CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNITY AND THE QUESTION OF POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY

Wajid Ali Ranjha
Department of Politics

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

February 1998
Dedicated to the memory of my mother
ABSTRACT

Wajid Ali Ranjha

CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNITY AND THE QUESTION OF POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY

This thesis seeks to understand the interrelation of knowledge, power and culture in the context of globalization. Crisis of Marxism has prompted intense reflection on the nature of modernity as a cultural-political phenomenon. This discourse highlights forms of domination and resistance which were neglected by Marxism and Liberalism. In contrast to postmodernism which accentuates certain Nietzschean and Structuralist themes abstractly, Adorno’s appropriation of Nietzsche and Marx is quite illuminating, both theoretically and politically. It resists nostalgia and futuristic escapades to focus on the present.

Although intellectual developments in the West have global implications, they invariably acquire a halo of universality which makes it difficult for outsiders to recognise their limitations. The debate between modernists and postmodernists is a case in point. Following Edward Said, 'Post-colonial' theorists scrutinise the West’s epistemological hegemony, highlighting modernity’s connection with imperialism. Nevertheless, their appropriation of post-structuralism, thematic and methodological, raises questions about their own relationship to Western theory and whether their analyses neglect material aspects of globalization as well as problems specific to post-colonial societies. In short, post-colonial theory remains an ambivalent and contested formation.

The thesis contends that it is unnecessary to absolutise the 'culture vs. materialism' dichotomy. Both perspectives offer useful insights but also have their problematic aspects. As the world becomes more integrated without ceasing to be dominated by the West, the complexities and stresses of modernity are exacerbated. Thus, no single theory can prescribe answers to everyone or claim to be devoid of cultural effects, although there is the danger of 'culture' being invested with a subversive potential which cannot be redeemed in democratic ways. After all, authoritarian regimes find it convenient to legitimise themselves culturally. While it may be true that the cultural is 'always already' political, critical theory must insist on foregrounding a more activist notion of political agency in a conjuncture marked by global management of dissent, economic fundamentalism, media spectacles and cynical conflation of democracy with consumption.
# Contents

Declaration  
iv

Acknowledgements  
v

Introduction  
1

1 Marxist Roots of Critical Theory  
10

2 Friedrich Nietzsche and the Fate of Reason  
59

3 Critical Theory, Modernity and Subjectivity: Theodor Adorno  
117

4 Critical Theory, Postmodernism, Aesthetics  
153

5 Critical Theory Today: Towards a New Constellation ?  
197

6 Post - Colonial Questions: Globalization, Culture and Method  
245

7 Conclusion  
301

Bibliography  
309
Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to Doug McEachern, Paul Nursey-Bray, Peter Mayer and other members of the Politics department for offering their unreserved support to this project. Thanks are due to Christine Hill and Natalie Mahoney for being so efficient and generous in providing administrative support. Also to my fellow postgraduates, especially Angela Clare, Michael Howes, Don McMaster and Stephen Wood, with whom I have had many rewarding discussions. To Pal Ahluwalia who has been so much more than a supervisor, my debt is incalculable. Suffice it to say that without his guidance, care, and above all, faith, this project could not have reached this stage. I must also acknowledge the generous support of Australia's Department of Employment, Education and Training which offered me a research scholarship.

Safdar Sohail, Mohammad Naseer, Shahzad Malik, Samina Choonara, Jalees Hazir, Azmat Hayat, Kamran Sheikh, Greg Goodrich and many others in Pakistan and elsewhere, cannot realise the extent to which their friendship and intellectual generosity have sustained me over the years. Of course, it is my wife Lubna and son Ahmer who have borne the brunt of this protracted adventure most intimately. I hope they will be able to derive some consolation from the result.
INTRODUCTION

Even the most sober critics of post-structuralist and post-modernist thought generally concede that traditional conceptions of meaning, culture and subjectivity can no longer be taken for granted and a wide array of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities are undergoing transformations (Dews, xi, 1988). Be it Sociology, Area studies, International Relations, Development Studies, Anthropology or Politics, discomfort of practitioners with old methodological tools and meta-theoretical guarantees becomes apparent soon after one picks a current journal. Regardless of the manner in which we may characterise it and whatever else may be its significance for the critical intellect, one thing about the present conjuncture is clear: it demands that we pause and reflect upon the journey that has brought us to where we are; to ask questions, which have not only been repressed but also those that challenge our usual questions. Least of all does it suggest that we acquiesce to the emerging consensus about the demise of 'grand narratives' and the triumph of the 'disenchedted', liberal reason. However, looking back can be either tedious or painful, depending upon how deep one is willing to probe and with what intentions. If the primary motives are self-assurance or self-congratulation, then one would follow the well trodden grooves at a leisurely pace without straining one's senses or mind too much. But if one really wants to reflect on how and when wrong turns were made or simply to gain fresh insights about the terrain, then, one has to take some risks and occasionally, unfamiliar paths.

The polemics that have been going on between modernists and postmodernists block almost as many paths as they break, forcing us to broaden the terrain upon which the debate is taking place, especially if the concerns of non-Europeans are to receive more than cursory and charitable attention in what is increasingly claimed to be a global cultural space. A necessary step in the direction
of re-configuring the context of the debate would be to regard critical theory as an ensemble of responses to the dilemmas of modernity and be open to the suggestion that both Marxism and postmodernism are elements of this ensemble. In other words, rather than treating critical theory as an off shoot of Marxism, the latter may be regarded as an element of the complex, intertwined and often conflicting set of responses to modernity (Agger, 1992). At the heart of this tradition is the project of ideology critique, which continues to be pursued in various guises by the post-structuralists and postmodernists. However, as subsequent discussion will demonstrate, it is not intended to overlook the many differences which exist between the work of the Frankfurt School and post-structuralism. The task of constructing new cultural-ideological ensembles in response to ever changing political conjunctures entails specifying the differences no less than 'elective affinities' between (and within) different discursive ensembles. It involves loosening some of the conventionally stabilised boundaries and antagonisms of discursive ensembles and allowing their constituent elements to articulate. As will hopefully become clear, this process is not as arbitrary as it seems.

One of the fundamental imperatives of modernity, it will be argued, is that of secularisation. Conceiving the problem in this manner shall not only highlight the 'radical' tradition's cavalier approach to the question of religion and bring that tradition into dialogue with discourses which it has tended to denigrate and marginalise, but it may enable critical theorists to recognise that religious discourses are a far from negligible entity in the contemporary situation. This juxtaposition of theological and materialist discourses is not meant to set up a primordialist or culturist critique of materialism, rather, it aims to expand the horizon of critical theory by pointing out how even the most self-consciously critical of discourses can become oblivious of its limitations, get mired in dogmas and allow political, economic and cultural catastrophes to occur in the name of Science, Reason, Progress, and so on. As both 'radicals' and 'conservatives' have had to learn in the
course of the last two centuries, when an ideological system expends more energy on maintaining its coherence and identity by squashing dissent and absolutising its difference from rivals than in engaging with the world, its grasp of reality, and eventually, influence in the political-cultural arenas is bound to diminish. It is time, then, to scrutinise the polarities in which the political debates have been confined for too long.

The articulation of different ideas and contexts to generate more complex responses to the challenges of these 'deflationary' and disorienting times may be more useful than keeping ideas segregated in some original state of purity or heroic opposition. This task demands that the underlying cultural horizon of these debates be made more explicit to bring into sharper focus the political exigencies that define the contemporary situation. To put it slightly differently, not only must one ask whether the great ideological battles of the last two centuries have been fought on the more or less stable ground of the Enlightenment but also if the underlying cultural terrain may also be specified as 'Western'. Such a task requires interrogation of the Enlightenment from positions that are not reducible to its foundational premises; positions which are peripheral to it. A relation of exteriority is nevertheless a relation and can therefore enable a dialogue between different ideological formations. Mere juxtaposition of two apparently discrepant perspectives can at times 'de-familiarise' the established opinion and clear the ground for fresh thinking.

A central concern of this thesis is post-colonial theory's ambivalent relation with both postmodernism and post colonial projects of national modernity. Metropolitan discourses of Conservatism, Liberalism and even Marxism tend to construe post modernism as a dark and irrational force which is determined to subvert all certainties, problematise stable identities and deconstruct totalising ideologies. In other words, postmodernism is perceived as a threat to the identities of Marxism, liberalism and conservatism which are based on canonical texts, illustrious
traditions and epistemological foundations. Postmodernism is sceptical of the notion of authenticity, whether derived from history and the classical tradition, grounded in cultural or experiential resources or legitimised by rational means.

Modernist theory is alleged to apply authoritarian closures, essentialise heterogeneous phenomena, fix dynamic processes in rigid and cumbersome categories and declare vast areas of reality inferior and dark due to the patrician, racialist and teleological heritage of its epistemology. It is suspected that the impulse to overcome and to enslave others became greatly refined in the course of Western imperialism. Modernist theory, including its radical, progressive strand has been decisively shaped by the imperialist enterprise: its desire to achieve complete mastery of the material, its titanism, its arrogant demand that everyone surrender to its 'Truth'. Arguably, it is the combination of rational–scientific method consecrated during the Enlightenment, moral fanaticism inherited from Christianity, and protracted involvement with imperialist adventures which gives modernist theory its distinctive character. By contrast, postmodernism claims to engage with the dominant discourses and disciplinary structures from a position of weakness and marginality and operates in the negative mode. For the most part, it seeks to expose the aporias and blindspots of the dominant frameworks so that the oppressed, the excluded and the inferiorised may find some room in which they can breathe.

Thus, in a certain sense, postmodernists aim to excavate differences/dissonances buried within modernity - narratives, practices, spaces, aesthetic forms, whose the hegemonic tradition was impelled to deny, obliterate or reify. It is the 'little narratives' and other dissonant phenomena that postmodernism celebrates, in so doing it eschews modernist strategies of legitimation which resort to Reason, utility or notions of intrinsic worth. Postmodernism's 'foundational' move is to cast doubt on the conventional patterns of legitimation and on the question the canonical status of the modernist discourse itself. The ensuing epistemological
anarchy and panic is expected to facilitate the eruption of the marginal, suppressed and different voices. Notwithstanding the ecstatic pronouncements of some, the more scrupulous among the postmodernists are careful not to mimic the modernist euphoria and make wild claims about the postmodern transformation. This cautious attitude is particularly evident in the way postmodernist aesthetic is distinguished from the modernist. According to postmodernist critics, modernist conceptions of the new and beautiful are elaborated in overly metaphysical, monumental, almost noumenal terms which posit radical disjunction of the 'aesthetic' from the sphere of mundane interaction, ideological investments and various networks of power. The modernist account is seen to enthrone the ascetic, charismatic, sovereign figure of artistic genius whose existence and creative achievements are presumed to transcend the panoply of material, cultural and ideological factors. Consequently, a modernist work of art is seen to possess something akin to religious and miraculous; having the potential to speak to all 'civilised' persons regardless of cultural differences.

The notion of resistance has provoked intense debates within the postmodern discourse, with some theorists arguing that the subjectivities of the radically oppressed and marginalised are so massively shaped in the context of domination that they can hardly be expected to recover their pre-discursive or pre-ideological selves. Others consider this perspective deterministic and argue that domination is never so thorough and complete as that. They insist that theory needs to pay closer attention to those modes of resistance, association and empowerment which may be occluded by an overriding concern with the dominant frameworks.

Notwithstanding their radical vocabulary, it does appear that the postmodernists interrogate modernity from within, neither judging it in terms of its external adventures nor proposing an alternative. It may be said that they re-negotiate their location within modernity by attempting to create more ambiguous, less formal and normalising spaces inside the whale, so to speak. Furthermore, what
is often obscured by the polemic between modernists modernists is the the fact that it is enacted on the terrain of Western culture. The interesting question is whether postmodernism's ambition to examine the foundations of Western culture, to decipher the polyvalent violence of modernity and to clear space for the suppressed and dissonant voices can be realised when the project is located within the horizon of Western modernity; when its epistemological point of departure remains the canonical intellectual tradition of the West?

How is postmodernism to be interpreted from the post-colonial theoretical perspectives? Is it the case that in the process of appropriating aspects of postmodern epistemologies, post-colonial theory allows itself to be subsumed under postmodernist hegemony, adopting the latter's deconstructive agendas to the detriment of post-colonial interests? Whilst post-colonial theory may find it useful to appropriate elements of postmodernist constellation, it must sharpen its critique of modernity by drawing upon the cultural and political experience of post-colonial societies. Thus, what the discourse of modernization may term unintended consequences of development are made explicit by the post-colonial reading to deconstruct the sanitised, apolitical narrative of modernity as consummation of human potential. According to post-colonial reading, imperialism may be the truth-content of modernity which becomes visible in peripheral locations. The discourse of modernity would then emerge as the discourse of the centre that dominates, marginalises and denies, but also produces alterities. Indeed, it is through domination, denial, marginalisation and splitting that it produces inferiorised and exotic alterities or 'subalternties' so that the other of modernity is invariably constructed as the obverse of Reason, of Truth, of Good, of New.

While a radical scrutiny of Marxist theory and practice is a necessary, even urgent task if we are to understand and learn from the past, the exercise might become counterproductive if in our zeal to expose the 'essential' link between word
and deed, we were to subject Marxism to the interpretive violence which was the hallmark of its treatment of other bodies of thought. Hence, nothing would be more damaging than to subsume varying tendencies, histories and personalities that are associated with Marxism under a monolithic category and then to repudiate the latter as otherworldly or aberrant or evil. To think and feel and believe that the world has awakened from the Marxist nightmare or delusion and recovered its innocence, is not only naive, it is dangerous. Marxism was born in this world and it was here that it was able to inspire millions of ordinary men and women in almost every part of the world to heroic and not so heroic deeds. Those deeds may not have amounted to much in the end, but, there must be something in the world, and in the hearts and minds of those people, that called for change. Lest we forget, it is the same world which has been giving birth, for thousands of years, to prophets, kings and tyrants. It gave birth to slavery, imperialism, and concentration camps, as it did to constitutions, parliaments and capitalism itself. What can stop it from giving birth to evil and to good? Or from mixing one with the other? The Manicheanism of pitting the evil of Marxism against the innocence and normality of the world which the former was able to violate for a period begs too many obvious questions. More perversely, it bestows normality and innocence on whatever is constructed as the contrary of Marxism: Liberalism, Conservatism, Capitalism, the Market, Globalization, Monarchy, Hollywood, Poverty, Inequality, The New World Order. The list could be endless.

To sum up, a major challenge for theory in the post-Marxist conjuncture has been to thematise the relation between culture and politics in adequate, non-reductionist ways. A recurring criticism of postmodernist positions is their alleged neglect of 'material' factors. This is variously attributed to their abstract negation of Marxism, to the subterranean presence of structuralist and semiotic residues and to an inherently culturalist focus which aestheticises the far from benign features of late capitalism into some vaguely defined 'post modern condition'. The thesis
contends that it is unnecessary to absolutise the 'culture versus materialism' dichotomy although it is extremely important to examine its various manifestations. Both perspectives offer useful insights but also have their problematic aspects. As the world becomes more integrated without ceasing to be dominated by the West, the complexities and stresses of modernity are exacerbated. Thus, no single theory can prescribe answers to everyone or claim to be devoid of cultural effects, although there is the danger of 'culture' being invested with a subversive potential which cannot be redeemed in democratic ways. After all, authoritarian regimes find it convenient to legitimise themselves culturally. While it may be true that the cultural is 'always already' political, critical theory must insist on foregrounding a more activist notion of political agency in a conjuncture marked by global management of dissent, economic fundamentalism, media spectacles and cynical conflation of democracy with consumption.
MARXIST ROOTS OF CRITICAL THEORY
Rational, system building impulse of the Enlightenment does not start or finish with Marxism. Herbert Spencer’s evolutionism and Auguste Comte’s three-stage model of intellectual progress come immediately to mind. The other substantial model which precedes Marx’s is, of course, Hegel’s monumental system which attempts nothing less than to depict the unfolding of the absolute in history, as though God himself were the author of this manifesto. What all these theories share is the impulse to explain the totality of phenomena in elaborate, rational frameworks that are claimed to be true and binding. Despite its anti-metaphysical, worldly approach and singular concern with the ‘actually existing individuals’, Marxism is generally included among the all encompassing, rational ontologies of the Enlightenment. As a matter of fact, due to its focus on the ‘concrete’ problems of ‘this world’ whose fallen state it purports to cure by means of socialist revolution, Marxism is said to exemplify a particularly refined variety of ‘gnostic’ attitude (Voegelin, 1968,p.23).

A gnostic, in Eric Voegelin’s opinion, is someone who considers the world to have become so thoroughly corrupt that it is not expected to respond any longer to partial measures. Even the prospect of subjective attunement to an alternative set of values has become chimerical for this person. Nothing but the prospect of thoroughgoing transformation of the strife-torn world into earthly paradise could engage the gnostic mind (Voegelin, 1968, pp.9-12; pp.86-89). Whereas in the hey day of religious civilisations, the task of redeeming the world belonged to the prophets, the secularised imaginary of the Enlightenment assigns this task to Cogito, Science, Technology, Nature, Progress, Class etc. In other words, gnostic impulse does not
disappear after great religions lose prestige but undergoes something of a mutation. The yearning for authoritative explanations and meaning does not disappear with secularisation. Indeed, with the de-valuation of the transcendental horizon which had kept the subject aware of its fragility while illuminating its anxiety with hope, the quest for explanation and rational mastery of the world explodes all constraints and becomes absolute. This is a movement away from transcendence; away from the limits and tensions which become inscribed in the subject on account of its dignified comportment towards the transcendent. It is a desperate movement towards immanent, 'this worldly' explanations and all round loosening of tensions. Voegelin insists that:

All gnostic movements are involved in the project of abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine, transcendent being, and replacing it with a world-immanent order of being, the perfection of which lies in the realm of human action. This is a matter of so altering the structure of the world, which is perceived as inadequate, that a new, satisfying world arises. (Voegelin, 1968, pp.99-100)

However, this immanentist drive should not to be mistaken for genuine secularisation; it has been interpreted by Voegelin as 'ersatz religion'. It is a perspective which is so vividly stamped by the 'death of god' that all it can do with its 'freedom' is to fashion substitute gods or idols, which, fittingly enough, it drapes in the finery of the Enlightenment. These constructs represent the worst of both worlds, so to speak.

Armed with scientific method and rational optimism, the modern gnostic descends to a world of forlorn and unguarded objects and discovers to his/her delight that he/she can manipulate them with impunity. This discovery goes on delighting this person until, overcome by narcissism and pride, he/she enthrones himself/herself as the New god or Superman. But what distinguishes the new god from the old is the fact that Man-God is more adept at destroying than he is at creating (Voegelin, 1968, p.57). Voegelin terms this rebellious, murderous propensity 'pneumopathological consciousness'. What the term is meant to signify is the frustration of a being who wants to render the infinite finite and finite infinite. It represents the rage of a being
who seeks absolute mastery over everything without realising that such mastery would
destroy both the subject and the world. Most importantly, it depicts a consciousness in
revolt against God, but one that is unable to become god like (Voegelin, 1968, p.62).
Thus, it remains imprisoned within its rebellion which is epistemologically fortified by
suppressing any questions which might rupture the delusive coherence of the system
which is believed to contain Being in its entirety. Rage against God is of course
sublimation of the rage against the world. It will be recalled that gnostic attitude stems
from disgust with an imperfect world which launches the adept on the quest for
magical cures which are expected to change everything for the better. Both the
emotional and moral content of that disgust and the types of cures, change in the
context of the Enlightenment, with rational accumulation of knowledge becoming the
choicest cure. It is believed now that if enough people with appropriate training and
aptitudes were to devote themselves to the persuit of scientific knowledge, every
problem will be solved in due course, including the fundamental problem of evil. In
the idea of scientific and social progress, time itself becomes the miraculous agency.
As Voegelin remarks, pneumopathological consciousness aims to possess knowledge,
whereas it shuns philosophy, which was originally construed as 'love of
knowledge'. This peculiar state of mind has no use whatsoever for 'idle speculation'
that may drift into the misty realm of transcendence:

Philosophy springs from the love of being; it is man’s loving endeavour to
perceive the order of being and attune himself to it. Gnosis desires
dominion over being; in order to seize control of being the gnostic
constructs his system. The building of systems is a gnostic form of
reasoning, not a philosophical one. (Voegelin, 1968, pp.42-43)

Above all, modern gnosticism wants to keep its feet firmly planted on earth lest it gets
waylaid by otherworldly seductions. Why this desperate battle against illusions, one
may ask, if they are insubstantial and are bound to disappear before long? Isn’t this
desire to draw clear, self-evident boundaries between what is real and what is not,
what is true and what is false, reminiscent of the theological impulse which is
presumed to have been superseded?

