more detailed exposition can be consulted in: Roche (2000). [81] I was struck by a comment by one of the leading spokespersons of the Global Justice Movement, Walden Bello, in a recent interview in *New Left Review*. In speaking about the agenda of the movement he explains that for now 'the movement's most valuable contribution is its critique of corporate-driven globalization, rather than the model it offers for coming together and making decisions […] How might we—I hate to use the word—institutionalize methods of direct democratic rule?' (Bellow, 2002: 85).

their equivalents, because such tools tend to snuff out originality, adaptiveness and creativity. (During incipient organisational phases or when highly routinised tasks need to be carried out, there is merit in using these tools.) Thirdly, we need to match organisational imperatives with the rhythms of livelihoods, household reproduction and fostering strong social ties in specific places. For, as Norman Long reminds us:

> People develop their own strategies to solve problems they face through the use of interpersonal networks, community or neighbourhood ties, church or NGOs, and through an appeal to certain widely-accepted value positions, and they may do this either individually or in groups. They do not merely respond to programmes and services provided by 'outside' public or private interests; nor do they simply react to distant market conditions. On the basis of 'local' knowledge, organisation and values, they actively attempt to come to grips cognitively and organisationally with 'external' circumstances, and in so doing the latter are mediated and transformed in some way.[82]

In my experience, the tendency of many intervening government agencies or NGO programmes is to assume a vacuous space in neighbourhoods in relation to the issues that they focus on. Thus, upon arrival (descent?) in a given area, the propensity is to establish yet another new organisational formation to act as an interface and to ensure adequate 'community participation'. This goes against the grain of the approach advocated by Alan Kaplan, which treats all development contexts as a 'living process' in order to anticipate non-linearity, surprise, multi-dimensionality, and especially pre-existing agency. For, all 'that we can do is facilitate processes that are already in motion.'[83] This approach means taking time to understand the pre-existing strategies of problem solving or mitigation that Norman Long alerts us to. In other words, how can the plethora of existing structures such as choral associations, stokvels, religious groups, sport clubs, cultural structures, trading associations, buying clubs, taxi associations, and so forth, be engaged and nudged to widen their agendas and practices to consider fulfilling other functions and exploring new 'projects'? There is obviously a tipping point beyond which 'organic' formations should not be pushed for they will loose their original or primary *reason d'être*. Yet, it is also counterproductive to bypass what is already there in favour of organisational forms that are more recognisable for formal development programmes.

What is required is an accommodation that starts off with what exists and moves on to negotiated agreements about what is required to assist existing formations to fulfil new functions in order to manage new resources and opportunities. Such a process must be animated by an explicit dialogue about the positioning of the place/neighbourhood in wider circuits of power—a thematic that Kaplan refers to as 'the organisation's understanding of the world.' For me, this conversation is about naming the translations, following the quote above, that take place as a given community marks itself off from the world, whilst continuously reinserting itself through the necessary networks of engagement to sustain livelihoods. The next organisational step is then to define, in however provisional terms, what the actors can do together to shift something in that world in favour of addressing particular needs or aspirations in the community. Here the

[82] Taken from: Long (2000: 189).
[83] See: Alan Kaplan (2000: 33).

challenge is to open up windows to imaginative and transgressive thought. Nothing, nowhere and nobody should be off limits in terms of dreaming alternative futures. Subsequent discussions about the pragmatics of implementation and sustaining energies will hem in over-ambitious goals. The challenge is to animate collective action in the zone of aspiration, whilst remaining grounded about what practical improvements in livelihood opportunities are being fought for.

The approach to organisational building intertwined with social mobilisation that I am alluding to here is powerfully captured in the recent work of Arjun Appadurai on 'deep democracy', wherein he theorises community development through the struggles of various slum dweller organisation in Mumbai, India. Appadurai demonstrates that specific forms of 'self-governance, self-mobilisation and self-articulation are vital to changing the conditions under which activists among the poor are changing the terms of recognition, globally and locally, for the poor.'[84]