'Murder of God' is the defining motif of modernity's radical gnosis as indeed it was of ancient myths of origin in which mana of the slain god accrues to the ancestor-hero who has performed the 'unthinkable' deed. This figure would, then, lay the foundations of a new community (Eliade, 1963, p.99). Likewise, death of God, whether proclaimed from the mountain tops or 'demonstrated' in scientific treatises, marks the dawn of modernity. This is the deeper meaning of immanence: incorporation of God's power and charisma in humanity without having to obey His severe commandments. Indeed, 'the new thing thus shares in the substance of the slain divinity and in some sense continues his existence (Eliade, 1963, p.99). To be sure, the candid, confident and joyful atheism of the philosophes has something titanic about it. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the first rays of the Enlightenment stir up a feast of human creativity which offers a dramatic contrast to the meloncholy ruminations of agnostics such as Max Weber, Heidegger and the young Lukacs (Honigsheim, 1968; Lowy, 1976; Weber, 1975). Even Nietzsche who has given such a powerful expression to the foundational myth of modernity seems to shudder as he announces the murder of God in Gay Science, as though crushed by the weight of what is to follow the 'event'. Even as he proclaims the bankruptcy of the older, religio-metaphysical systems, he can hardly suppress his contempt for the 'cold monsters' which appear to replace them in modernity.

As the magic and euphoria of the new dawn starts to fade, as the limits of science and rationality become palpable, and as the ruins buried underneath the shimmering facades of modernity crumble into dust, sharp pangs of nostalgia erupt in many a modern's soul. At this point, the excruciating character of agnosticism comes fully to the fore. Indeed, Malinowski describes modern agnosticism as a 'tragic and shattering state of mind' and few serious observers would be prepared to deny that 'genuine religious elements ... do remain in the agnostic's thought' (Lightman,
However, relentless assault on the edifice of Newtonian mechanics by the likes of Heisenberg, Einstein and Poincare meant that agnosticism's status as a substitute religion drawing sustenance from a deductivist-realist epistemology had to decline. As a result, agnosticism became increasingly 'tragic' in its orientation towards the world, often degenerating 'into a frustrated and despairing doubt longing for faith' (Lightman, 1987, pp.180-181).

Modern consciousness is so intimately conditioned by agnosticism that its subtle but far-reaching influence cannot be underestimated. In *The Destruction of Reason* Georg Lukacs goes so far as to interpret the bulk of cultural, intellectual and political developments in Germany from the early nineteenth century to the advent of National Socialism in terms of intellectuals' bitter and convoluted struggle with agnosticism. The struggle takes place in the midst of social and cultural upheavals which shatter the old order; however, the new order is yet to announce itself in decisive tones.¹ This struggle ends in the moral and intellectual collapse, which is represented most dramatically by nihilistic deification of irrationality and unknowability. In the crucial period of transition, ecstacies of *lebensphilosophie* overwhelm neo-Kantianism's ambivalent and despairing stand on behalf of reason. This enables the neo-pagan cult of Fuhrer to seize the mantle of redeemer. An indignant Lukacs castigates the 'petty bourgeois' intellectuals for succumbing, in fear and confusion, to an authoritarian resolution of their intellectual, political and psychological dilemmas.

The desirable alternative was, of course, Marxism, which carried the banner of

---
¹See Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief* New York, Harper & Row, 1970. Germany was the first underdeveloped country in the sense that she was the first country to feel powerful pressure to change emanating from the alien early modernising societies of the West. And it is in Germany that we can see clearly for the first time the emergence of the great counter modernising ideologies that would be subsequently important in all the developing nations: both European and otherwise in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These ideologies can be grouped under two main headings: romantic nationalist on the one hand and radical socialist on the other, with, naturally, the possibility of various combinations. p.70.
Reason and embodied truth in its historical form. One may wonder why it was so obvious to Lukacs that nothing but Marxism could save Germany, the world and Reason itself. The answer lies partly in the explanatory power of 'Marxist Science' which Lukacs, like many of his contemporaries, considered superior to its rivals. However, that is not the whole answer. What Lukacs is not prepared to consider is that for a substantial portion of uprooted, agnostic intellectuals who were appalled to see the traces of authentic culture disappear under the onslaught of capitalism, the Marxist movement was akin to religion. It promised the initiate meaning, stable identity and enthusiasm in a world becoming rapidly disenchanted, just as fascism did to its own adherents.

Lukacs' own conversion from 'romantic anti-capitalism' to 'Bolshevism' is a case in point (Lowy, 1979). The writings of his youth make it abundantly clear that he experienced most of the fears, tensions and temptations which his analysis associates with the 'pre-fascist' intellectuals of the German speaking world. And, that before embracing Marxism, he subscribed to a 'tragic' view of life which abhors the idea of compromising with a world that is rotten to the core (Lukacs, 1971; Lowy, 1979, p.96). Indeed, at different stages of his pre-Marxist period, Lukacs expressed profound admiration for intellectual tendencies which are hardly distinguished by their fidelity to Reason: Kierkegaard's spiritualist critique of modernity which celebrates radical individualism, Dilthey's _lebensphilosophie_, neo-Kantianism, Dostoevsky's Christian utopianism, Jewish messianism, _Vedanta_. Even this list fails to cover the entire range of the young Lukacs' decidedly un-Marxist interests. Most of his interlocutors at the Weber Circle in Heidelberg remember Lukacs' contempt for parliamentary and reformist responses to capitalism's contradictions. They also attest to the quasi-religious character of his utopianism (Honigsheim, 1968, p.24). Marianne, Max Weber's wife, states in the biography of her husband that Lukacs and his friends:
were moved by eschatological hopes of a new emissary of the transcendent God, and they saw the basis of salvation in a socialist social order created by brotherhood. For Lukacs the splendour of inner-worldly culture, particularly its esthetic side, meant the antichrist, the "Luciferan" competition against God's effectiveness. (Weber, 1975, p.466)

As Lowy, in his superb reconstruction of Lukacs's 'conversion' to Marxism demonstrates, Lukacs' tragic world view plunged him in acute despair at one point. He was outraged by the extent of capitalist plunder, and by his own 'pale compromise' with life. Lowy argues that only a spiritual rebirth or 'leap' of some kind could have saved Lukacs from suicide by reliving the unbearable sense of personal degradation that he experienced at the time (Lowy, 1979, pp.106-107). It is important to take note of Lowy's judgement on this point:

*Lukacs' mystical flight, suicidal despair, ascetic spiritual aristocratism, and tragic world view can be understood only in relation to his deep, radical, absolute, and intransigent rejection of the impurity and lack of authenticity of the bourgeois world* (Lowy, 1979, p.108; italics in the original)

Gnosticism, as Bernard Lightman reminds us, 'proved to be extremely malleable. It could be adapted to the needs of varying intellectual movements (Lightman, 1987, p.181). This peculiar combination of faith and rationality may indeed be the defining trait of gnostic commitment in modernity.

It would be disingenuous to overlook the excessiveness of the Marxist dream of reconciling the totality of existence with the theory of totality, and, it would be nothing short of intellectual dishonesty and moral obtuseness to attempt to dissociate Marxism from the Stalinist nightmare which consumed the socialist dream. However, the inverse fanaticism of so many recent denunciations of Marxism does little to advance our understanding of the most ambitious ideological experiment of the century, to which several generations of men and women could offer their loyalty. Many of these were neither naive nor cruel nor avaricious. It is only fair to say that Marxism, especially in its political aspect, was a historical phenomenon which had to
struggle with its rivals and suffer its share of reverses on a terrain which it sought to
hegemonise, that of modernity. As a matter of fact, fights between Communism,
Liberalism and Fascism demonstrate something of the ferocity of warring sects. It has
been suggested that in the absence of significant differences between these three
modernist ideologies, the partisans of each had to work themselves into a blinding rage
to identify the others as enemies. Of course, this is not an accurate description of the
ideological tendencies in question.\(^2\) However, to construe the present as the dawn of
liberal-democratic bliss at the end of Marxist nightmare would be to slip back into the
darkness. And, it might be infinitely more difficult to extricate our vision from the
darkness in which nightmares remain invisible.

Genesis of Marxist Method from the Spirit of Hegel

In order to clarify the notion of reification which is central to Lukacs's analysis
of the capitalist society, it would be necessary to give a brief account of 'ideology' and
'reification' which appear in the work of Karl Marx as interrelated concepts. The
notion of ideology emerged in the writings of the young Marx in the context of his
vigorous engagements with Hegel and his radical followers such as Lugwig
Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Max Striner. It may be noted that Marx continued to use
the categories of the Hegelian tradition while investing them with different meanings.
This may explain the fact that the notion of ideology in Marx's early writings is
intertwined with that of alienation. The same can be said for Feuerbach's influence on
Marx's revolt against Hegel's idealism. Although Marx went on to radicalise

\(^2\) See Albert Camus, *The Rebel* London, Hamish Hamilton, 1953, pp. 215 216. 'It is not legitimate
to identify the ends of Fascism with the ends of Russian communism. The first represents the
exaltation of the executioner; the second, more dramatic in concept, the exaltation of the executioner
by the victim. The former never dreamed of liberating all men, but only of liberating a few by
subjugating the rest. The latter, in its most profound principle, aims at liberating all men by
provisionally enslaving them all. It must be granted the grandeur of its intentions. But, on the other
hand, it is legitimate to identify the means employed by both with political cynicism which they have
drawn from the same source, moral nihilism.
Feuerbachian positions towards an explicit standpoint of praxis, they nevertheless enabled him to criticise Hegel for depriving the human subject of its essential qualities and projecting them in the predicate to be glorified, namely god. Furthermore, he objected to Hegel's glorification of bureaucracy as the universal class with the capacity to mediate the particular interests with the universal in an enlightened manner. Marx pointed out that the authoritarian and parasitical character of bureaucracy acquires rational and representative garb precisely because, divided by the conflicts besetting the bourgeois civil society, people cannot perceive their interests clearly or comprehend the true source of 'local' conflicts, namely, the dominance of the false universal. He attacks Hegel for theorising a reconciliatory framework that remains triumphantly confined to the realm of consciousness, leaving 'real men' and the material contexts of their struggles untouched: ultimately, Hegel's dialectic remains idealistic, not to say religious.

During this period, Marx is quite relentless in his critique of ideas that fail to address concrete issues in adequately materialistic terms. However, these criticisms are yet to be grounded in a systematic framework. Even when he undertakes to expose the brutality of the nascent capitalism in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, what he projects by way of an emancipatory alternative is the blissful state of 'species-being' in some vaguely defined society of the future. The notion of species-being, having its origin in Feuerbach's critique of religion, denotes a humanity conscious of its universality, being fully reconciled with itself and nature: not isolated individuals or privileged groups but only liberated human beings in their totality could claim to have attained the status of species-being. Young Marx's vision is undeniably suffused with optimism and compassion which cannot fail to touch the reader but it is evident that as a recipe for social change on a world historical scale, this vision would have to become more 'concrete'.

It is in *German Ideology* that Marx and Engels embark upon the development
of historical materialism as a systematic perspective on social formations and, a relatively coherent account of ideology starts to take shape, culminating in a veritable paradigm shift in the way social processes had been hitherto understood. Consciousness, it is argued, is embedded in 'social being' and not something free-floating and autonomous: 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life' (Marx, 1989, p. 47). Although this remark does no more than gesture towards an interpretation of the intricate dialectic involving consciousness and social being, it does set the stage for a thoroughgoing re-configuration of the 'social being'. As Marx explains:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (Marx, 1989, p. 49)

It is possible to argue, of course, that this characterisation of ideology remains in thrall to the Feuerbachian trope of inversion and fails to provide a particularly sophisticated mediatory framework between subjective consciousness and social being. However, it may be pointed out that despite the crudely naturalistic reference to 'retina' and camera obscura, Marx's account is not meant to be rigorously scientific or ontological. It is meant to illustrate historical development of capitalist forms in Europe. Within that context, he attempts to highlight the manner in which the expansion of productive forces stimulates the growth and differentiation of centralised institutions, notably the state. The state extracts the vitality (labour power) from the civil society, deploying part of it against the fragmented individuals of the conflict-ridden civil society who produced it in the first place. These individuals become subject to increasingly strict division of labour and are burdened with insecurity as material and normative foundations of the pre-capitalist communal solidarity are undermined by capitalist forms. Meanwhile, what these isolated individuals produce is appropriated from them in a process of unequal exchange; they are often unable to purchase and consume what
they make with their own hands. Mindless, repetitive, debilitating work becomes a precondition for their survival as 'wage-slaves' or human-animals who get barely enough rest and 'feed' to prolong their bondage. They become radically isolated, uncreative, desperate, in short alienated; unable to relate either to themselves, other human beings or nature. Nothing encapsulates this metamorphosis more vividly than Marx's telling remark in his *Paris Manuscripts*: What is animal in man becomes human, what is human becomes animal.

As the realm of alienated subjects, seductive objects and abstract institutions develops, it takes on a semblance of independence from the productive core of the society. Even the producers are overwhelmed by the plethora of indifferent, powerful forms, relegating themselves to an inferior ontological status vis-à-vis state functionaries, managers and politicians. Marx's analysis underscores the crucial point that given the abstract character of capitalist development and the stultifying nature of work in the context of sweeping mechanisation, even the primary producers are unable to form a clear enough view of their situations. In other words, the cognitive deficit at the subjective level is related to the agents' inability to control their own 'life-activity'.

If the lines which precede the references to 'retina' and *camera obscura* in the text were examined within the context just outlined, the scandalous images might appear less mechanistic than they do at first glance, although it does not follow that a true image of Marx's conception of ideology will thereby crystallise. It is nevertheless important to emphasise that the context of Marx's observations is the transition in Europe from feudalism to capitalism. And, he attacks the idealistic tendency because it deifies a disembodied 'consciousness' without paying much attention to the socio-economic factors:

The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are...The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of
men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their mental behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. - real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. (Marx, 1989, pp. 46-47)

If one could resist the temptation to dismiss this description as 'vulgar materialist', it might be possible to notice that (a) While the dialectic between productive forces and relations is being underlined as the process that conditions men, it is not credited with an abstract, fate-like quality; rather, its human aspect and indeed continuing dependence on human activity is underlined and; (b) primacy is being accorded to the social situation of men over their 'self-conceptions', thereby avoiding psychologism and other varieties of methodological individualism in favour of a historically mediated, concrete sociological approach; (c) the level and existential status of activity is being intimately linked with modes of thinking, speaking, self-awareness and self-expression without making this relationship mechanistic. Nevertheless, it would be safe to say in the light of these formulations that a slave is unlikely to think like a master, except by somehow becoming unconscious of his own existence.

Some interpreters have subjected Marx's treatment of ideology to a rigorous, cognitivist scrutiny which does not do it full justice. John Mepham, for example, undertakes a literalist reading of the metaphors of 'retina' and camera obscura, overlooking the context of Marx's formulation (Mepham and Ruben, 1979). To extract the concept of ideology from the constellation which it forms with 'essence', 'alienation', 'division of labour' and 'praxis' and to place it in the oppositional dyad with 'science' is to gradually neutralise its critical - emancipatory potential. It is notable that even the young Marx strives to overcome the dualism of consciousness and material reality with the mediatory concept of practice, as evidenced by the eighth thesis on Feuerbach: All the mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their
rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of practice.'

Polemical dismissals of Marx which are threatening to saturate the 'post modern condition' should not obscure the fact that it was Marx who thematised the significance of human activity for social and cultural development with a rigour that is missing from the contributions of his philosophical predecessors. Unlike, say Aristotle who regards 'praxis' as immanent activity and 'poiesis' as an activity with an external end, Marx unifies both aspects so that practice appears as activity which produces an external object and simultaneously expresses the subject itself (Larrain, 1979, p. 217). There is a further distinction to be made between reproductive activity and revolutionary practice. While the former is imposed on the subjects by the force of circumstances, the notion of revolutionary practice presupposes that the agents have sufficient grasp of the conditions to be transformed. Thus, in contrast to the arbitrary, repetitive and passive character of the merely reproductive activity, revolutionary practice encompasses reflexive, expressive and transformative dimensions which are intrinsic to the genesis of a collective agent of change. In Concept of Ideology, Larrain persuasively argues that the seminal insight contributed by Marx's reflections on the question of ideology pertains to the fact that when the level of collective practice and consciousness of that practice lag behind the level of objective developments, individuals tend to view the objective factors as overly complex, self-perpetuating, indeed overwhelming. As Larrain puts it, 'Ideology therefore appears as a sublimation in consciousness of the limitation of human practice which leads to the negation of social contradictions' (Larrain, 1979, p. 47).

Even if one were to acknowledge the weight of this argument, it would be necessary to add that ideology is not a matter of deficient practice alone. That deep and intricate connections exist between material practices and cultural forms is difficult to refute; however, it is not only the level of activity but also its 'form' which distorts consciousness and inhibits the formation of oppositional solidarity. The notion of
form is related to specific historical and cultural constellations in which practices are embedded: symbols, belief-systems and all manner of rituals pertaining to 'superseded' modes of production whose influence may not be negligible or even comprehensible. The notion of form also refers to the 'structuration' through networks of mass media, state institutions, religious, mythical and academic discourses etc., of the contexts of exchange, distribution, consumption and comprehension. The structuration of temporal and spatial contexts of activity is geared towards stabilising, reproducing, legitimising, naturalising and even concealing the dominant configuration of power relations in a society (Therborn, 1980). The aim of these proposals is not to criticise Larrain who does offer a more adequate formulation of this issue elsewhere but to point out the problems which emerge when the concept of ideology becomes either too broad or too narrow. As Larrain notes:

Soon after Marx’s death the concept of ideology began to acquire new meanings. At the beginning it did not necessarily lose its critical connotation, but a tendency arose to give that aspect a secondary place. These new meanings took two main forms; namely, a conception of ideology as the totality of forms of social consciousness - which came to be expressed by the concept of 'ideological superstructure' - and the conception of ideology as the political ideas connected with the interests of a class. Although these new meanings were not the result of a systematic re-working of the concept within Marxism, they finally displaced the original negative connotation (Larrain, 1988, p.220)

In their search for the 'ground of history', the real substance of existence as opposed to the 'idealistic humbug' of Teutonic metaphysicians, Marx and Engels state that:

This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics etc. etc. and trace their origins and growth from that basis, by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another).... it does not explain practice from the ideas but explains the formation of ideas from material practice; and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism; by
resolution into 'self-consciousness' or transformation into 'apparitions',
spectres', 'fancies', etc. but only by the practical overthrow of the actual
social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug; that not criticism
but revolution is the driving force of history. (Marx, 1989, pp. 58-59)

Marx and Engels endeavoured to break the spell of idealism and indeed, of
everything dead in the accumulated wisdom. They aimed to install historical
materialism as a concrete, comprehensive, authoritative vision of social evolution: of
how societies outgrow repressive, wasteful and stultifying forms of interaction and
organisation through collective, thoughtful efforts of situated individuals. Although
they underlined the profound significance of 'material basis', the content of this 'basis'
is not confined to economic structures- inclusion of 'civil society' in the base makes
the situation somewhat more complex. Nor do they conceive the relationship between
base and superstructural elements in narrow, deterministic terms; the emphasis is on
'reciprocal action of these various sides on one another'.

The base-superstructure model has, of course, been a source of luxuriant
polemics the detailed exposition of which is beyond the scope of this discussion.
Briefly, it may be stated that from within the Marxist tradition this problem has
typically elicited two kinds of responses. One is the view associated with Plekhanov
and Labriola that legal and political superstructure is more or less directly derived from
the material relations while the forms of consciousness are derived somewhat
indirectly, through mediations that are more tortuous and elusive (thus irritating to
study). Kautsky and Lenin exhibit similar tendencies and even some writings of
Engels point in that direction. Superstructure appears in Plekhanov's account as a
rigidly demarcated surface manipulated by the irresistible commands of the base.
Kautsky, for his part extrapolates dialectics into a cosmic law which is applicable to
social and natural phenomena alike, thus, eliminating praxis from the nucleus of
Marxism. Lenin for his part is persuaded by the truism that all structures can be
reduced to economic relations and 'sees no need for an analysis of the super structure
in itself.'
As Marxist critics point out, deterministic and naturalistic interpretations of dialectic obscure the significance of class struggle(agency) and foster a nominally critical but essentially complacent reformism which is liable to provoke a desperate voluntarism in reaction. The subjective, 'left wing' revolts, however, disintegrate in the face of objective constraints and brutal 'counter-insurgency' campaigns of the capitalist state. The tendency to smother the interactive play of various 'superstructural' elements among themselves and with the elements of base doubtless encourages a rigid view of 'base' as well. Franz Jakubowski, writing in the thirties, is among the earliest dissenters who stress the importance of superstructural phenomena and advocate a rigorous approach to their study. He also offers lucid criticism of the deterministic tendency:

The economy is assigned a special place in the totality of social relations, the foundations of which is the production of immediate subsistence. This does not mean that economic relations are to be strictly separated from the rest, nor that they can be, even in a purely conceptual sense. The unity of social life is so strong that the only possible distinction is a methodological one, for the purpose of throwing light on any particular one of the fundamental relationships. It is a complete mistake to think that Marx's differentiation between base and superstructure was an absolute distinction between two different, overlapping spheres. All we can do is to make a very general paraphrase of the concept of 'superstructure'. It cannot be determined concretely and it certainly does not mean that a comprehensive tabulation of all social relationships is possible. (Jakubowski, 1978, p.37; emphasis in the original)

One strives in vain to find a reference to Jakubowski's work in the writings of later Marxists which says something important about the Marxist tradition, namely, its far from revolutionary propensity to make a cult of seminal figures; to perpetuate foundational dogmas till the bitter end. Indeed, Althusser's enumeration of 'ideological state apparatuses' makes a mockery of Jakubowski's sensible advice that Marxist theorists need not undertake the exhausting task of identifying every component of the ideological superstructure in the manner of medieval scholastics. As though to compound the irony, Jakubowski goes on to develop the rich, but generally
overlooked strands of Marx's thought into a complex methodological synthesis, anticipating to some extent the efforts of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams. He is at pains to criticise the tendency, fortified into a dogma by the leading lights of the Second International, of treating superstructural elements as though they were insubstantial emanations from the base:

In order to combat a widespread misunderstanding, it must be stressed that the superstructure is real, Lenin in particular tended to overlook this, when, he contrasted being and idea in his 'reflection' theory. The superstructure is no less real than base. (Jakubowski, 1978, p.56)

Jakubowski recognises, moreover, that every element of superstructure does not necessarily have a specific, identifiable correlate in the base. For example, certain conventions and beliefs could be survivals from previous modes of production. What can be said, however, is that all these various spheres of ideas correspond in their totality as the intellectual structure of society, to its economic structure (Jakubowski, 1978, p.53). In sum, this may be too congruent a picture, perhaps insufficiently responsive to different and fluctuating levels of contradiction, but it does seem to prefigure the Althusserian view of society as a complex, interdependent organism perspiring in a state of overall equilibrium. However, unlike Althusser who is said to reduce human beings to mere 'supports' of ideological state apparatuses, Jakubowski claims that material base and subjective consciousness exist in a differentiated but interpenetrating, interactive and necessarily discrepant unity. Thus, it would be difficult to argue that one must always determine or dominate the other. Marx's observations in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* about the contradictory consciousness of the French petty bourgeoisie and peasantry lend support to Jakubowski's argument. Marx describes the consciousness of the said groups as a curious blend of archaic and modern elements, with the former over shadowing the latter in moments of crisis. To illustrate his point further, Jakubowski cites the example of the German petty bourgeoisie who were expected by the Marxist political economists to become part of the revolutionary movement, but who gravitated
instead towards National Socialism. Quite appropriately, Jakubowski concludes that 'social being' in not synonymous with 'economic situation.' (Jakubowski, 1978, p. 60)

Georg Lukacs: Revolt Against Form

This section aims to clarify Lukacs' attempt to develop a Marxist interpretation of capitalist culture which is neither 'vulgar' materialist nor idealist. Lukacs' pioneering effort remains something of a watershed for the Marxist reflection on cultural issues, inspiring, among others, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. However, many have discerned in Lukacs' work the same totalising drive that characterises rational ontologies built on the principles of the Enlightenment—faith in a substitute god and in the perfectibility of human beings. And yet, it could be argued that as capitalism develops into a more encompassing, global, system, extending its tentacles into every region and sphere of activity, systematic frameworks of analysis become more relevant, not less.

Georg Lukacs' attempt to formulate a substantive theory of society was rooted in his profound sensitivity to what he perceived as the crisis of European culture. His aim was not only to understand society but to redeem the promise inherent in its very substance by uncovering the movement of its creative tendencies which could be developed by the subject of history. Inspired by Hegel's method and inspiring in turn the tradition of inter-disciplinary critical analysis, Lukacs' social theory is a dialectical theory and central to its analytical procedures are concepts of 'totality', 'mediation' and praxis. But, these concepts acquire their specific redemptive significance only when they are set off against the concept of reification. The importance of this concept for the present discussion cannot be exaggerated, since it underpins a whole set of arguments about ideology and the fate of modernity which are to be examined in this thesis. Indeed, the concept of reification is central to the analyses of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse.
Lukacs' theory of reification synthesises Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism with Weber's concept of rationalisation. However, this synthesis takes place in a distinctly Hegelian framework. Realising that Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism in *Capital* was not exhaustive enough to account for concrete mediations which were to instigate the sublation of reification, Lukacs decides to take up this challenge (Arato, 1972, p. 25). In *Capital*, Marx highlights the dualistic character of commodity which, in his view, has a decisive impact on the form of social relations and modes of perception in the capitalist society: to the isolated subject, things appear independent of the processes in which they are generated. They appear to be 'natural' and 'eternal' as though human labour has not contributed to their genesis. Traditional theory is unable to resist this tendency, dismissing as unscientific every attempt to proceed beyond 'facts' or what is 'given' to the senses.

In the Lukacian framework, the phenomenon of reification is connected to the division of labour and formal rationality which become the organising principles of capitalist modernity. From this perspective, dualisms of bourgeois philosophy represent actual conditions of a society in which the subject and object have become dissociated and where organic relationships are destroyed and replaced by a kind of 'second nature' holding isolated individuals under its spell. This second nature comes into its own when the commodity form becomes universal, making even human relations appear as abstract relations between things. What is natural in the subject is no longer reconciled to the world of commodities from which traces of human labour are progressively erased. Interestingly, commodities floating about the consciousness

---

3 See Lukacs. The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness in forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the 'second nature' so created. *History and Class Consciousness* London, Merlin Press, 1971, p. 86.
of the bewildered, agitated but essentially resigned subject resemble celestial movement of Kantian categories—pervasive incarnation of the 'thing-in-itself' as visible, tangible but nevertheless spell binding fetishes. It may be suggested that it is precisely the ubiquity of abstraction and the severity of rational imperatives in capitalist societies which stimulate the desire for aesthetic purity and a distinct cultural sphere, as though to compensate for the fact that relationships between subjects have become devoid of content and the social system is no longer anchored in an encompassing structure of meaning. Besides, the subject is unable to draw much solace from nature either.

Lukacs maintains that capitalist development inevitably engenders contradictions which ensure that as a mode of production, capitalism will be overcome in the long run. However, objective possibility is not sufficient in itself; it must be complemented by subjective necessity. This subjective necessity cannot become significant at the structural level unless a collective subject commensurate with the objective contradiction drives the contradictory process to its logical conclusion. For Lukacs, this collective subject is the proletariat, but he notes that a serious obstacle stands in the way of the potential Subject resolving objective contradictions. This is reification, which seeps into the proletarian consciousness as it does into the brains of bourgeois entrepreneurs, experts and philosophers. The proletariat is therefore unable to visualise the objective contradiction even when the contradiction is ripe for overcoming, still less to recognise itself as a force of world-historical dimensions. Thus, Lukacs undertakes scrutiny of bourgeois thinking, examining it in its positivist as well as idealist mode. He is convinced by Hegel's dictum that 'reality is not, it becomes'. A radical theorist, he feels, should offer a coherent account of this becoming in historical time rather than spiriting it away in the waltz of timeless categories.

Lukacs suggests that ideological facade of the capitalist society be made intelligible by reference to socio-historical conditions of its genesis, underlining the
significance of collective human agency. In order to give a concrete account of social phenomena it is necessary to adopt the stand point of 'totality' and identify the mediations which link abstract fragments; the so called facts, with the whole. Perhaps to ensure that 'mediation' is not conceived as an abstract category and subjected to academic neutralisation, he reiterates in *History and Class Consciousness* that:

The methodological function of the categories of mediation consists in the fact that with their aid those immanent meanings that necessarily inhere in the objects of bourgeois society but which are absent from the immediate manifestation of those objects as well as from their mental reflection in bourgeois thought, now become objectively effective and can therefore enter the consciousness of the proletariat (Lukacs, 1971, p.163)

To be constantly preoccupied with the empirical is to remain stuck in the spurious demarcations of partial thinking; a thinking that cannot comprehend the alienated spheres as integral parts of a whole in the throes of historically conditioned unfolding.

As mentioned above, Lukacs' notion of mediation presupposes an emancipatory *telos* in the contradictory development of the capitalist society. The promise of emancipation would be redeemed when the proletariat becomes conscious of its world historical potential and displaces the oppressing classes from the vanguard of history by means of revolutionary struggle. He points out that bourgeois thinking is defensively marooned in a contemplative attitude towards reality, so that, from the very outset it posits a gulf between subject and object, thought and what is thought, a dualism which it must then struggle to overcome. However, with an essentially epistemological standpoint, it is bound to remain abstract thought and construct immaculate systems devoid of content. After all, an essential characteristic of formal rationality is its disregard for the concreteness and specificity of the subject matter (Lukacs, 1971, p.101). For these reasons it is prone to disintegration when substantial crises in the material realm become palpable.

For Lukacs, then, it is a matter of replacing the false mediation (bourgeois
thinking) which draws support from a distorted reality (reification) with true, revolutionary consciousness through the mediatory framework of revolutionary theory. There is of course a dialectical relationship between the proletariat becoming conscious as a revolutionary class and revolutionary activity because the proletariat, being the objective and objectified class of the capitalist society, is seen in the first instance as the object of revolutionary transformation. By transforming its consciousness, it necessarily transforms 'objective' reality and vice versa. After all, the proletariat is the foundation of the capitalist 'reality' and does not, like the bourgeoisie, contemplate it from without.\footnote{\textit{Lukacs}} does not view mediation as a static connection or a spurious representation of causal relationships involving the whole and parts. Rather, the whole is constituted in an interactive process which is not without an element of contingency for Lukacs, although this is a particularly contentious aspect of his work. He goes on to argue, somewhat like Hegel, that the essential form of the whole is crystallised in its parts. Thus, if individual 'facts' are taken to be 'absolute', 'final' or self-sufficient forms without links to other things, then thought will remain trapped within the cocoon of immediacy and observe things from a distance since it will not be able to discern the more complex, underlying dynamics nourishing perceptible phenomena:

\[
\text{...the category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted on to the objects from outside, it is no value-judgement or 'ought' opposed to their 'is'. It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure...Mediation would not be possible were it not for the fact that the empirical existence of objects is itself mediated and only appears to be unmediated in so far as the awareness of mediation is lacking so that the objects are torn from the complex of their true determinants and placed in artificial insolation. (Lukacs,}\]

\footnote{\textit{Lukacs} (1971): 'What is 'reflected' in the consciousness is the new positive reality arising out of the dialectical contradictions of capitalism. And this is by no means the invention of the proletariat, nor was it "created" out of the void. It is rather the inevitable consequence of the process in its totality; one which changed from being an abstract possibility to a concrete reality only after it had become part of the consciousness of the proletariat and had been made practical by it. And this is no mere formal transformation.' P. 204. To ensure that the process outlined is not conceived mechanistically, he adds, 'But it must not be forgotten: only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat possesses this ability to transform things. Every contemplative, purely cognitive stance leads ultimately to a divided relationship to its object.' P. 205. Italics in the original.}
To conceive mediation in a specific socio-historical context is not a matter of projecting subjective biases into societal dynamics, nor of deciphering objective structures from a 'pure' cognitive stand point. In the final analysis, it is the concrete, historically situated activity in which the duality of subject and object is to be overcome (Lukacs, 1971, p. 123). It is necessary to stress that Lukacs employs the term subject to designate both the subject of knowledge and the subject of action. The following words capture the essence of his dialectical approach:

The genesis, the creation of the creator of knowledge, the dissolution of the irrationality of the thing-in-itself, the resurrection of man from his grave, all these issues become concentrated hence forth on the question of dialectical method. For in this method the call for an intuitive understanding (for method to supersede the rationalistic principle of knowledge) is clearly, objectively and scientifically stated. (Lukacs, 1971, p. 141)

Notwithstanding his invocation of the figure of dialectics to characterise the relationship between subject and object which is historically conditioned and not pre-determined, it has been suggested that Lukacs spirits away the historically specific contradictions and erects a homogeneous subject that interacts in a domineering fashion with pliable objects. Thus Paul Piccone complains:

This dialectic tends to quickly lose sight of the content which, transformed into categories by the very nature of discursive expression, takes on the character of forms leaving behind a chaotic and meaningless dimension of existence as a material residue (Hegel's positivity) no longer susceptible to spiritual articulation...As already indicated in the early works, the living dialectic between subject and object, life and culture, form and content, is readily over-intellectualised and the pre-categorical non-conceptual pole of the material dialectic becomes automatically transformed into another concept thus reducing the living tension into an ideal dialectic of forms and concepts. (Piccone, 1972, p. 112)

Piccone discerns vestiges of 'reflection theory' in Lukacs's work and goes on to characterise his reconstruction of Marxist method as one that is aprioristic and indifferent to the subjects' experience of actual conditions, tending to revert to
Helegian eternity of concepts which Marx had tried to explode. He insists that Lukacian dialectic does not open itself up to subjective experience which it attempts to integrate into conceptual hierarchy by attributing its fragmentary, quasi-autonomous character to specific developments and identifiable forces. Lukacs does not succeed in his endeavour, partly because he remains trapped in the Weberian schema of 'ideal types'. Whereas:

It is only the level of feeling and living experiences (Erlebnisse) that we always confront reality as totality containing fixed categories as moments thereof. To the extent that Lukacs never penetrates this crucial living dimension and remains throughout within the categorical realm, his brilliant intuitions eventually fail. (Piccone, 1972, p.121)

Piccone appears to be accusing Lukacs of forgetting Hegel's insight that 'concrete totality' has to be the 'result' of dialectical process; it should not function as the secret metaphysical guarantee of that process. Likewise, he upbraids Lukacs' for positing identical subject-object in the manner of idealists:

A Marxist dialectic must dialectize not only itself, but also the very categories of analysis. Although Lukacs recognizes this, in practice he retains unchanged all of the Marxist categories which he mechanically proceeds to super impose upon a reality that has at least partially outgrown them. To the extent that Lukacs does not generate the categories employed from the concrete context of his historical situation, he ends by deducing 19th century consequences from the 19th century Marxism that he uncritically transposes over to 20th century realities. A Marxist articulation of Marxist theory must give an analysis of all of its categories, understood not as Platonic forms pre-given and universally valid, but as determined moments of praxis meant to capture reality in a certain way so to already build into that very apprehension something which is not yet and which is precisely praxis' task to bring about .... Although Lukacs claims verbal adherence to the concrete totality, in fact he wavers throughout History and class Consciousness between the positivist and the romantic totality understood retrospectively as a metaphysical whole obtaining above and beyond all the parts that constitute it. (Piccone, 1972, pp.126-27)

As mentioned above, it is the categories of bourgeois thought which the proletariat must transcend in order to actualise itself as the determinant force of contemporary history, although this transcendence is neither abstract nor strictly
theoretical. In order for the proletariat to become a 'class for itself' it must undertake more or less conscious development of the contradictions implicit in the capitalist society, leading it towards socialism. However, categories of the bourgeois thought are in turn sustained by the structures of capitalism. One cannot help notice an element of circularity in Lukacs' argument, although that may be inescapable given his rigorously dialectical approach bent on connecting everything with everything else: The proletariat cannot realise its objective potential due to the ideological impediments represented by the 'bourgeois' thought. But, bourgeois thought expresses and is indeed grounded in the commodified structures of the capitalist society which could only be overcome through the proletariat's revolutionary comportment towards the unfolding totality. One way out of this conundrum would be the Leninist notion of intellectual-organisational vanguard or party whose task it would be to inject 'advanced consciousness' into the ranks of workers and peasants. It is debatable whether Lukacs was entirely comfortable with the Leninist view of the vanguard party. What is clearer is that he was inclined to suspend both formal, proceduralist criteria as well as empirical ones to bestow a kind of authenticity and epistemological privilege upon the proletariat.

5Lukacs declares reification to be the 'necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings for the total development.' History and Class Consciousness p. 197. Emphasis in the original.

6It is customary to characterise Lukacs's outlook in the period in which he wrote essays comprising History and Class Consciousness as 'left wing', reposing greater faith in the spontaneous activity of the masses than in formal arrangements such as the party organisation. However, some ambiguities remain on a number of important points. For instance, he writes that: 'Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectic of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality.' History and Class Consciousness p. 197. Is this awakening to be spontaneous, stimulated by the practical transformative activity of the proletariat or is the mediation of revolutionary theory as developed by intellectuals a necessary step in this process? Furthermore, how is one to deal with the distinction between workers and intellectuals, that is, between manual and intellectual labour?

7Although reification is said to penetrate everyone's consciousness in the capitalist society, Lukacs claims that it is only in the proletariat that the process by which a man's achievement is split off from his total personality and becomes a commodity leads to a revolutionary consciousness. History and Class Consciousness p. 173. This is partly because unlike other groups who are hulled into passivity or petty opportunism by the commodified veil of the capitalist society, the proletariat, being
It has been suggested that the monistic and necessitarian character of Lukacs' system does not grant ideology much in the way of autonomy. And, this conciliatory, teleological drive of Lukacs' work is typically characterised as idealistic and totalising even though Lukacs may have intended to situate the moment of reconciliation in the future. Furthermore, Lukacs' affiliation with Stalinism which could only be described as a marriage of convenience, does make one wonder if the dream of 'sublating' capitalist reality to some wholly other condition situated beyond history, does not encourage and justify pragmatic, not to say abject compromises and violent excesses in the present. Does the quest for 'absolute ends' justify arbitrary and 'terroristic' means because the 'present' is so thoroughly devalued that no aspect of it is considered worthy of attention, let alone preservation?