So, for me, all development action boils down to organisation, comprising active agents with diverse and confluent interests. Also, organisation for development must be attuned to the necessity of the political (internally and externally) in engaging the world to pursue specific objectives. The starting point must always be what is most needed and desired in a particular area and using the culturally-embedded sense of aspiration as the animating force to strengthen (existing) organisation to navigate the worlds of resources and power to access opportunities and resources. Capacity building and organisation development need to shape themselves around these imperatives and not demand standardised responses (take-up) to generic products and services. The dilemmas of how to do this is not a problem that ordinary people need to solve, but remains a challenge for change agents that wish to understand and strengthen their livelihood practices—'the idea of individuals and groups striving to make a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coming with uncertainty, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions.'[85]

FLIP MODE: REFRACTING SEVEN PROPOSITIONS AS A DIAGRAM

At the outset I mentioned that I will draw on a diagrammatic representation of the ideas discussed up to now. (See below.) The diagram deliberately does not correspond to the themes and topics I have just traversed because it is meant to serve as a navigational tool for debates that take flight beyond the thematics of this paper. The idea is that everyone will be able to position their interests and experiences somewhere on the map and in the process create space for linkages, connections, contradictions and articulations. No matter how I approach these densely inter-related themes, I run up against question marks that are seemingly impervious to any easy answers. It is therefore fitting to make some of these questions explicit before I conclude the paper. These questions and the issues before and hereafter, will hopefully initiate a rewarding exchange. How to achieve scale and also draw on individual creativity to unlock imaginations so that innovation can be born?

[84] Appadurai (forthcoming: 16). Also see: Appadurai (2002).
[85] Again, Normal Long (2000: 196).

a. Decentralisation of service delivery functions and roles to provincial and municipal government;
b. Improved policy coordination and alignment, with steering power located at the apex of government, the Presidency;
c. Creating a performance culture across the public sector and municipal government through a plethora of efficiency-inducing measures;
d. Stimulating greater citizen involvement through corporatist reforms (e.g. NEDLAC and local equivalents) and participatory involvement in various planning and monitoring systems, especially at municipal level through the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) system;