It may be argued that Lukacs tried, like Marcuse and a number of other Marxist thinkers, to 're-claim' Hegel from the Right, but Adorno has demonstrated the risks involved in this enterprise. All too often, paranoia about 'bourgeois thinking' and the desire to obliterate all 'bourgeois' forms as deceptive and repressive expressions of 'underlying' structures of domination, get mired in even greater problems. As Stephen Lukes has argued, Marxist theorists' imperious dismissal of the notions of legality and morality as corrupt remnants of 'bourgeois' formalism which must be dissolved in the holistic ontology expressing the 'essence' of the soon to be liberated humanity, has probably contributed to Stalinist obscurantism and terror (Lukes, 1985, p.xii:p.146). In other words, the authoritarian practice of treating all forms as fungible and illusory or as instruments of domination and deception, could result in theoretical and political monstrosities, just as eternalising them a la Plato would. To regard legality and

directly involved in the production of commodities has an immediate and 'naked' experience of this process. P. 172. Furthermore, unlike white collar slaves such as journalists, clerks and bureaucrats who sell the very faculties, thoughts and feelings, which could save them, workers' souls, though mutilated by monotonous and often physically crushing labour are 'not changed into commodities'. P 172. Lukacs augments his point with a thought provoking quote from Hegel: 'It is much harder to bring movement into fixed ideas than into sensuous experience.' P. 172.
morality as minor elements of ideological superstructure which may be manipulated or overcome in the interests of revolutionary ends (the highest morality) is another way of expressing the same problem. Stephen Lukes has shown that Marxism and Utilitarianism share a 'consequentialist' view of morality, except that Marxism tends to combine consequentialism with 'perfectionism' in a dogmatic fashion which subjects reality to rigid means-ends relationships (Lukes, 1985,p.143; pp.147-48).\textsuperscript{8} Lukacs' story, intellectual and personal, is quite instructive in this regard; no less than Heidegger's. A critical theory prepared to confront its own tradition and engage with the world cannot afford to ignore either.\textsuperscript{9}

Subsequent explorations of the problematic of ideology by Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, and French post-structuralists have indeed suggested that the genesis and demise of ideologies is far from simple or predictable; that far more than consciousness and transition to a different mode of production is involved. Yet, from the Lukacian perspective, devaluation of the notions of revolutionary subject and decisive contradictions is a high price indeed for the much lauded 'complexity' and pragmatism of the more recent work on ideology. It is precisely in these times of crisis and disillusionment, when a steady growth in the quantity and sophistication of theoretical production is accompanied by the celebration of neo-liberal consensus in the developed world that radical social theory, in a bid to recover its disappearing link with practice may have to re-consider

\textsuperscript{8} See Stephen Lukes, \textit{Marxism and Morality}; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985. He concludes that marxian and marxist thought about the means and ends of action, and more generally about morality, has a certain distinctive structure. It is in brief, a form of consequentialism that is long-range and perfectionist. p.142. He defines consequentialism as a theory which judges actions by their consequences only, and requires agents to produce the best outcome overall. Plainly, consequentialism contrasts with deontological theories, which standardly hold that it is sometimes wrong to produce the best outcome overall, and right not to do so. p.142.

Lukacs' critique.

Antonio Gramsci and the Concept of Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci is increasingly regarded as the most sophisticated analyst of culture and politics in the Marxist tradition. His reluctance to imprison cultural and political phenomena into the economic base and his ability to explore diverse patterns of governance in specific contexts have prompted several observers to place his thought in closer proximity to that of Lenin. It is necessary to emphasise, however, that Gramsci's thinking bears little resemblance to Lenin's more exuberantly utopian claims, such as the one that 'government of persons' would give way to 'the administration of things' in the communist society. For the rapidly vanishing breed of 'orthodox' Marxist, Gramsci is too 'historicist' and 'voluntarist' and not enough of a political economist. Indeed, what distinguishes his thought is the wealth of strategic and 'conjunctural' analyses' rather than any structuralist distillation of capitalism's 'laws of motion'. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that its contribution to the ongoing refinement of critical theory rivals that of the Frankfurt school and Althusser.

Responding to the peculiarities of his situation which included Europe-wide defeats of the workers' movements, growing evidence of capitalism's ability to profit from all manner of crises and technological breakthroughs, and a predominantly Catholic, semi-industrialised society which was not particularly hospitable to conventional Marxist analysis, Gramsci demonstrated considerable daring and originality in rendering Marxist system flexible without vitiating its overall strengths and appeal. Indeed, Gramsci's conception of 'historical bloc' and his refinement of Plekhanov's and Lenin's insights on hegemony was a successful attempt to overcome the aridity of Marxist polemics about the base-superstructure model. Gramsci's aim was to decipher the specificity of particular ideological terrains by delimiting them
historically and geographically, and by identifying force-fields of enduring significance that lend cultural-institutional coherence to a particular 'historic bloc'. In contrast to Hegelian Marxism's decidedly philosophical-teleological emphases, Gramsci's approach developed spatial and strategic focus, although not in a reductive sense. For example, Gramsci clearly recognised the limitations of the base-superstructure model to explain differences between Italy and Russia, inclined as he was to regard them as two different historical blocs with distinct patterns of domination and resistance. Russian situation was characterised by the historical supremacy of the monarchical state which had reduced the bulk of the population to a more or less diffuse mass. The general lack of mediatory structures between the state elites and the predominantly rural masses created a vacuum that could be effectively filled by Leninist-style party organisation. The Italian case, on the other hand, presented a different picture; one marked by weak state and robust civil society. The prominent features of the Italian civil society included Catholic church, bourgeois publishing houses of the south, a small number of influential newspapers and a miscellany of intermediate strata with their affiliated intellectuals. As Gramsci elaborates:

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relationship between State and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earth works. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238)

It was the uninterrupted moral leadership of Catholic church, which, together with other significant forces of the civil society, could lend a degree of coherence to Italian culture even when the state was not a crucial player in the political and cultural arenas. Gramsci noted that people often adhere to a set of values and practices which actually violate their 'real', material interests and fortify the prevailing structures of power. Such values, intellectual constructs, institutions and practices, when considered self-evident, natural, prestigious or morally binding by a large number of people in a given society are said to be 'hegemonic'. Hegemony is to be understood as a form of
governance combining coercion and consent (McLellan, 1979, p. 187). In Gramsci's view, it is the 'civil society' as distinguished from 'political society' or state proper which happens to be the pre-eminent site of hegemonic constructions in the West:

... the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' (dominio) and as 'intellectual and moral leadership' (direzione). A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate even by armed force: it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power): it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well. (Gramsci, 1988, p. 249)

Given the strength and complexity of civil society in Western Europe, mere political revolution dedicated to the conquest of the state would not be as effective as it was in Russia. As Perry Anderson has demonstrated in his incisive study of Gramsci's thought, what the term 'civil society' actually stands for in Gramsci's texts is not easy to ascertain. At times, Gramsci uses it in a manner to suggest the sphere between the state and the economy; on other occasions he sets up a stark opposition between the state and civil society. And sometimes, he assimilates both 'political society' and civil society in an encompassing unity designated by 'state'. To be sure, some of this confusion originates in the exigencies of producing written analyses of political and strategic issues in the cells of the fascist prison. But as Anderson suggests, Gramsci made several inconclusive attempts to clarify the notions of civil society and hegemony in the light of debates going on in the international communist movement (Anderson, 1976-77). However, notwithstanding the ambiguities which still remain, it is safe to say that Gramsci had intended to emphasise the robustness of the public sphere (the cultural-political space between the formal structures of the state and the economy proper) in the West and, the fact that the ruling strata have to rely more on the consent of the governed than on the use of force. Anderson has, of course, discerned affinities between reformism and Gramsci's espousal of 'war of position'. Not only does Gramsci's position lead to the idea of 'Euro-communism', says Anderson, but it
downplays the significance of the capitalist state's 'coercive apparatus': where Machiavelli had effectively collapsed consent into coercion, in Gramsci coercion was progressively eclipsed by consent (Anderson, 1976-77).

To be sure, Gramsci stresses that ruling classes 'govern' by perpetuating their 'moral and political hegemony'. They attempt to 'represent' subaltern groups by incorporating their elites, especially intellectuals (Gramsci, 1988, p. 250). Where brute force is frequently resorted to, there the ruling bloc is probably exhausted (Gramsci, 1988, p. 251). The challenge for the oppositional forces in Europe was thus one of transforming normative orientations (in the civil society) in favour of socialism. It was none other than this slow and tortuous process of overcoming bourgeois 'common sense', partly by reworking and destabilising it from within, but also by delegitimating it through the articulation of a more coherent and incisive 'world-view' which Gramsci termed 'war of position' (to distinguish it from the Leninist strategy of frontal assault). Nevertheless, producing counter-hegemony is not simply a matter of bringing to expression a pre-given set of 'true' or self-evident values by removing obstacles to their expression and reception. Pure, abstract truths, which are indifferent to the conventions of a given historical bloc, rarely develop into counter-hegemonic formations. Counter-hegemony is 'constructed' by intellectuals as they struggle with competing ideologies to attain 'critical self-consciousness':

Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an elite of intellectuals. A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is, without organisers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialised' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 334)

The 'message' undergoes continual and subtle changes in the course of its engagement with other points of view and forces, both sympathetic and hostile.
Gramsci's understanding of intellectuals is quite original. He does not regard them as authentic bearers of \textit{zweigeist} who espouse eternal verities and possess celestial tastes, but as 'human, all too human': having political interests and 'biases' like everybody else. Indeed, everyone is an intellectual to the extent of being able to think and learn from his or her experiences. In the final analysis, the difference between intellectuals and the masses is functional and quantitative, not ontological: 'All men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9). And:

The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 8)

However, Gramsci finds it necessary to distinguish 'organic intellectuals' from the classical figure of humanistic intellectual. The latter type, epitomised in Italy by Benedetto Croce, considers itself the austere guardian of distinguished legacies, whether sacred or humanistic, and is generally comfortable with the status quo. By contrast, organic intellectuals have affiliations with the ascendant forces, conceive their roles in more circumscribed terms and favour social change. Nevertheless, organic intellectuals are not be passive recipients of 'progressive ideas'. They are urged to explore the dichotomy between received ideas and their own experience of specific cultural-political contexts. They are exhorted not only to refine practice with critical thinking but also to expose received ideas to the crucible of experience. In this way, they are to gain a clearer understanding of their immediate situations, developing more encompassing interpretations of the larger patterns obtaining in the 'historic bloc':

The active man - in the mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses(or one contradictory consciousness): one which is
implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies' and opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333)

Although Gramsci lays great stress on the strategic articulation of ideas, it would not be accurate to suggest, as some of his interpreters in the cultural studies movement do, that he treats philosophy as an irredeemably metaphysical, bourgeois ideology. What such interpretations ignore is not only Gramsci's insight that ideas (including religious ones) are a 'material force', but they also overlook the complexity of his relationship with Benedetto Croce's thought. Notwithstanding the fragmentary character of his reflections, he clearly appreciates the force of coherently articulated perspectives, and contrasts them favourably with the wavering, rudimentary character of 'common sense' on the one hand and religious dogmas on the other (Kilminster, 1979, pp. 166-67). It could even be argued that Gramsci associates philosophy with critical attitude or 'good sense'. Since the 'world views' elaborated by philosophers together with other forms of the so called high culture are associated with practical activities of various groups, being elements of the field of ideological contestation, their importance cannot be overlooked. Thus, counter-hegemonic movements must strive for the creation of moral and intellectual unity between high-culture intellectuals and the masses (Kilminster, 1979, p. 171; Gramsci, 1988, p. 332). Gramsci is at pains to

10 Explicating the connection between philosophy, common sense and religion, Gramsci states that, Philosophy is an intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be. It is to be observed that religion and common sense do not coincide either, but that religion is an element of fragmented common sense. Moreover, common sense is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process. Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and "common sense". In this sense it coincides with 'good' as opposed to "common" sense. A Gramsci Reader, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1988, p. 327. Richard Kilminster has argued that Gramsci was, undoubtedly inspired by Italian idealist historicism, from which he has absorbed and creatively utilized the conception of 'moments'. The point is that without understanding the logic of this approach we could mistakenly assume that the forms of intellection are just a formal typology or conceived in the modern manner as paradigms. Praxis and Method, London, Routledge, 1979, p. 169.

11 Gramsci notes that the distinction between intellectuals and the masses, between high and low culture, is to be subverted not by demonising the notions of intellectual and high culture and leaving the masses to their own devices by glorifying their 'authentic' consciousness. Rather, the masses are to
emphasise that the failure of urban intellectuals of the north to forge powerful links with the southern peasantry was a major weakness of the workers' movement in Italy. He warns that ontologising the distinction between intellectuals and the masses, besides being theoretically questionable, would have damaging political consequences. It would support the misleading view that intellectuals are by definition teachers of the masses and have little to learn from them. Furthermore, such a definition overlooks the limitations of the intellectuals' point of view. As Gramsci clarifies:

The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel ... The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned: in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and thus explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated - i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics - history without this passion, without this emotional bond between intellectuals and people - nation. In the absence of such a bond the relations between the intellectual and the people - nation are reduced to relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order, the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism). (Gramsci, 1971, p.418)

This is a thoughtful account of theory-practice relationship in the context of societies marked by regional and cultural disparities. It should also problematise the recent appropriations of Gramsci's thought to valorise fragmented identities. One cannot forget that Gramsci's reflections emerged in the specific context of Italy's socio-historical development. In that context he specified national integration as a major goal of the working class movement (Merrington, 1977, p.161). Not surprisingly, his views on the 'peasant' and 'national' questions were at variance with Trotsky's formal be encouraged to develop critical consciousness. Thus, unlike Catholic church, which tolerates the split in the 'community of the faithful' between the intellectuals and the 'simple', the philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the simple in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life. If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups.' A Gramsci Reader, p.332-33.
internationalism and more in line with Lenin's who evinced greater sensitivity to the Russian situation. Every national situation, Gramsci remarks, 'is the result of a combination which is "original" and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them' (cited in Merrington, 1977, p.146).

According to Perry Anderson, Gramsci stands out among 'Western Marxists' as someone who posed the problem of 'cultural superstructures' not in mere theoretical or aesthetic terms but as political through and through, possibly because, as an opponent and prisoner of fascism, he was having to face the political realities rather more directly than others (Anderson, 1979, p.78). Thus, theoretically inclined 'Structuralist Marxists' often dismiss Gramsci's work as 'historicist' and 'voluntarist'.

The fragmentary character of Gramsci's observations in *Prison Note Books* often obscures the fact that Gramsci's strategic analyses, concerned as they are with historical understanding of the Italian situation, are grounded in a thorough understanding of the socio-historical dynamics of the capitalist societies. Indeed, it is the notion of 'organic crisis' which informs his conjunctural interventions and imbibes them with an ethical charge. After all, if it is just a matter of re-inserting the masses in hegemonic frameworks to subvert the bourgeois rule, then, what was to distinguish socialism from fascism? In some periods, fascists were actually more effective in mobilising the ambivalent and recalcitrant elements of the society. Given his first hand experience of fascist terror and the difficulty of constructing working class hegemony, Gramsci could not possibly ignore the need to distinguish working class 'ideology' from fascism, although it is debatable whether he could locate the distinction at a level higher or deeper than the strategic-functional. As the following quote indicates, the schism between normative and functional levels is not entirely resolved:

12See Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure* p.81. 'Gramsci's unbroken identification of history and theory, his idea of "pure" process and praxis (meaning that the future is absolutely subject to the human influence), and the related establishment of the primacy of the subject in Fichte's sense had to bring down on him the structuralist accusation of naive historicism.'

44
It is evident that this kind of mass creation cannot just happen "arbitrarily", around any ideology, simply because of the formally constructive will of a personality or a group which puts it forward solely on the basis of its own fanatic philosophical religious convictions. Mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality or historicity of modes of thinking. Any arbitrary constructions are pretty rapidly eliminated by historical competition, even if sometimes, through a combination of immediately favourable circumstances, they manage to enjoy popularity of a kind; whereas constructions which respond to the demands of a complex organic period of history always impose themselves and prevail in the end, even though they may pass through several intermediary phases during which they manage to affirm themselves only in more or less bizzare and heterogeneous combinations. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 341)\textsuperscript{13}

Notwithstanding its inconclusiveness, contradictions and occasional excesses, Gramsci's thinking is remarkably vigorous in its struggle to mediate between the determinism of orthodox Marxism and Leninist voluntarism, between sobering contemplation of material compulsions and the breath-taking daring of the human heart.\textsuperscript{14} No doubt, 'pessimism of intellect, optimism of spirit ' encapsulates the paradoxical but scintillating interventions of Antonio Gramsci.

**Althusserian Reading of Marx**

Is it the case that the notion of 'process' which occupies a central position in the Hegelian-Marxist discourse has succumbed to academic neutralisation? That it has been de-radicalised and invested with a pseudo-vitality and gregarious ambience which has obliterated the traces of the original Marxist emphases. Some Marxists would argue

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13}Richard Kilminster has discerned Lukacsian tendencies in Gramsci's gesture of privileging the party or 'Prince' as the locus of ethics. 'As in Lukacs, in practical terms it is for Gramsci the party (the modern Prince) which is important on question of morality.... The party for Gramsci is the crucible for the development of a new morality since it embodies the potential of the organic historical tendency within itself and therefore historically enshrines moral imperatives.' Richard Kilminster, *Praxis and Method*, London, Routledge, 1979, p.152. Kilminster doubts whether Lukacs and Gramsci are able to specify criteria whereby arbitrary and sporadic ideological mobilisations can be distinguished from the ones rooted in an 'organic crisis'. p.153-54.

\end{flushright}
that if the notion of process, even in its relatively sophisticated formulation as the movement of complex and intertwining practices and discourses, were severed from the notion of an actual or possible subject of this process, and from the notion of potentially disruptive contradictions, then its value for radical thought would be considerably diminished. Vitalist and gestaltist interpretations of 'societal totality' have been available to support deterministic and reactionary tendencies ever since the aged Schelling's Munich lectures which reinterpreted Hegelian dialectics as a species of oppressive metaphysics. He proposed to replace it with an ahistorical scheme oriented towards stasis. Of course, he did so by disconnecting dialectics from the notion of universal subject and ignoring the subversive potential of unfulfilled needs. This model is a kind of vitalistic pantheism in which every thing partakes of every thing else but remains politically stationary. There are hardly any references to the role power plays in structuring relationships between individuals who are predictably treated as spiritual entities.

Likewise, Althusser's move to reject Hegelian dialectic and embrace Spinoza has turned out to be a mixed blessing for radical theory.\textsuperscript{15} While seeking to counter economistic and Stalinist dogmas on the one hand and humanistic and historicist excesses on the other, it tends to collapse practice into theory and theory itself into a meta-theory of discourses whose critical potential is somewhat difficult to identify, notwithstanding the distinction, in itself problematical, which Althusser sets up between science and ideology (Althusser, 1969, p.13).\textsuperscript{16} As he claims, Theoretical

\textsuperscript{15} Ted Benton has highlighted Spinoza's influence on Althusser's notion of structural causality which is supposed to replace the less than satisfactory conceptions of 'linear' and 'expressive' causalities. The outcome of Althusser's prolonged and labourer discussion is that the structure of the totality is nothing other than its effects; it is, in Spinoza's sense a cause "immanent in its effects" (just as, in Spinoza's philosophy, God is a cause immanent in His creation: God and Nature are identical). Ted Benton, The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism, London, MacMillan, 1984, p.64.

\textsuperscript{16} Althusser's claim about the 'epistemological break' in Marx's work, separating early, that is, immature, idealistic, moralistic, subjective, Hegelian works from the more systematic, mature, scientific ones of the later period, has been widely discussed. In much the same way, Althusser deploys the Bachelardian notion of 'rupture' to distinguish science from ideology. Explaining Bachelard's notion of 'break', Alfred Schmidt writes, 'On this view, the level of science is always attained through a break (coupure constitutive) with the received problem field (espace de problemes), a field which is
practice is ... its own criterion, and contains in itself definite protocols with which to validate the quality of its product (cited in Geras, 1977, p.247). Although he affirms the primacy of the real, as every Marxist must, it is the internal protocols of theory and not this 'real' which yield the criteria of validity for althusser. For some Marxist scholars, such a position is fraught with grave difficulties. As Norman Geras remarks, 'Any epistemology that sees the relation between the object of knowledge and the real object as a problematic one, i.e., that regards knowledge itself as a problem, is simply ideological and to be rejected for that reason' (Geras, 1977, p.247). Althusser does indeed make a rigorous distinction between the 'object of knowledge' and the 'real object'. While determined in the last instance (rather mysteriously one may add) by the real object, theory can do no more than 'produce' the object of knowledge. He argues that the object of knowledge is 'in itself absolutely distinct and different from the real object ... the idea of the circle, which is the object of knowledge must not be confused with the circle, which is the real object' (Althusser, 1970, p.40).

Althusser conceives theoretical practice as productive labour which transforms the confused, ideologically 'overdetermined' raw material of empirical and subjective derivation into authentic theoretical goods by means of critical, that is, productive ideological insofar as its concepts work with unconsciously operating images and myths. *History and Structure*, pp.93, 94. Generally speaking, ideology corresponds to elaborations derived from immediate or empirical or subjective consciousness; a consciousness driven by interests other than those oriented purely towards knowledge. Indeed, a more ambitious project than Althusser's would be difficult to imagine: its aim being to establish Marxism as a science whose apodictic status would not be altered by social, political and indeed theoretical vicissitudes. The other Marxist thinker who set himself a similar task was of course the young Lukacs, believing that Marxist method, once fully elaborated, would endure regardless of the fluctuations in the fortunes of the working class movement. Although Althusser's evaluation of science was diametrically opposed to that of Lukacs, he dismissed almost every other tendency within Marxism other than that represented by his own interpretation, as flawed. For analyses of Althusser's thought, see Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism* London, Macmillan, 1984; Andre Glucksmann, 'A Ventriloquist Structuralism', in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, London, New Left Books, 1977; Norman Geras, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Assessment', in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, London, New Left Books, 1977. On the general theoretical climate surrounding Althusser in France, see Perry Anderson, 'Structure and Subject' in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984; for a critical discussion of the style of ideological analysis influenced by Althusser, see Conrad Lodziak, 'The Ideology of the Ideological Deconstruction of Media Products', in *Treat Papers in Communications*, Nottingham, 1985.
'interpretation'. What, precisely, is the relationship between the object of knowledge and 'real' object? This is a question which haunts Althusser's work, recalling rather ominously the Kantian duality of the phenomenal and the noumenal. The object of knowledge, Althusser appears to suggest at times, is a stand-in for the real object, facilitating knowledge of the latter by enabling a kind of *epoche*. However, this bracketing becomes more or less permanent since the 'lonely hour of the last instance' fails to arrive. But what exactly is the 'real' in any case? Geras seems to think that for Althusser, it is nothing else than knowledge itself.\(^\text{18}\) Glucksmann, on the other hand, suspects that a secret, but untheorised correspondence between the object of knowledge and real object is presupposed in the Althusserian framework:

> How are we to understand that the structure of the real is to be the 'absolute reference point' for theory without being its object of knowledge - except by presupposing some more secret correspondence between a theory and its object? This underlying correspondence, everywhere present, is never theorized. (Glucksmann, 1977, p.289)

Ted Benton makes the cogent observation that Althusser remains trapped in the classical dilemma of 'subject/object epistemologies' which he was resolved to supersede. Althusser's problem is compounded by the fact that he must reject empiricist and subjectivist foundations of knowledge in decisive terms (Benton, 1984, pp.39-40). But instead of choosing the realist alternative, Althusser, following his

\(^{17}\)Andre Gluksmann argues that the notion of production is the *sine qua non* of Althusserian system, although this point is never sufficiently clarified by Althusser. In an intriguing move, Gluksmann compares the all encompassing character of 'production' in Althusser with Heidegger's concept of Being. See *A Ventriloquist Structuralism*, pp.282-85. Ted Benton explains that for Althusser, theoretical work is to be thought of, at least in its structure, as analogous to other forms of social practice with which it is combined or articulated in society. But it is distinct from them in having its own specific raw materials, means of production, product, and, presumably, form or type of human labour. *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, p.36.

\(^{18}\)Thus, if the object of knowledge in the strict sense is not the real object, the object which is known finally, via the object of knowledge, is the real object. Theoretical practice achieves, through the object of knowledge, the cognitive appropriation of the real object called knowledge. More accurately, it ensures, by means of the continual transformations it effects in the object of knowledge, the 'incessant depeing' of the real object. Norman Geras, 'Althusser's Marxism : An Assessment', pp.243-244. Interestingly, this complex account of the production of knowledge which strives to avoid empiricism, idealism, economic and class reductionisms, moralistic and religious dogmatism and just about every other epistemological sin has similarities with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's somewhat numinous account of how *subaltern* is constructed within hegemonic discourses.
mentor Bachelard, opts instead for the conventionalist one: 'In this latter strategy the internal (conceptual) object of knowledge is privileged, and what counts as 'real' is a function of what is conceptualised as real in current knowledge' (Benton, 1984, p.40). What clearly comes to the fore in this analysis is the impulse to absolutise immanence in a desperate move to secure the foundations of Marxist science against every possible challenge. But that is not an easy thing to do. As Benton explains:

Althusser himself alternates uneasily between both strategies. Sometimes he denies there is anything at all problematic in the object of knowledge-real object relationship, and sometimes asserts that specific sciences stand in no need of external guarantees or tests of their validity. These are both conventionalist responses, and take Althusser down the slippery road to relativism. (Benton, 1984, p.40)

According to Althusser, the subjects' relationship to the material conditions of existence is characterised by 'misrecognition' which he terms 'ideology in general' and defines as 'representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their real conditions of existence'. And, 'I shall adopt Freud's expression word for word, and write ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious' (Althusser, 1971, p.161). Everyone is irredeemably soaked in ideology; ideology has no outside (Althusser, 1971, p.175). Also, 'ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects' (Althusser, 1971, p.176). One could only reiterate that to identify ideology with the very fabric of reality is to risk the ironic outcome of making it coterminous with the frameworks of domination and systematic deception which the critique of ideology must uncover.

Now it may be true that in societies plagued by material inequalities and myriad forms of domination, human relations will not be fully transparent to individuals who are not likely to develop comprehensive understanding of the societal processes. However, it is one thing to deny people the capacity for perfect knowledge, another to declare that they cannot have insights that are objectively valid or which may affect their situation in important ways, at least in specifically defined contexts. It appears
that Althusser tends to overlook this distinction and concludes that since our genesis as subjects involves deceptive and coercive processes of immense complexity, it is futile to reach for an 'outside' of this ideological network. Since the very categories and tools and media that enable us to think, feel, perceive and resist are in turn fundamentally conditioned by that which we try to fight and change, our attempts to bring about fundamental changes in our situations are essentially quixotic. When in response to his critics, Althusser tries to address practical-political implications of his theory, he is faced with a dilemma: he must either sacrifice the integrity of his system or have his credibility as a communist intellectual questioned. In any case, his subsequent references to the theoretical significance of class struggle remain mere assertions in that they are not, indeed cannot be, integrated within the original theoretical framework (Elliot, 1987, pp.186-244). As though to compensate for his theoretical aloofness, he seeks to re-invent himself as a partisan but ends up endorsing Maoist dogmas (Elliot, 1987, pp.198-199).19

In many ways, Althusser appropriates the least illuminating aspects of Gramsci's legacy without being able to surpass the acuity of his predecessor's conjunctural analyses. Thus, his theory of 'ideological state apparatuses' thematises the confused and excessive character of Gramsci's reflections on the relationship between civil society and the state and makes matters worse by ignoring the vital distinctions, thereby, assimilating the former into the latter. Furthermore, in developing Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Althusser performs the astonishing feat of overlooking the capitalist state's capacity for domination, concentrating exclusively on the frameworks of ideological incorporation whose effectiveness he duly absolutises. Thus, every institution of the capitalist society is revealed to be an embodiment of the state's intentions. Perry Anderson comments that such theoretical excesses could only

19 Lukacs' career followed a similar trajectory after History and Class Consciousness degenerating into a period of accommodation with Stalinism in which Lukacs could bring himself to endorse some of the most obtuse Zhdanovite positions in the name of communist solidarity.
obfuscate political realities:

For once the position is adopted that all ideological and political superstructures—including the family, reformist trade unions and parties, and private media—are by definition State apparatuses; in strict logic it becomes impossible and unnecessary to distinguish bourgeois democracies and fascism. (Anderson, 1976-77)

The vice of abstraction invades almost all aspects of Althusser's system, producing dramatic results. His conception of ideology is a case in point. Indeed, even if one were to concede that a degree of misrecognition is endemic to all interaction in the capitalist societies, would it be reasonable to extend this intuition in an undifferentiated manner to all times and places? 20 Surely, there are significant qualitative distinctions to be reckoned with; these may not be readily discernible or empirically verifiable in every instance, but, on the other hand, they may not be so negligible or subtle as to elude every mode of recognition and expression. To take just one example, even a superficial comparison of art works from different eras makes it plain that social experiences underlying the two are qualitatively different, although these may not be of the kind to justify the construction of ontological typologies.

Similarly, cultural products of advanced capitalist societies cannot be ideological in exactly the same sense as the cultural products of, say, Asian and African societies in whose case the very notion of a distinct aesthetic sphere would be problematic. Theory should be able to make such distinctions without degenerating into Orientalist, racial or teleological schemas.

20 It has been argued that Althusserian approach, by focusing exclusively on the texts of Marx which were, after all, written in the nineteenth century, offers somewhat schematic and quaint accounts of contemporary societies. In doing so, it remains faithful to the limits of Marx's own fragmentary reflections in Pre-Capitalist Formations. But it fails altogether to confront the wealth of historical evidence accumulated since Marx on the diversity of pre-capitalist societies. A much more sophisticated set of concepts is needed to grasp the wide gamut of relationships between the direct producer and the means of production in such modes of production. In other words, the project of a direct theorization of the basic elements of all possible modes of production from the literal texts of Marx risks naivete: it assumes a finished corpus where Marx in fact left only preliminary guesses and incomplete signposts. 'Introduction to Glucksmann, Western Marxism: A Critical Reader', p.276. Also, Jean Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production, ST. Louis, Telos Press, 1975. By pretending to illuminate earlier societies in the light of the present structure of the capitalist economy, it [Marxist epistemology] fails to see that, abolishing their difference, it projects on to them the spectral light of political economy: 'P. 66.
It is apparent that Althusserian treatment of ideology, consciousness and subjective experience fails to draw productive conclusions from Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. Every discussion of ideology in the context of capitalist societies must be sensitive to this analysis which has illustrated that the development of capitalist production, distribution and exchange introduces mystificatory frameworks which render previous forms of dissimulation relatively benign in comparison. Thus, only a method that is 'superior' but not necessarily insensitive to other methods would succeed in penetrating the opacity or excessive transparence of the capitalist society. Although political economists move beyond external relations between commodities and derive them from labour, Marx points out that they fail to undertake radical enough a critique of the commodity form. Such a critique would make it clear that only destruction of the commodity form could restore rationality and normality to the alienated social relations. Since the classical economists do not come to this conclusion, they 'remain more or less in the grip of the world of illusions'. However, as Geras has sought to demonstrate, it would be a mistake to conclude that the illusions referred to by Marx are mere subjective phenomena which would become understandable by an altered consciousness (Geras, 1971, p. 75). These illusions are products of objective conditions, and it is these peculiar socio-historical conditions which invest the commodity with its enigmatic character. The culprit in a sense is the law of abstract exchange which allows two entities to be treated as (formally) equal without regard either for their inherent characteristics or the specificity of the processes through which they are produced. Thus, one may speak of contradiction between the 'use-value' of a thing and the value which it acquires during exchange, but this contradiction is repressed to establish the dominance of exchange value.

This aspect of the capitalist society gives a whole new significance to the concept of ideology. With the processes of capitalist rationalisation becoming more extensive as well as intensive, thing-like quality of social relations is enhanced and the
awareness of natural and historical connections becomes progressively attenuated. When this state of affairs becomes sufficiently advanced, as for instance in the monopolistic phase of capitalist development, it even penetrates 'alternative' and 'oppositional' perspectives. What may have been regarded in an earlier period as 'natural' could now seem archaic, exotic, possibly even pathological. It would be too dramatic, of course, to ask whether Althusser succumbs to the power of commodification since he construes 'misrecognition' as an eternal condition, suppressing the fairly straightforward observation of Marx that the modern world is the product of specific socio-historical processes involving struggling, suffering human beings whose consent to their progressive de-humanisation can be neither absolute nor permanent.

This point touches upon another serious deficiency of Althusser's thought. Its treatment of fetishism deals only with the mystificatory aspect without paying much heed to domination/alienation (Geras 1971, p. 72-73). As noted above, the tendency to disentangle those Marxist concepts which acquire their full force only as elements of an ensemble, often subtracts from their critical potential, and Althusser, whose dismissal of Marx's early works and the problematic of alienation is nothing short of exemplary, does indulge in such excesses. Norman Geras points out correctly that in Althusser:

...the concept of alienation, as that form of domination engendered by capitalist relations of production, is replaced and here is its surviving trace by the notion of men as the mere functionaries, or bearers (Trager) of the relations of production which determine their functions. What Marx regards as a feature specific to capitalist relations of production, Althusser articulates as a general proposition of historical materialism. Thus de-historicising the concept of alienation in a manner quite strange for a Marxist author (for how is this different from the fault of the classical political economists who regard commodity production as eternal?) he makes it impossible to comprehend, from this perspective, those passages in which Marx anticipates a future social formation where, precisely, men will control their relations of production, rather than be controlled by them, where they will, therefore cease to be mere functionaries and bearers. (Geras, 1971, p. 74)

This brief assessment of Althusser's thought sketches out a number of themes
which appear to have been exacerbated during some French intellectuals' slide beyond dialectics and modernity, even beyond structuralism and 'history'. Liquidation of the historical dimension, liquidation of the utopian dimension, liquidation of the subject of history, evacuation of conscious human element from 'production' and its essentialisation as 'technology'. Neglect of 'alienation' as a signifier of violated human potential and subjective protest over this violation. Notion of relatively autonomous practices with their relatively autonomous zones of effectivity and relatively autonomous temporalities and historicities is another important theme which is taken up by poststructuralism.

One of the most prominent features of the Marxist reflection on culture has been its negative character which is energised by the question: In what ways does culture prevent revolution from occurring which is inscribed in the deeper nature of things?²¹ For early Marxists, more confident that the revolution was on its way, the question of culture failed to acquire the significance which it would for their descendents, especially in the West. Thus, Engels, Plekhanov and even Lenin to some extent, were inclined to conceive culture in functional terms. Only with Lukacs, Korsch and Gramsci does a serious reflection on cultural matters commence, although it must be reiterated that the rise of fascism poses this challenge with particular intensity to Gramsci. For Gramsci, therefore, the task becomes emphatically one of

²¹ See Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976. Commenting on Marx's erasure of culture from the order of production, Sahlins writes that, 'The cultural order of production ... was in decisive respect naturalised, to generate the superstructures as culturalized forms of a natural order.' P. 128. Furthermore, 'The action of reproduction, naturalised, at once escapes a symbolic determination and dialectically overcomes it, to itself determine the symbolic system. The infrastructure responds to the greater wisdom of things-in-themselves, and Marx's anthropology comes after production but not in it.' P.28. Likewise, Baudrillard (1975) has sought to demonstrate the ethnocentric character of Marxist epistemology which, in failing to break out of political economy, has perpetuated the Enlightenment's denigration of non European societies, which are portrayed as either 'underdeveloped' versions of Europe or as irrational and ahistorical. In either case, they are to be saved from themselves by the rational and developed Europe. Due to its objectivist materialist pretensions, Marxism, like other off shoots of the Enlightenment, consecrates 'production' as the foundational category which inevitably neutralises complex phenomena. In other words, Marxist epistemology remains blind to the symbolic dimension, preventing rich, non-European cultures from inspiring a qualitatively different theory and practice. PP. 46-51; 65-67.
countering fascism rather than of articulating normative or epistemological justifications of Marxism. The success of fascists in mobilising a broad cross section of the population including elements of the working class by securing nodal points of the civil society and penetrating its capillaries, so to speak, forces Gramsci to come to grips with this remarkable phenomenon. It has even been argued that Gramsci tracks fascism so closely that his theory of socialist (counter) hegemony becomes a mirror image of fascist strategy (Scruton, 1985, pp. 84-85). It does appear that in Gramsci’s theory, a politicised civil society envelops everything including the state itself, with specificities of the social, the political, the cultural and personal tending to disappear.

Lukacs’ work, on the other hand, is arguably the most ambitious and systematic attempt by a Marxist to lay the foundations of an alternative culture and epistemology. Thus, although the proletariat was in principle expected to create new, socialist forms automatically after the revolution, Lukacs undertakes detailed analysis of the material-systematic as well as cultural-ideological factors which legitimise bourgeois rule and impede the formation of revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat. His critique of the antinomies of the bourgeois thought, although grounded in his encompassing notion of reification, exhibits profound understanding of the Western tradition and foreshadows many of critical strategies of Western Marxism, particularly those of the Frankfurt School. However, once political-epistemological guarantees constituted by Hegelian philosophy, Marxist Political-Economy and the inevitability of the revolution disappear, the distance between the young Lukacs’ theoretical project and that of Heidegger shrinks, bringing to the fore totalising, foundational urges and a quasi-religious antipathy to modern forms (Goldmann, 1979). Lukacs may have questioned Lenin’s characterisation of post-revolutionary politics as ‘administration of things’ but his own alternatives suggests an equally simplistic and oppressive, manipulation of things, by the homogeneous and titanic subject. In retrospect, the undertakings of Lukacs and Heidegger appear, notwithstanding their opposing ideological orientations, as systematic attempts to re-
enchant the world in the face of nihilistic forces represented by technology for
Heidegger and capitalist rationality for Lukacs. Both visions exhibit remarkable
insensitivity to ethical and political questions perhaps because the ethical and political
realms are treated as dependent sub-sectors of the larger 'system' which is to be
transformed in its entirety.

However, it is one thing to highlight the problematic aspects of a theoretical
constellation, another to reject it in its entirety or to assume that 'new', more adequate
paradigms are readily available. Thanks perhaps to the ubiquity of reification, the
riddle of 'thing-in-itself' still refuses to surrender to the power of mere thought. It does
not follow, of course, that thought should succumb to some numinous conception of
irrationality, curtailing itself masochistically in anticipation of miracles or instant
enlightenment. As 'anti-humanist' positions threaten to replace older dogmas, it is
important to emphasise that neither contemplative or agnostic dis-engagement from the
object nor mindless, positivistic appropriation of it, would lead to adequate levels of
theoretical consciousness.