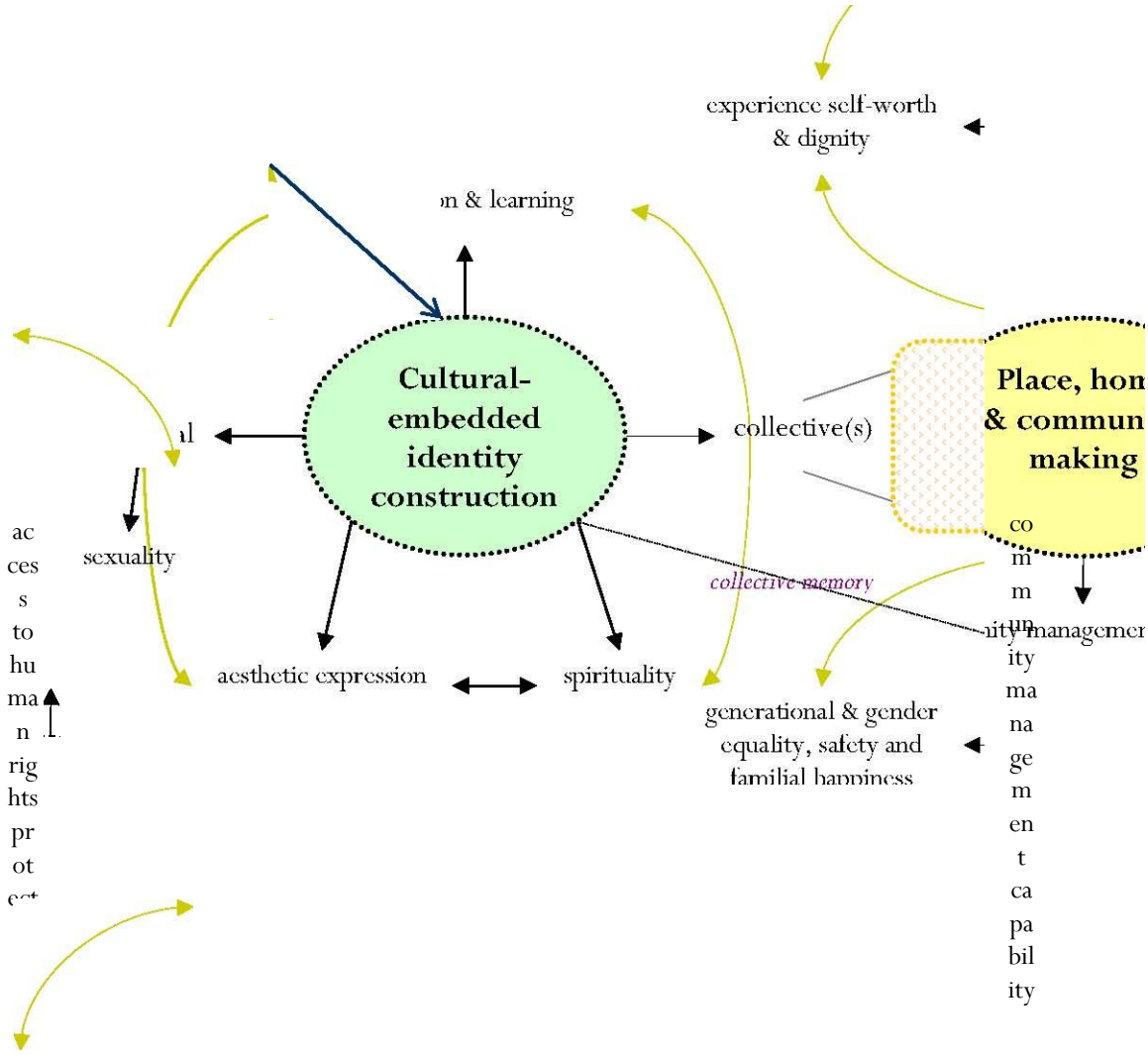

Figure 1: Inter-linked domains and scales of development practice

CODA: TOWARDS A SUBVERSIVE PRAXIS TO REALIZE HUMAN FLOURISHING

> …are we not all, in different ways, and through different conceptual spaces […] desperately trying to understand what making an ethical political choice and taking a political position in a necessarily open and contingent political field is like, what sort of 'politics' it adds up to?[86]

Fundamentally, the foregoing discussion adds up to a question about praxis: What is an appropriate way of being and moving in complexity whilst endeavouring to realize human flourishing (including our own)? For me, it boils down to four sensibilities/capacities that assist one in navigating the conceptual diagram that is holistic development for human flourishing. In other words, I am not in a position to answer the smouldering questions in the previous section but believe that it is an *approach*, a way of being, that counts.

Firstly, one must be able to practice *code-switching* between the multiple registers of knowledge that constitute any development context. There is undoubtedly a vital role for formal knowledge systems that make up the canons of development theory, policy models and various (participatory) recipe books to guide sensitive intrusions into the life spaces of ordinary people. At the same time, it is equally important to recognise the power dynamics and effects of such knowledge systems in social settings that are invariably inscribed by specific power lines of unequal differentiation. However, it must go beyond awareness and appropriate self-reflexivity; it must also include an effort on our part as development professionals/protagonists to acknowledge the complex social registers and knowledge systems that constitute the everyday. In some cases, it will be about learning the 'vernacular politics' of a particular neighbourhood. In other instances, it will be about understanding the inter-dependencies between household economies and informal, possibly illicit, economic systems that keep poor communities afloat and cruelly dependent. Practically, it must translate into time and effort to just 'hang-out' and experience the social contexts that we are so determined to drag into the shining light of rationality, formalism, efficiency—the typical hallmarks of development projects. Beyond honing one's skill at code-switching, there is the linked matter of reading and interpretation of contexts.

Thus, the second sensibility can be characterised as adopting a *multi-focal* perspective in 'reading' and conducting the political. As must be obvious by now, I regard development practice as a deeply political act in that any conscious attempt to intervene will result in a shift in power relations in the relevant organisation or social setting. It may either reinforce existing power relations or it will challenge and transform them in the interest of those who are systematically disempowered and marginalised. What it cannot do is circumvent or elide power. However, effecting transformative change through development interventions requires political savvy about how various scales of power and knowledge are implicated by one another. Consequently, it is critical to expect and understand unusual trajectories and linkages that bind together the multiple identities and group affiliations that invariably co-exist in any neighbourhood.

[86] Staurt Hall, 1996: 244.

A third sensibility is *self-reflexivity*, i.e. being able to recognise oneself and ones own (projected) desires in a development process. The conscious act of working to mobilise resources or energies to solve certain problems so that peoples' lives can be improved is such a profound undertaking that it cannot but slip into the realms of the spiritual or existential or metaphysical—take your pick. In other words, when we are ostensibly doing tried and tested things to foster development through programmes or policies, we are in fact ceding bits and pieces of ourselves. Why do I say this? Because in the context of South Africa's history of arbitrary cruelty and violence, it could have been us (or our loved ones) that are at the receiving end of history's vicious ironies. Everyday into the future is a dawning of relief because we have been spared relative to others. It is because of these deeply inscribed psychological distresses that we have to take care in who we seek to become in our work for 'others'. It is for these reasons that we have to ensure that it is not guilt, regret or a sense of self-entitlement that is driving us along, but rather an honest commitment to living full lives, with all of its insecurities and ambivalences. This does demand, though, a commitment to 'self-creation' in our own lives as development activists in the sense as explored earlier. This note of caution eases me into the final point about how one forges a practicable approach for daily action.

The fourth and last sensibility is being *empirically informed and symbolically attuned*. By this I am trying to capture the importance of getting much closer to the ground through more effective research/investigate means to understand what is really going on in 'empirical' terms. Such knowledge, in turn, must be contextualised in larger scale analyses about the political economies within which localities, sectors or organisations function. Too often in South African debates, the reflex is to rely almost exclusively on ideological polemic or technocratic preaching with scant respect for the 'facts'—proportion of issues—at hand. Yet, a nose for empirical patterns and trends can be at the expense of understanding the symbolic and imaginary dimensions of so-called empirical reality. This is why it is vital to always explore the symbolic flipside of any so-called factual assessment, because one person's struggling micro enterprise could be another's source of largesse and authority. The only way these flipsides of the coin can be held together in a healthy conceptual tension is through an insatiable and irrepressible *curiosity* about what is going on. The following line of argument by James Clifford echoes powerfully what kind of political sensibility is implied here:

> Cultural politics is not secondary to more material political/economic agencies. Effective democratic mobilizations begin where people are (not where they 'should be'): they work through the cultural discourses that situate groups, that provide them with roots (always spliced), with narrative connections between past and present (traditions), with distinctive social habits and bodies. This hooking-up and unhooking, remembering and forgetting, gathering and excluding of cultural elements – processes crucial to the maintenance of an 'identity' – must be seen as both materially constrained and inventive. Of course it is difficult, analytically and politically, to sustain this double vision, just as it is hard to work with ambivalence inherent in processes of identification: the practical inseparability of empowerment and chauvinism, of community and exclusion, of performance and commodification, of positioning and governmentality. And yet it is precisely in this uncomfortable site of cultural process and politics that we begin, and begin again.

> Moreover, it is here that we can cultivate a kind of historical 'negative capability', interference patterns and sites of emergence, piecing together more-than-local patterns, big enough stories of the 'global', of intersecting 'historical' trajectories.[87]

If we can agree that these sensibilities (which turn out to be five instead of four, if you count 'curiosity') make some sense and can provide a platform to exchange perspectives and experiences, we have the beginning of a meaningful dialogue that is not about resolving truths, but rather about illuminating situated 'solutions' that found problems in specific places/instances. In the diagram of multiple problems, potential solutions and various vantage points, we can begin to construct a new grammar of thinking and doing development that may even contribute to our own flourishing and happiness…

Having started this rather long and meandering journey on the basis of Iain Chambers's reminder that we are the only custodians of our collective stories, it is maybe fitting to let him have the last word as well

> [In writing and analysis, what] is offered is neither a cure nor a conclusion. It is a critical practice whose activity, condemned to be a part of this world, can reveal elements that are incompatible, even mutually incomprehensible, but whose synchronic presence in the knots of language and experience produce new questions, reproblematize our sense of being and hence reproduce *our* historical space.[88]

* * * *

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[87] Taken from James Clifford (2000: 97).
[88] Iain Chambers (1990: 105).

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