Althusser’s project, like that of Lukacs, absorbs enormous intellectual energy
to fortify Marxism as a science with the capacity to adjudicate in every sphere of
activity. That such a grandiose project was doomed from the start seems obvious now,
making all the more intriguing the accolades which were lavished upon Althusserian
enterprise in its hey day, transforming it into an international phenomenon.22 Many of
its critics point to the obsessive self-enclosure and tortured scholasticism of

---

22 See Susan James, 'Louis Althusser', in Quentin Skinner, ed., The Return of Grand Theory in the
Human Sciences. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985. To begin with, his emphasis on
Marx's materialism excited the sympathy of those, who while committed to Marxism as a general
political philosophy, were hostile to the 'humanist' interpretation which focused on its Hegelian
aspects. For many people this was no Marxism at all, and Althusser promised a return to something
more traditional. This attempt to rejuvenate an old fashioned commitment also gained in
attractiveness from Althusser’s close concentration on Marx’s texts. P.156. Althusser’s resounding cry
to return to the Master’s words in the face of multifarious corruptions threatening the integrity of the
message is a typical impulse of reform movements aiming to purify a creed by returning to its
fundamentals.
Althusser's system which failed to connect with the political practice which it had aimed to refine. They also point to Althusser's quest for conceptual purity which refused any contact with the empirical. Dissociated from life, concepts could multiply, rather mutate at random, becoming monstrously self-referential, obliterating limits and forms to which they only make abstract references.

Since the discrepancy between the empirical and theoretical becomes a categorical schism in Althusser's system, the system must ceaselessly expand to become a substitute for the world which is denied the capacity to mediate with theory. Paradoxically, this Marxist edifice does not allow any systematic response to the world other than abstract denial of existent forms on the one hand and their quasi-positivistic description on the other. Most other responses would have to be arbitrary, extra-theoretical varieties of decisionism. In the final analysis, Althusser's system is an elaborately constructed, colourless refuge from the world; it has no room whatsoever for subjective expressions, whether of suffering or joy.\(^{23}\) Nor would it have any truck with norms other than those which it prescribes dogmatically. Needless to say, this framework demands nothing less than conversion from those who are not already committed to Marxism. In a sense, Althusser's theory mimics religious dogma, replacing ritual with theoretical 'rigour', cultivating an intense paranoia towards challenging questions and dissent. In this closed universe, there is hardly any room for conscious moral agents or a political practice which could engage with the world as it is. These observations will help to evaluate the appropriation of Althusserian insights by critical theorists and theorists of postcoloniality.

\(^{23}\)In his autobiography which has an uncanny, posthumous quality about it, Althusser provides disturbing insights into his sense of dissociation from the world and of his life-long struggle with crippling melancholia. It is ironic and not a little sad that when describing his identity crisis, the merciless anti-humanist has to resort to the subjectivist vocabulary which was repudiated in his attacks on Sartre and Existentialists. See *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, London, Vintage, 1994.
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE FATE OF REASON
CHAPTER 2

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE FATE OF REASON

This chapter aims to discuss the critique of modernity stemming from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Not only are cultural implications of modernity highlighted in this tradition, but it would not be inappropriate to say that modernity itself is interpreted as a cultural phenomenon. It is important to discuss this tradition because its contribution to the reflection on modernity has been nothing short of seminal. Furthermore, in the aftermath of Marxism's crisis, an increasing number of scholars active in the fields of social, political and cultural theory have been turning towards this tradition as a critical resource. Arguably the most influential theoretical movement of the times, namely postmodernism, has adopted Friedrich Nietzsche as an emblamatic figure, having repudiated Marx as being incurably metaphysical. The other significant theoretical tendency is represented by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School some of whose early exponents were fully aware of Nietzsche's stature as a thinker and, appropriated some of his ideas to enrich their Marx inspired critique of modernity. Critical theorists' engagement with Nietzsche's thought was mediated by Weberian sociology of culture which sought to maintain a careful balance between the causal import of material and cultural factors. Postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche will be contrasted with the Weberian approach to Nietzsche to prepare the ground for a critical articulation between critical theory and postmodernism.

Interestingly, both modernists and postmodernists offer similar interpretations of Nietzsche's thought although they proceed to draw different political, cultural and

---

1See for instance, Clayton Koelb, ed., Nietzsche as Postmodernist Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990. 'It is difficult to discuss post-modernism without invoking Nietzsche, and it is difficult to discuss Nietzsche without invoking issues now widely associated with post modernity.' P. 7.
epistemological conclusions. Both groups tend to construe Nietzsche's thought as mainly irrational, aesthetic, apolitical and fragmentary. There is little consideration given to the more explicitly political, not to say, rational and realist aspects of his thought. This is symptomatic of the broader trend whereby particular aspects of Nietzsche's thought are appropriated in a manner that exaggerates their significance, neglecting other aspects as being unimportant. Thus, there is Kaufman's existentialist Nietzsche, Nehmas' perspectivist Nietzsche and the fascists' anti-Semitic Nietzsche. If Heidegger's Nietzsche is obsessed with 'will to power', then Foucault's genealogist will have nothing to do with fixed notions of truth. So far as Derrida is concerned, Nietzsche is above all else a seasoned de-constructionist. While most of these interpretations are plausible and some are quite illuminating, they tend to inflate themselves into hegemonic perspectives and impede further reflection on other, equally enriching aspects of Nietzsche's thought. Thus, labelling him as a modernist or a postmodernist would preclude the line of inquiry which might suggest that his texts offer insights which subvert both modernist and postmodernist interpretations.

It would be a pity if sterile polemics and dogmatic closures were to distract from the wealth of subtle and penetrating insights which Nietzsche's work has to offer to an attentive reader. This is borne out by recent scholarship which has sought to highlight his contribution as a political thinker (Patton, 1993; Owen, 1995; Warren, 1988; Strong, 1988). I would suggest that the relatively standardised interpretations of the recognisably modernist and post modernist varieties be juxtaposed with the more complex and ambivalent appropriations of Max Weber, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, so that the tensions underpinning Nietzsche's understanding of modernity and almost ripping him apart, may be fully appreciated. He is a contradictory, even incoherent thinker, which is understandable given the scale of the problems he had set himself. However, it would be facile to elevate his inconsistencies into a kind of higher postmodern or de-constructive wisdom. Without necessarily lapsing into psychological or sociological reductionisms,
one should be able to say that although Nietzsche was certainly a rare and complex personality, and a great thinker, yet in more than a mere trivial sense, he was 'human, all too human', prone to change his mind and even heart, like the rest, and to become confused and angry from time to time.

In this chapter, I will focus on the problematic of nihilism, hoping to foreground the Platonic and even Machiavellian elements of Nietzsche's analysis which, in my view, should not be ignored. In addition, I will discuss his thoughts on scepticism, another trope celebrated in postmodernist literature. Once again, Nietzsche's views turn out to be more nuanced and multivalent than those of his exegetes. Then, I will go on to elaborate Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche which also impinges on the development of Heidegger's own thought. It seems that the relation between Heidegger's philosophy and politics is affected by his immanentist, gnostic outlook on the world, although that does not invalidate the significance of his critique of modernity. Then I will discuss his thinking of the post-war period to see if it has the potential to enact a non-appropriative dialogue with 'other' modes of thinking in an age increasingly recognised as nihilistic.

The final section is meant to illustrate the political, ethical and epistemological challenges of post-metaphysical era and how post-Nietzschean thought has responded to them. Postmodern views on the interrelationship of politics, epistemology and ethics will be contrasted with Max Weber's views on similar issues. In general, the postmodernists celebrate the uncertainty and chaos of the post-metaphysical situation as liberating, whereas Weber's stance is far more cautious, ambivalent, almost tragic. It is not clear whether postmodernists, with their ecstatic disavowal of material and metaphysical tyrannies of the age, can address the ethical and political questions thrown up by their own interpretation of the 'post modern condition'. Likewise, it is debatable if their abstract inversion of modernist quasi-theology actually leads to a
wordly, secular and liberating thought, or if the postmodernists are any less the 'people of the book'.

Post modern Critique of Modernity

The following account draws together the main strands of post modernism's philosophical critique of the Enlightenment. Many of these themes occur in the work of Nietzsche and some of them may not be so explicitly articulated in the postmodern discourse although they are central to it. It may be considered a slightly dramatised, if not necessarily ideal typical, account of postmodernism's counter-narrative of Enlightenment.

After the death of God and the overthrow of monarchies, the Enlightenment project becomes the vehicle of perpetuating the reign of theological motif and ascetic modes of being. Science emerges as the guarantor of truth to legitimise the grandiose conception of modernity. The model of truth associated with natural sciences is then appropriated by social and human sciences. As Michel Foucault has sought to demonstrate, these fields of knowledge become deeply implicated in the processes of societal rationalisation and formation of 'docile subjectivities' which facilitate 'enlightened' modes of governance. Critics suspect that the Enlightenment's dream of emancipation through knowledge masked insidious forms of domination which are far more difficult to think through and resist than ancient and medieval tyrannies ever were.

In a certain sense, modernists are revealed to be the people of the book, for whom scientific treatises, canonical texts of social science, Marxist theory, etc replace holy books. These texts, bearing authentic imprints of the real, are seen to hold the key to the future in which human beings will master and even re-shape reality.
Accordingly, modern 'man' becomes prey to a fantastic optimism and develops the insidious malady of literalism. He seeks the fulfillment of his intentions in words which are presumed to represent the 'essence' of reality. The quasi-mystical enactment of theory's marriage with practice, intention's perfect translation into outcomes, leaves little room for the possibility that ideas may not be faithful reflections of reality or that they could resist the virtuous exertions of ideology critique. The modernist deification of knowledge cannot allow the objects to escape the intentions of the 'homo-faber' nor entertain the possibility that the 'cunning of reason' may not always throw its lot with the dialectically oriented subject. That even the most rigorously planned and executed 'projects' may give rise to 'unintended consequences' about which little may be known at the time of planning or execution. Thus, postmodernism counsels modesty and caution to the 'post-metaphysical' theorist: when it is virtually impossible to distinguish between some pre-representational, 'pure' reality from the so-called representations, then it would be ridiculous to believe that 'reality' could be mastered through knowledge of some sort. It follows that the relationship between theory and practice cannot be one of cause and effect, devoid of the element of contingency.

From the postmodernist standpoint, institutionalised 'Reason' becomes no less chauvinistic than the medieval Church in demonising anything that seems to resist or even ignore its neutralising protocols: madmen, orientals, peasants, etc. Stubborn and threatening differences are dealt with severely and efficiently: through incarceration, exclusion, normalisation and sometimes annihilation. Scientifically legitimised, 'radical' projects of social emancipation which unfolded under the banner of Marxism could only produce catastrophes which must bring under closer scrutiny the Promethean, heroic image of man in relentless pursuit of new frontiers and total mastery, having secured the all-consuming flame of knowledge.

It would not be unfair to say that postmodernism signifies a moment of intense disillusionment with the titanic conception of the modern subject. As mentioned
before, this subject is seen to exhibit an appropriative relationship with nature and other beings, having usurped the divine aura. Thus, a radically secular tendency in the postmodernist constellation has underscored the finitude of the human self and the fragility of its habitat, being more inclined to regard the Promethean drive as a sadomasochistic compulsion or curse than a mark of quasi-divinity. Accordingly, systems of knowledge which exemplify the modern subject's command of reality are interpreted as substitutes for theological and metaphysical discourses which had sought to bind people to static, unconditional dictates. Thus, epistemologically, postmodernism may be construed as a form of radical scepticism whose objectives, however, are not exhausted either by the Humean problematisation of the cognitive and experiential functions or by the philosophical destruction of philosophy associated with Al-Ghazali. Whereas Hume could rely on cultural conventions and mundane 'diversions' in the face of corrosive uncertainty and whereas Al-Ghazali's intention had been to place orthodoxy beyond the pale of philosophical scrutiny, more radical among the postmodernists eschew deference to tradition, culture, discursive formations or anything which demands unconditional loyalty. At the same time, they question the liberal conception of the modern individual as abstract and oppressingly metaphysical in its celebration of subjective autonomy and coherence.

To the extent that postmodernism questions the liberal, communitarian and culturalist positions as being foundationalist in one way or the other, it is tempting to construe it as a form of abstract negation which remains parasitical on the discourses being criticised or deconstructed and, has little, if anything, to contribute in the way of substantive political alternatives. Thus, some critics of postmodernism claim that notwithstanding the rhetorical invocation of otherness, it evinces few signs of substantive engagement with the marginalised or repressed narratives other than Western (Morley, 1996, pp.338-40). There is also the more serious epistemological question of postmodernists being trapped in a performative contradiction. Given that 'truth' of the universal, totalising discourses is a thoroughly adulterated product of
power, convention and rhetorical effects, what, if any thing could guarantee the truth of their own assertions and negations? Like all forms of radical scepticism, must postmodernist critique either explode in hyper-relativist fragmentation or congeal into silence, especially if it is to resist conventionalist and decisionistic closures? Can it exorcise the ghost of a theoretical legacy from which it derives its impetus but which it tends to construct as the other? Is postmodernism therefore guilty of perpetuating the gestures of denial and exclusion which it associates with the modernist project? Is it possible that the polemic between ‘modernists’ and ‘postmodernists’ conceals enduring affinities between what are in the final analysis two forms of Western cultural-epistemological hegemony?

Nietzsche’s Confrontation With Modernity

Nietzsche’s point of departure, like that of Marx, was the awareness that something was seriously amiss in times that promised to liberate mankind from fears, superstitions and blind dictates of nature. Apostles of liberalism had been proclaiming in deafening tones that after being forced to deny their desires and dreams for millennia, human beings were about to enjoy earthly bliss. Nietzsche may not have been the first to find these propositions misleading but his response was arguably the most eloquent, and has indeed proved to be the most influential. He discerned something false in the celebration of individual autonomy, democratic iconoclasm and progressive values that was taking place in Europe. He suspected that the cultural horizon of modernity was still clouded by the after-effects of an event which modernity claimed to have mastered, namely the death of God.

For Nietzsche (and Heidegger) modernity is related to God’s death in ways that disclose something like its essence. Disregarding the facile optimism of liberals, Nietzsche insisted that the consequences of God’s de-valuation are ambiguous and will not become apparent for centuries. At one level, it is something to be celebrated in that
the source of eternal bondage, relentless surveillance and moral terror is considered to have been vanquished, leaving human beings free in a world that need no longer groan under the weight of other-worldly commandments and stultifying asceticism. Finally, men and women could recognise each other as earth bound creatures, value their own and others' desires and create forms that express their joy in being free, natural and mortal beings who can nevertheless consecrate life. Having dispensed with the eternal scape goat, they could assume responsibility for their deeds and aspirations and make concerted effort to reduce senseless, metaphysically driven wastage of resources and avoidable suffering. If the world is a violent and unhappy place largely because far too many people experience a mutilated yearning for existence in the place of a truly empowering connection between their desires and the world, then, it may be that a world that is not subject to metaphysical and theological imperatives distorting human intercourse and, which is more hospitable to expressions of differences, would be a happier, livelier place. In the absence of overriding compulsions to categorise differences and redeem established patterns of individuation, it is conceivable that there would be less need to dominate and greater inclination to relate to life-forms without regard to their pedigree or putative utility. Rather than pursuing grandiose metaphysical projects which obscure and belittle what makes life truly worth living - intimate moments, chance encounters, smells, sights, sounds of all kinds, alluring liminality of absurd beings, mystery of begetting and losing - one would let things be, live. This is a somewhat simplifying gloss on some of Nietzsche's ideas, but it represents the avatar of Nietzsche which postmodernists cherish. There are glimpses of this 'aesthetic', 'apolitical' Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*: he who celebrates the tragic efflorescence of Dionysian ecstasy and pantheistic communion with all; the dancing pagan who cautions mortals against the hubris of instrumental mastery and invites all to prepare for the Dionysian pageant, from 'India to Greece'.

But there is of course another, Apollonian, not to say Machiavellian Nietzsche the brutality of whose thought is not fully registered by the postmodernists. His
chilling verdicts in favour of aristocratic, Brahmanic values may be read in *Beyond Good and Evil, Genealogy of Morals* and in the fragments comprising *The Will to Power*. This Nietzsche is adamant that only a select few, those whom he calls noble, are likely to surmise the horizon of possibilities vacated by God; a challenge requiring infinite courage and resourcefulness. For the great majority of the earth's human population, however, death of God is nothing short of a catastrophe, because 'God', after all, stands for the highest values. When the most sacred values lose their prestige without being replaced by another constellation of comparable prestige, the masses are likely to be devastated. They become confused and depressed because they can no longer justify life; they can no longer see its worth, and thus, life appears meaningless to them. This state of disorientation and 'anomie' is in Nietzsche's view a symptom of nihilism which haunts modernity after God's supposed demise. Those who are subjected to this terror will do anything to escape its vice like grip. 'History', 'Revolution', 'Nation', 'Great Leader', 'Chosen People' etc. come in handy as substitutes. These are of course inauthentic alternatives for Nietzsche, judging by his antipathy to cultural and political developments in contemporary Europe.

Since the distinction between noble/strong and base/weak is so crucial for Nietzsche, it would be useful to clarify what it generally designates. Nietzsche employs the categories of noble and base to characterise human types and classes as well as societies and whole epochs. To simplify his account somewhat, the former is permeated by a heightened feeling for life which is typically expressed as strength, as the will to overpower, re-value and enrich life; to create. Such persons or periods are active, expansive and venturesome. By contrast, what Nietzsche terms 'low' or weak is marked by reactive, resentful, defensive, contemplative tendencies. It is the concern for survival which determines the fundamental orientation of this type. Nietzsche is interested in this type to the extent that it impinges on the development of the other. Likewise, when he investigates the problem of nihilism, he does so with the well being of the noble type in mind. The addressee of his writings are also the handful of free
spirits and geniuses in waiting. These points are usually lost in the postmodern readings of Nietzsche which are content to draw wide ranging conclusions from his captivating account of Dionysian undoing of subjectivity.

Nihilism

Nietzsche's meditations on the question of nihilism are complex and wide ranging, encompassing material, cultural, philosophical and psychological dimensions of the problem. As described above, a simple way to understand nihilism would be to view it as loss of faith in the highest values, with disorientation, demoralisation, dissipation and in extreme cases, self-destruction being typical consequences. What are the conditions in which such a crisis becomes possible? According to Nietzsche, loss of faith in the highest values may be a consequence of weakness, in that certain amount of strength is required to preserve an active, enriching relation to anything, be it a person, a deity or a system of ideas. The weak or exhausted people often cling to symbols of power and energy, but since that clinging is overdetermined by the need to survive, it remains blind to the content of what is grasped. What the weak seek is remedy not relationship, and in cases of extreme weakness, even clinging may become difficult. Not surprisingly, Nietzsche observes that an unmistakable symptom of weakness or decadence is the craving for stimulants, intoxicants and other means whereby consciousness of powerlessness may be obliterated. Following his breach with Richard Wagner, he would sometimes allude to the latter's music as an example of decadent, consolatory art which relieves the weak and the weary from the responsibility of confronting their lives (Nietzsche, 1967).²

²For a useful account of Nietzsche's relationship with Wagner and the deeper, psychological implications it had for Nietzsche's development, see Carl Pletsch, Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius, New York, Free Press.
In Nietzsche's opinion, Christianity has been a particularly effective weapon for the downtrodden, transforming resentment, asceticism and priestly cunning into a world - historical force. By de-valuing and marginalising courageous, clear-headed encounters with reality and by fostering weakness and submissiveness through a superabundance of consolations, it has managed to create an evasive, therapeutic civilisation which treats differences as threats and elevates formal equality to the level of a heavenly ordinance (Nietzsche, 1990b). Thus, Christianity, which he terms 'Platonism for the masses' has been instrumental in producing 'Man'; that abstract, empty universal which he holds in contempt, as does Marx, although for different reasons. For Marx, the notion of universal human subject is ideological in that it distracts from brutal inequalities which exist between 'actually existing men' in the class divided society. Nevertheless, he believes that universalist connotations of the notion would be actualised in the post-capitalist society of the future. Nietzsche, on the other hand is adamant that Christian and Socialist conceptions of 'Man' constitute gross misrepresentations of reality which is at bottom a ceaseless battle between wills of different potencies that is never going to terminate in the kind of harmonious states depicted in Christian and Socialist idylls. He argues that Christians and Socialists , by absolutising a perverse, 'pariah' interpretation of reality which was bound to disappoint people in the age of science, have caused incalculable damage to the deepest resources of creativity. He regards this development as a protracted though half-conscious intrigue on the part of reactive and perverted forces to neutralise the sources of genuine strength and de-moralise those personalities which have the potential to affirm life unconditionally and create values that may re-enchant existence. As a result, the modern, Christian civilisation exalts the basest and most egoistic values on the pretext of creating heaven on earth.

What postmodern appropriations of Nietzsche's critique of repressive subjectification often overlook is the distinction he makes between derangement and narcosis impelled by weakness and, ecstatic dissolution of subjective confines due to a
superabundance of life and strength. Indeed, Nietzsche exclaims that even Dionysian melancholy and the propensity for frenzied self-annihilation spring from the sacred depths of life and are ultimately joyous. They are not to be confused with the masochistic rites of self-preservation and 'sickness unto death' of convoluted spiritlessness which having exhausted all stimulants and intoxicants could only perish although it would like others to interpret its failure as a spiritual triumph. Referring to Dionysian ecstasy, he writes: 'Life itself - life's eternal fruitfulness and recurrence caused anguish, destruction, and the will to annihilation' (Nietzsche, 1924, p. 421). In Nietzsche's view, the strength to live, the passion to create and the serenity to understand others can only emerge from the act of living; from regarding suffering and misfortunes no less than blessings as being intrinsic to life. We must express gratitude to life no matter what, since we are ultimately responsible for our inescapably tragic existence. The type of man that Nietzsche admires does not blame his suffering on worldly or otherworldly scape goats, nor does he experience this responsibility as a crushing burden. In short, only he who is truly alive can peer into the head of Medusa without ceasing to laugh, to play and to choose, although transfiguration of subjectivity through art might be necessary in moments of unadulterated terror. Nietzsche's doctrine of amor fati, which he formulated towards the end of his productive life and which has been interpreted by many as a 'counter ideal' and a godless, immanentist theology, recommends unquestioning faith in life, forbidding craven recourse to transcendental escape clauses and theodicies.

Drawing support from Nietzsche's thought, postmodernists espouse an unqualified scepticism, whereas it is my contention that Nietzsche's thought offers a far more nuanced assessment of scepticism as a strategy of epistemological and cultural liberation. Postmodernists do not appear to confront what are in Nietzsche's opinion 'dangers' of scepticism. While they are perfectly justified in appropriating aspects of Nietzsche's work that suit their own purposes, the foregrounding of the 'other' Nietzsche does problematise the general image of Nietzsche as a postmodern icon.
Thus, the focus of this section is on those aspects of Nietzsche's work which deal with political issues rather than aesthetic. And, since Nietzsche often has in mind the perspective of 'masters' rather than of 'slaves', some of his comments are obviously repugnant to democratic sensibilities. Yet, critical theorists and especially post colonial theorists must confront and learn from this 'dark' Nietzsche if they are to overcome their somewhat sentimental, self congratulatory attitude to understand what domination can do to its objects and how cunning and resourceful 'masters' often are.

When highest values, such as God, ancestors or tradition are subjected to rational, sceptical critique and stripped of mystery and power, these values are liable to become de-valued, engendering cultural and epistemological chaos whose political consequences are rarely predictable. Scepticism can serve tyrannies as it can freedom. Scepticism is clearly a double-edged weapon. While it can break worn out moulds obstructing life's flow, it can also give rise to uncertainty and fear by destroying those imaginary maps and enchanting shelters that human beings find indispensable in their struggle for meaning and belonging in the midst of an indifferent, rather overwhelming universe. Being aware of scepticism's corrosive potential, Nietzsche terms it 'spider scepticism' to indicate how it can squeeze life out of those who fall into its trap; how it can rob them of convictions and how it can replace their strength and intuition with intellectual poison. It has contributed to the disenchantment of the world by clearing the dense undergrowth of myths, beliefs and 'values'; thereby preparing the void which enlightenment could then saturate with its desecrating glare.

In its quantifying, analytical zeal, the Enlightenment fails to realise that the horizon of sacred, unconditional values is what creates the atmosphere in which the masses can endure the brutality and drudgery of existence while avoiding menacing existential questions. The notion of atmosphere, whether energising or enervating, is crucial for Nietzsche's theory of decadence. He is aware that institutionalised scepticism, backed up by the power of state and technology, can disturb the intricate
balance between a host of subtle, local elements that make up an enchanting, rich atmosphere conducive to creativity. Of course, Heidegger refines this idea even further in his meditations on the subtle interplay of forces which transforms a space into 'place' and ultimately 'home'. Heidegger's emphasis on 'stimmung' (mood) of different epochs and places captures the essence of Nietzsche's endeavour to intuit the physiognomy of an age.

Nietzsche's low estimation of 'scholars', the certified practitioners of scepticism, is well known and will not be discussed in detail. It would be sufficient to highlight the main points. He claims that the scholar, in his attempt to be 'objective' and open to every conceivable possibility becomes an indifferent, neutral, will-less creature; an 'instrument, let us say a mirror'. He can neither create nor master real problems of life, rather he should be considered a 'delicate, empty, elegant, flexible mould which has first to wait for some content' (Nietzsche, 1990a, pp.134-35). Thus, the scholar is 'something of a slave, if certainly the sublimest kind of slave, but in himself he is nothing' (Nietzsche, 1990a, p.135). In sum, the scholar's will is attuned to contemplation and not praxis, which is something of a perversion because, will by definition is geared towards producing effects in the world. While there is a healthy type of scepticism associated with strong, creative people who manage to retain a 'firm hold on the heart', Nietzsche fears that scepticism is usually a refined expression of weakness and mediocrity because it can function, just like rationalism, as a refuge against active nihilism which is a tonic for courageous, tragic spirits (Nietzsche, 1990a, p.136). Just as tragedy can be the sublimest goad to action, so scepticism, while ostensibly worldly and nemesis of illusions, can function as a 'sedative' in the face of challenging insights, leading to the paralysis of will (Nietzsche, 1990b, pp.136-37). In many cases, when a difficult situation calls for a decision or commitment, scepticism saves the day and, not infrequently, the sanctity of one's conscience. Indeed, if nothing is ultimately comprehensible and reflection is
to be the ultimate arbiter of conflicts, then how could one be ‘ultimately’ responsible for anything? Nietzsche illustrates this problem with his characteristic flair:

‘Uncertainty too has its charms, the sphinx too is a Circe, Circe too was a philosopher.’ Thus does a sceptic console himself; and it is true he stands in need of some consolation. For scepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition called in ordinary language nervous debility and sickness…(Nietzsche, 1990a, p. 136)

Both postmodernists and their righteous, ‘rational’ detractors are content to regard Nietzsche as an uncompromising iconoclast who despises everything settled and backward looking. Is he not, after all, the reckless Centaur who announced the death of God? He is supposed to be an accomplished ‘de-constructor’ of every form of essentialism. As it is, Nietzsche always turns out to be more subtle and far sighted than his epigones. It is a very tricky enterprise indeed to attempt to construct another ‘school’ or ‘movement’ around him, or against him for that matter. As discussed above, the key to Nietzsche’s thought is the distinction he makes between noble/strong and base/weak although one must note that even this distinction may not be sustainable in some of his writings. However, on the question of whether or not an alternative to modernity is to be imagined by its critics, the judgements of contemporary modernists and post modernists are decidedly more moralistic and dogmatic in comparison to those of Nietzsche. This is not to deny, of course, that Nietzsche ridicules ‘puritanical fanatics of conscience’ who in their desperate quest for certainty in the face of nihilism, deny the world of appearances and cling to abstractions because the latter would not betray them by changing (Nietzsche, 1990a, p. 40). But it is different with ‘stronger, livelier thinkers who are still thirsty for life’:

...when they take side against appearance and speak even of ‘perspective’ with an arrogant disdain, when they rank the credibility of their own body about as low as the credibility of the ocular evidence which says ‘the earth stands still’, and thus with apparent good humour let slip their firmest possession (for what is believed in more firmly today than the body?) - who knows whether they are not at bottom trying to win back something that was formerly an even firmer possession, some part or other of the old domain of
the faith of former times, perhaps the 'immortal soul', perhaps 'the old God', in short ideas by which one could live better, that is to say more vigorously and joyfully, than by 'modern ideas'? (Nietzsche, 1990a, p.40)

Nietzsche will not yield to the modernist blackmail whereby one is required to dismiss the past as barbaric or absolutely dead to valorise modernity as a whole. He will be a merciless judge of modernity if its glittering facade turns out to be chimerical; when masses as well as geniuses remain slaves of necessity and are deprived of fulfillment in the midst of material plenty. Is it so sacrilegious to desire or imagine something different, even better? Or must imagination too remain tethered to modernist imperatives? Must it radically historicise itself in order to view the modernist perspective as the one and only truth, denouncing as authoritarian the very desire for alternatives? Nietzsche suspects that the outlook of precisely the most perceptive and sensitive persons may develop contempt for this age and for what it celebrates as culture:

There is distrust of these modern ideas in this outlook, there is disbelief in all that has been constructed yesterday and today; there is perhaps in addition a little boredom and mockery which can no longer endure the bric-a-brac of concepts of the most various origin such as so-called positivism brings to the market today; the disgust of a more fastidious taste at the village-fair motley of all these reality-philosophasters in whom there is nothing new or genuine except this motleyness. In this, it seems to me, we ought to acknowledge that these sceptical anti-realists and knowledge-microscopists of today are in the right: the instinct which makes them recoil from modern reality stands unrefuted. (Nietzsche, 1990a, pp.40-41)

Nietzsche warns his free spirits, geniuses and philosopher-kings of the future to use scepticism carefully: preferably as a tool with which to clear hurdles from their path without allowing themselves to be seduced and de-personalised by it. When they happen to be rulers, higher men do not necessarily use scepticism to destroy traditional ways. They use it as a tool to understand clearly the significance of tradition in a given context so that they may govern effectively and securely. They may introduce sceptical habits into popular thinking if that is likely to erode cultural and intellectual bases of
resistance to their own rule. A conquering race would do well to make the conquered people suspicious of their customs, memories, heroes and so on. That is likely to produce in the conquered/colonised feelings of self-loathing, disorientation, disharmony and guilt which erode their will to resist and even prepare the ground for conversion to the conquerors' values. Thus, in order to govern the conquered effectively, the rulers are to problematise the latter's sense of identity in subtle ways. Often brute force, followed by liberal doses of narcotics and 'cultural liberalisation' may produce the kind of 'relaxation' that is conducive to lasting stability. Arguably, Christianity was such a narcotic in parts of colonial Africa and Latin America.

Nietzsche suspects that some of the most successful leaders of religious empires were actually atheists who continued to rule by manipulating the religious prejudices of the masses. He includes these leaders among the most subtle, strongest men. They could identify power as the ultimate reality and realise that intellectual processes are to be harnessed to the enhancement of life and power. This insight testifies to their healthy instincts which have overcome the de-vitalising effects of scepticism. These strong men of disenchanted intellect know that the masses are desperate to 'escape' their freedom because freedom entails responsibility for one's thoughts and actions. Hence, the masses are only too eager to allow charismatic personalities and institutions sacred and quasi-sacred to function as the arbiters of ultimate values. Nietzsche understands of course that interpreting good and evil for the mankind is a terrible responsibility; a burden which cannot but crush most mortals. Consequently, only a few exceptionally gifted and strong men are able to bear it with genuine understanding of the stakes involved. Usually, such persons are beyond good and evil themselves, paying the frightful price of cultural exile from the very communities in

---

3 Thus, Neither Man nor Plato, neither Confucius nor The Jewish and Christian teachers ever doubted their right to tell lies. Nor did they doubt their possession of other rights.... Expressed in a formula one might say: every means hitherto employed with the intention of making mankind moral has been thoroughly immoral. Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of The Idols / Anti Christ, London, penguin, 1990.
which they function as the source of meaning and enchantment. However, their 'bad faith', unlike that of ordinary mortals, is of a higher kind and therefore justified.

Interestingly, Nietzsche's comments on aristocratic governance bear close resemblance to Dostoevsky's account of the worldly corruption and cynicism to which 'beautiful' ideals of the charismatic innovator (Jesus Christ in this case) are subjected by his followers in the process of establishing and perpetuating massive institutions. In the 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor', a 'philosophical poem' which the atheist Ivan Karamazov composes in a fit of delirium, the worldly wise leader of the mighty Spanish Church is ready to crucify Jesus who returns with the intention to 'reform' the Church in the name of his 'pure' vision (Dostoevsky, 1990, pp.246-264). The 'Grand Inquisitor' has nothing but contempt for the other worldly 'prisoner' and informs him sternly that pragmatic interpretation of the message undertaken by his institution preserves the spirit of the original which after all was revealed in this world to improve the lot of the down trodden. If the masses prefer to have bread rather than poetry and promises of paradise, then the Church must address that issue. But what are the consequences of an ideological mutation of this scale? Priestly bureaucrats take on the role of economic managers, civil administrators and judges, maintaining Christ's legacy mainly as a legitimating ideology and spectacular device of enchantment. Indeed, if the satisfaction of the people's material needs and maintaining the institution's power over them are crucial issues in a world that persists in being profane, then, must not sacred institutions develop secular functions? On the other hand, the logic of secularisation might relegate the disbursement of meaning to a secondary status. Indeed, if the world is not yet ready for the 'message' in its pure form, then, single minded zeal of other worldly institutions to make the world in the image of revealed perfection would produce grave conflicts and possibly disasters. Thus, rather than risk total rejection, pragmatic compromise of a hypocritical church keeps the 'Word' relevant to the world in at least formal terms. Preserving the 'Word' in ceremonial finery might prove to be an appropriate strategy in the long run.
Paradoxical but appropriate! The worldly wisdom of the guardians cannot rule out the possibility that the masses may never be ready for such a beautiful, other-worldly vision. In that case too, 'good governance' by the disciplined clerisy would in principle be as legitimate as any other form of rule.

Indeed, when all ideals are exposed to be a sham and norms are seen through as utilitarian and therefore mystificatory constructs, then practice strives to become self-legitimating and power assumes the mantle of highest principles. Confronted by such a devastating performance of disenchanted 'critique' and the prospect of yet another crucification, the bemused 'prisoner' could do little else than to kiss the cold mouth of the wily patriarch and disappear, this time for good. Whereas the physical crucification of Jesus had saved the idea of Christianity and even invested it with a world historical potential, the assumption of worldly functions by his Church would attenuate the tension between the sacred and the profane to such a degree that the words of the prophet would be exiled from the world, to be entombed in the history of 'religious' ideas.

Dostoevsky's fable has been interpreted as a prophetic account of Marxism's degeneration into an ideology to sanctify Communist party's stranglehold on the human and natural resources of the empire. Marx is, of course, the prophet whose monumental statues oversee the heroic construction of the 'just' society in accordance with his 'Word' now consecrated as scientific. However, this remarkable fable sheds light on the more fundamental dilemmas of modernity: its continual oscillation between idealism and terror on the one hand and cynicism and stagnation on the other; between the longing for transcendence and the more mundane craving for security and 'goods'. It may be asked in the light of Dostoevsky's reflection whether that dilemma has been spectacularly (magically?) resolved (undermined?) in the Western societies by having both sets of desires incarnated in the figure of commodity? In the absence of transcendental resources of meaning, does commodity form become the focus of
transcendental as well as profane desires which are now substantially de-contextualised? Given Weber's enormous regard for Dostoevsky, it is probable that his conception of the dialectic between charisma and routinisation, which underpins his cultural theory, was influenced by Dostoevsky's narrative.

**In the Footsteps of Nietzsche: The Heideggerian Critique of Modernity**

While the nihilistic mood may have acquired significance in certain phases of ancient cultures, it is only with the advent of modernity that nihilism assumes menacing dimensions. As Heidegger sees it, nihilism as the most brutal, metaphysical perspective on reality has been quietly developing since Socrates' and Plato's attempts to enframe (*Gestalt*) the totality of existence in overarching, metaphysical constructs, but it is in modernity and as modernity that nihilism finally matures and becomes wholly manifest. Modern technology, as the extreme development/refinement of abstract, formulaic thought of post-Socratic Greeks is the most dramatic manifestation of nihilism. And, Nietzsche is the philosopher who offers the most explicit, devastating account of nihilism as the essence of modernity. Heidegger claims, however, that Nietzsche's thought, engaged as it was in a titanic battle with the spectre of nihilism ultimately succumbs to it, turning metaphysical and becoming an awe inspiring symbol of what has been ailing Western metaphysics since the advent of Socrates, namely, the 'forgetting of Being' in that tradition's appropriative comportment towards beings. This is how he formulates the problem:

*Metaphysics as metaphysics is nihilism proper.* The essence of nihilism is historically as metaphysics, and the metaphysics of Plato is no less metaphysical than that of Nietzsche. In the former, the essence of nihilism
is merely concealed; in the latter, it comes completely to appearance. (Heidegger, 1982, p.205)

In its protracted battle against the obsessive dualisms of Western philosophy, Nietzsche's thought is said to become forgetful of its own entrapment within subjectivism (Thiele, 1994, p.474). In this account, Nietzsche turns out to be the last metaphysician because he proclaims 'will to power' as the underlying principle of life, or to put it differently, he reduces Being to 'will to power'. For Nietzsche, 'will is nothing else than will to power, and power nothing else than the essence of will. Hence, will to power is will to will, which is to say, willing is self-willing' (Heidegger, 1979, p.37). Akihiri Takeichi clarifies matters a great deal when he writes that, 'Will, in so far as it is will, always needs to ground itself by positing a thing other than itself. This means that will itself lacks a ground; the basis of will is groundless. That its ground is nothing urges will toward positing values constantly' (Takeichi, 1987, p.177). After the devaluation of God as the highest value, as the ultimate source of values, it becomes apparent that 'nothingness' is what lurks 'at the base of the will to power' (Takeichi, 1987, p.177). Nietzsche completes Western metaphysics by giving its underlying problematic explicit, concentrated, decisive expression. The problem is not, says Heidegger, that the highest values become de-valued, but rather that Being is subjected to evaluation in the first place, that is, rendered valuable. Ultimately, it is reduced to calculation and exchange.

Disembodied, instrumental thought does not relate to the world but represents objects, as though from infinite distance and from a position of absolute power. Such a thought assumes that, 'the whole is intelligible, or that the grounds of the whole are essentially intelligible: at the disposal of man as man - that they are always and in principle always accessible to man. This view is the condition of the possibility of human mastery of the whole' (Strauss, 1995, pp.316-17). However,
from this thought which reduces Being to pliable objects, truth of Being withdraws. Thus, excessive visibility of objects goes hand in hand with the more thoroughgoing concealment of Being. What is worse, one necessarily remains oblivious of the oblivion of Being, since technology itself prevents any experience of its nature (Heidegger, 1975, p.117). Akihiro Takeichi gives a poignant expression to this state of affairs:

If the unconcealment of beings and the essence of nihilism, which is the concealment of Being, are two sides of the same thing, then the destiny of Being as the essence of technology, in which nihilism culminates, is also the time when beings are completely revealed. In fact, all beings are exposed in the world of contemporary technology in broad daylight throughout the world. (Takeichi, 1987, p.181)

Thus, if modernity is a condition where objects are definitively exposed as usable and even reproducible, it is also the age when the concealment of the truth of Being is exposed without any longer being obscured by the unconcealment of beings' (Takeichi, 1987, p.182). Not Being but the feeling that it is nowhere to be found and the suspicion that it may have become irretrievable is what becomes palpable in modernity, which for that reason is viewed as the nihilistic age par excellence. Moreover, this is not something recent or avoidable, says Heidegger, but what confronts us as a 'destiny' that has been advancing towards us for centuries.

Whereas the subjectivist principle of 'enframing' or appropriation inherent in the Greek word for Being (Physis) and even more recognisable in thesis ['to lay something before one, to place it, to produce and bring it forth, namely into presence (Anwesen)'] becomes universalised in the form of technological domination, from a Nietzschean perspective, this project unfolds in the interests of baser instincts. As a practical metaphysics, it seeks to gather every aspect of life under its 'gaze' and to rearrange it for efficient processing. Hardly any sphere of
activity escapes this blind, blinding power whose intensity continuously increases with the development of development. 'All that is solid' goes on melting into air, and while Marxian analysts of modernity may evaluate this process/ fate positively, Heideggerians are not so optimistic.4

It is not only the external world of objects that is made to yield its secrets to the inquisitorial juggernaut and reduced to the position of drugged and perfumed courtesan. Subjective, inner worlds are also 'opened up' and re-mapped. Just as objective field is demarcated into 'zones' and 'spheres' in the interests of greater productivity and efficacious management of resources, likewise the 'organisation' of internal economy takes place. 'Savagery', chaos, 'myth', superstition and other 'irrational' elements are weeded out to generate a more stable, coherent, intelligible and manageable economy. Rigidly demarcated zones of good and bad, work and play, own and other, fact and fiction, sense and non-sense, become gradually inscribed in the subjects, making them amenable to control by master plans. Thus, imagination is not so much colonised as subjected to a particularly radical form of urban planning. Fantasy is not so much outlawed as the conditions in which it could grow into a significant force are eliminated along with the resources from which it could draw nourishment. Different forms and bases of togetherness are inevitably highlighted as threats or raw materials in the context of rationally ordained projects of modernity and are heedlessly manipulated. Once the force that accumulates in a community after long periods of togetherness in a specific locale dissipates, insecure, nameless individuals nursing silences and questions must join the ranks of

4 Thus, Marshall Berman, having surveyed the triumphs but also traumas and dislocations caused by modernity, concludes on the following celebratory note. To be modern is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows. Marshall Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity, New York, Penguin, 1988, pp. 345-46. Given the environmental and other catastrophes that face moderns and non moderns today, it would take something like faith, or extremely narrow, Westernised outlook to sustain such optimism.
modernity's reserve army to be flung across the face of earth in search of chimeras.

Nietzsche's tragic heroism, relying on subjective resources to create beauty and nobility in the midst of ruins emerges, in retrospect, as the most poignant symbol of homelessness and isolation; indeed, of the titanic delusions of modernity. It has been noted that postmodernism trivialises the gravity of this state, glamourising Nietzschean trope of homelessness. As Leslie Paul Thiele puts it:

What is remarkable in Nietzsche's homeless wanderings, however, is not that he rejects the comfortable refuge of certain social norms, moral prescripts, or epistemological tenets. For surely an essential task of philosophy is to uncover and question such thin realities. What is remarkable is that Nietzsche's rejections are so complete: all that remains is a nomadic self, cut off from meaningful rapport with others, proscribed from finding any residence in the world and in the present time, held together from disintegration by the sheer force of will. (Thiele, 1994, p. 476)

As 'radical' theorists are having to grudgingly recognise, the individualised, fragmented, insecure consumers, cut off from communal sources of vitality and identity, do not constitute a threat to modernity, capitalism or whatever it is that perpetuates the state of injustice and unfulfillment in the world. Although aware of the potentially catastrophic implications of the death of God, Nietzsche was not wholly pessimistic about the prospects of mankind. Indeed, he sought to consecrate the earth, the senses and the moment that is hardly born before it is consigned to oblivion. In more expansive, pantheistic moments, he wanted to accept 'all' without

---

5 A number of Nietzschean critics have registered their dissatisfaction with the postmodernist response to the problems facing the bulk of humanity in the present age. As Robert Solomon argues, there is currently a widespread suspicion that much of postmodernism is an excuse not to believe in anything, to avoid both personal and political involvements and take refuge in apathy, despair, or mere ambition. p. 292 in Robert Solomon, 'Nietzsche, Postmodernism, and Resentment,' *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra*, ed., C. Koelb, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. Leslie Paul Thiele observes that, 'Complacency in homelessness threatens to become the postmodern condition.' See his 'Twilight Of Modernity,' *Political Theory* vol. 22, no. 3, August 1994, p. 479.
subjecting any part of it to damning, moralistic comparisons with some perfect, rational, more real world. In a truly cosmic gesture symbolised by his doctrine of eternal recurrence, he wanted to dispense with all impotent, resentful denials of the being of whatever exists and whatever dies. Even in months preceding his drift into insanity, he hoped that a human type free from some of the most offensively 'human' vices and pathologies might emerge in the future. He was audacious enough to imagine a universe that is:

Forever blessing itself as something which recurs for all eternity, - a becoming which knows not satiety, or disgust, or weariness - thus, my Dionysian world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction, this mysterious world of twofold voluptuousness; this, my "Beyond Good and Evil", without aim, unless there is an aim in the bliss of the circle, without will, unless a ring must by nature keep good will to itself. (Nietzsche, 1968, p.432)

For Heidegger by contrast, disappearance of gods is an unmitigated disaster which has plunged the world in dark and 'destitute' times, throwing men mercilessly into isolation to cope with their finitude. They no longer feel at home in the world in which they recognise little that they may call holy or even their own. They find it difficult to dwell and therefore to build. Of course they build a great deal, but they cannot build a dwelling:

The real dwelling plight lies in this that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. What if man's homelessness consisted in this; that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight? Yet as soon as man gives thought to this homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling. (Heidegger, 1975, p.161)

In order to build a dwelling, they need the touch of a god but gods are nowhere to be found and so they feel lost (Heidegger, 1975, p.150). What is worse, most of them are out of touch with the awareness of their anguish and carry on in
the manner of sleep walkers, drowned in the oblivion of everydayness and 'idle chatter'. They are obviously reluctant to see that their dwellings are built on the edge of the abyss. Only a few have managed to glance into the abyss, and they have been smitten. They are poets, like Holderlin and Rilke, who 'utter the holy' word, as poets in dark times must (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 93-94). In dark times, it is the poets who bind mortals to the earth and evoke the presence of gods. They are the ones who bless the dwelling where men, gods, earth and sky could mingle. Their songs illuminate the traces of the departed gods in the darkness and emptiness that envelops the world in 'destitute times'. With their songs they try to create the abode that may receive the gods should they decide to return (Heidegger, 1975, p. 92). Through their art they 'world the world' where a people may feel at home. 'To be a work means to set up a world.' And, 'In a world's worlding is gathered that spaciousness out of which the protective grace of gods is granted or withheld' (Heidegger, 1975, p. 45). Somewhat cryptically, Heidegger considers the building of temple as the quintessential community-founding work which binds the earth and the world in a fruitful, though not tension free unison. It provides orientation to mortals; a sense of identity. The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains open as long as the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it' (Heidegger, 1975, p. 43).

Heidegger writes with an acute awareness that the modern world is nihilistic to the core; it is a world where Nietzsche's bleakest prophesies have come to pass whereas his ecstatic yearning for free spirits and magnanimous supermen has turned out to be precisely that - a yearning. Having dethroned every conceivable god and seen through the maze of consolatory myths and ideologies, the apostles of modernity are languishing. Possibly lacking energy, vision or conviction to create a just yet beautiful world (a new god?), they have discovered the virtues of passivity, non-thinking, chaos and so on. Having desecrated all gods and consumed all
ideologies, they may be sensing the danger of being consumed by rationality - the nihilistic anti-god of modernity which they were accustomed to regard as their own creation. They do find themselves in a difficult situation. On the one hand, they do not want to be consumed by nihilism yet they do not want to return to the 'pre-modern' sources of enchantment which in any case may not be available to them. Hence the proliferation of various 'hybrid' strategies which attempt to smuggle in small consignments of enchantment from the back door as it were. Thus, one could argue that the plethora of anti-rational, post-metaphysical and post modern approaches, far from being expressions of any radical or 'new' departure are desperate attempts on the part of disillusioned intellectuals to cope with the demon of nihilism, which has become even more menacing after the implosion of the most powerful political ideology of modern times. Some of the 'radical' intellectuals may be resorting to a tried and tested, indeed, 'radical' strategy of coping with unbearable situations: when nothing seems to work, deify the very monster that threatens to destroy all. Thus many post modernists have replaced their total denunciation of commodification and consumerism with an unqualified adulation of the same phenomena, as though in a decade or so the world has undergone some incredible mutation which has rendered everything topsy turvy, not to say unrecognisable. Adorno's observations about existentialists are relevant in this context. He noticed that they were inclined to deify the very experience of absurdity into a concept denoting a privileged, enchanting state in the midst of a disenchanted existence. Thus, protest against genuinely terrifying conditions degenerated into yet another consolatory myth which was duly institutionalised. By contrast, Samuel Beckett's refusal to construct a metaphysics of absurdity evokes some of the horror associated with an existence in which even suffering signifies nothing.

Of course, Heidegger's own response to the state of the world that he depicted in such dark tones was far from simple or uncontroversial. Few philosophers in recent times have inspired so many conflicting interpretations and
polemics as Heidegger has, which is somewhat understandable given his stature as a thinker and the dramatic character of his political intervention. Indeed, as more details emerge of the nature of his involvement with Nazism, that episode threatens to become the filter through which his philosophical achievement is approached. Of course, his tumultuous affair with Nazism cannot be ignored or excused as the 'great blunder' of a great philosopher, but it would not be useful to summarily judge his philosophical endeavour as being unworthy of consideration. Rather than perpetuate an inquisition whose very excess might distract from a fuller understanding of the pathology which was certainly deeper and more widespread than many righteous liberals are willing to admit, it would be more appropriate to try to learn whatever we can about the stresses that modernity brings to bear upon humans including the most accomplished thinkers. Heidegger's 'case' reveals a great deal about the ambiguities of theory-practice relationship and something about the nature of political-philosophical judgement in the context of modernity.

Heidegger's involvement with Nazism has of course been interpreted in terms of his opportunism and latent anti-Semitism, with his activities as the Rector of the University of Freiburg being cited to prove the point (Pearson, 1994, p. 510). Those who try to defend him typically attribute his involvement to the political naivety of the other-worldly philosopher who was waylaid by the Nazis' ideological fireworks. There may be more than a grain of truth in these judgements; indeed, being a philosopher does not necessarily cure one's human failings. However, these positions have been explored at length elsewhere. What I intend to explore is whether Heidegger's politics was part of his response to the problem of modernity which his thought had uncovered and whether elements of the gnostic attitude are discernible in that response. To be sure, one must first determine the precise character of Heidegger's understanding of modernity.
As discussed earlier, Heidegger's writings do appear to lend support to the view that technological domination is a fate enshrined in the innermost core of Western metaphysics. But if so, why try to resist it? Why not cultivate a tragic stance of philosophical acquiescence? On this reading, Heidegger's 'choice' makes sense only as an extra-philosophical, decisionistic leap which goes against the grain of his philosophical analysis of nihilism. But matters are not so straightforward. As Robert Dostal has suggested, Heidegger's decision was not entirely self-legitimating; it may have been grounded in 'a moment of truth' interpreted in quasi-religious terms (Dostal, 1994, pp. 544-45). Dostal relates Heidegger's decision to his overall trajectory of the period following *Being and Time* in which Heidegger struggles to differentiate his own notion of truth from modern 'representationalism'; a quest that moves him not only towards Nazism but takes him even closer to 'Christian theism' (Dostal, 1994, pp. 545-46). It is the unique, holy 'voice' of the great poet that is now believed to embody truth of a particular people or *volk*. The difference between the people and the public takes on a peculiar significance; while the former connotes authenticity, the latter is the debased preserve of the abstract *das Man* (Dostal, 1994, p. 547). It is suggested that Heidegger's contempt for liberal mediatory structures and his admiration for direct communion typical of small rural communities are partly responsible for his rejection of democratic politics and bourgeois public sphere, issuing in his enthusiasm for anti-modern authoritarianism of National Socialism (Ansell-Pearson, 1994, p. 51). Heidegger's understanding of the bourgeois public sphere as a site of vulgarity and mendacity was, in addition, influenced by his reading of Kierkegaard's *The Present Age* which espouses similar positions (Dostal, 1994, pp. 533-34). But, as Keith Ansell-Pearson claims, 'the philosophical overdetermination of the political, which characterizes his thinking in the 1930s, is not something peculiar to Heidegger, but something he shares with a whole tradition of modern German thought' (Pearson, 1994, p. 510). It is the unorthodox blend of religious and atheistic elements in Heidegger's outlook in the 'middle period' which delivers him to National Socialism. That Heidegger's
outlook was dominated by Gnostic element rather than Augustinian explains, to a large extent, the totalising, Manichean character of his evaluations: human versus nature, religion versus politics, authenticity versus inauthenticity, and so on (Dostal, 1994, p. 551). As Dostal goes on to elaborate:

The difference between Heidegger and Augustine with respect to the political is revealing. Though they might agree about the fallen ness of humanity, the place and role of politics in relation to this fallen ness is significantly different. For Augustine, the role of politics is not to provide salvation. The distinction of the City of God and the City of Man does not collapse. What Niebuhr calls Augustine's "moral realism" assigns the political realm the lesser task of getting along and maintaining order and peace. Salvation for Kierkegaard and Augustine is not in time but in eternity; that is, salvation is eschatological. When Heidegger turns to Nazism and thinks he sees a movement that will redeem human history, he suggests a secularized eschatology, a kind of moral and political "idealism". (Dostal, 1994, p. 550)

To complicate matters, in his famous Introduction to Metaphysics (1935), Heidegger makes dramatic pronouncements to the effect that Nazism alone can enact a world-historical confrontation with the global power of technology and save the remnants of authentic culture from the nihilistic incursions of 'Bolshevism' and 'Americanism' (Heidegger, 1959, pp. 37-38). But what, one may ask, is that which empowers Nazism to confront and subdue forces whose dominance has been underwritten by fate? Could there be another, less fatalistic view of technology lurking somewhere between his better known writings? Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut suggest that Heidegger vacillated between two different, though related responses to the global supremacy of technology. Importantly, both privileged National Socialism as the world-historical agency through which humanity's decisive confrontation with technology was to take place. The first position, which regarded technology as the fate concealed in the history of Western metaphysics recognised the futility of any attempt to oppose technology directly. What it aimed to produce was an attitude commensurate with the power of technology: a political-spiritual force capable of developing technology's potential to its logical conclusion.
Heidegger believed that National Socialism possessed the grandeur and 'resoluteness' which the task required (Ferry and Renaut, 1990, pp.59-60). Thus, like Lukacs' proletariat, Nazi movement was seen by Heidegger to have been pre-selected by history to develop radical tendencies inherent in reality to their inescapable conclusion.

The second response aimed to prevent technology's worst excesses, again through Nazism. Democracy was ruled out as a viable alternative due to its subservience to the nihilistic logic of technological globalization which valorises abstract, contractual relations and subjective autonomy (Ferry and Renaut, 1990, p.61). What is important from this point of view is to remember and draw strength from what has been forgotten in the technological levelling of traditional life-world. Accordingly, Ferry and Renaut consider Heidegger's quest for 'rootedness' as an anti-modern response although one which is not unrelated to the first. As a matter of fact, Nazism turns out to be a disconcerting mixture of modern and anti-modern elements (Ferry and Renaut, 1994, pp.69-72). They explain that:

The tension involved in Heidegger's assessment of National Socialism expresses the same mixture: in the age of the globalization of technology, conservatism cannot just pigeonhole the existence of a technicalised world and withdraw into premodern social or cultural forms; in a sense, the mission is to implement the technological destiny of modernity, but also actively to counteract it with the very thing that this destiny denies, to wit, the values of tradition, by attempting to impose these values on modernity by force. The very idea of a "conservative revolution," which defines the specific nature of the National Socialist revolution, thus involves a tension oddly close to the one we find throughout Heidegger's writings. (pp.72-73)

Heidegger's philosophical position was to undergo considerable transformation in the post-war period although his enigmatic silence made people wonder if his views on National Socialism had changed at all: a suspicion partially confirmed by his Der Spiegel interview (1966) in which he reiterated that technological levelling of the world and pervasive Americanisation were
catastrophic developments which liberal democracy was impotent to resist, concluding that 'only a God can save us' (cited in Dostal, 1994, p. 549). Heidegger's comments have caused general outrage. They are typically interpreted as the devious ploy of the unrepentant Nazi who wants to shift the responsibility of mass murders to metaphysical causes. His critics are also disturbed by his tendency to compare Nazi slaughter houses with mechanised farming and food processing industries as so many symptoms of a globalised technological barbarism. Be that as it may, the most striking feature of his post-Nazi period remains a substantial shift in his outlook from the Nietzschean emphases on 'will' to non-appropriative, non-subjectivist modes of philosophical experience. This transition is clearly illustrated in his 'Letter on Humanism', where he writes:

...if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to subsist in the nameless. In the same way he must recognise the seductions of the public realm as well as the impotence of the private. Before he speaks man must first let himself be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say. Only thus will the preciousness of its essence be once more bestowed upon the word, and upon man a home for dwelling in the truth of Being. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 199)

These words do indicate retreat from Nietzschean titanism which enables Heidegger to develop a notion of thinking as releasement (gelassenheit); as 'remembrance' and 'listening'; thinking that 'responds and recalls'; that seeks a dialogue with poetry (Heidegger, 1975, p. 96, p. 181). In this phase his thinking

---

6 See Richard Wolin, Recent Revelations Concerning Martin Heidegger and Socialism, Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 7, no. 1, 1990, pp. 73-96. Wolin points out inaccuracies in Heidegger's account of his involvement with National Socialism. He is outraged by Heidegger's comparison of Nazi death camps with the Allied bombing of German cities and nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. P. 94. Others have pointed out the danger of turning Heidegger into a scape goat. Notably, William Spanos regards it as a hypocritical strategy of deflecting attention from the barbarities of the supposedly liberal regimes which are quite ruthless in dominating a world which they claim to have 'liberated' from Fascism and Bolshevism. Likewise, Keith Ansell Pearson asks 'Is dying in fire produced by bombing essentially different from dying in a gas chamber? Is the dying of German and Japanese women, children and men different from dying of Jewish women, children, and men? And, most provocative of all, is the privileging of the Holocaust in Western culture an instance of Eurocentrism?' See Keith Ansell Pearson, Heidegger's Decline: between Philosophy and Politics, Political Studies XLII, p. 515.
evinces signs of opening up towards non-European thought and cultures and holds some promise of dialogue with other traditions in the context of what has been termed 'planetary age of technology.' What is the cultural-philosophical significance of such an age? In the age of 'world civilization', says Mehta, 'our relation to tradition is an irreparably broken one and our thinking is determined by an unheard-of simultaneity of times and places, all equally remote, all equally close' (Mehta, 1987, p.42). In the age of universal homelessness, the 'other' thinking might be able to offer to the homeless mind something which the disembodied thought of the rapacious West cannot. As Leo Strauss argues, the enactment of genuine dialogue between East and West may have become a necessity in these times when attempts are being made to build a 'world society' without there being a 'world culture' to underpin it. However, 'a world society can be human only if there is a world culture, a culture genuinely unifying all men. But there never has been a high culture without a religious basis: the world society can be human only if all men are united by a world religion' (Strauss, 1995, p.316). He suggests that the West must initiate the dialogue with East by striving to recover the subterranean presence of East within itself, something that it has been denying for centuries (p.317). Similarly, Jack Goody has proposed in a recent study that, 'we need to reconsider the East in the West' (Goody, 1996, p.9).

The demands which Strauss is making upon the contemporary world may be too severe and somewhat nostalgic, nevertheless, it would be naive to overlook the enormous difficulties involved in the creation of a truly global civilisation in these disenchanted times. Such efforts will have to reckon with the memories of colonialism and world wars; the principal global projects attempted in the context of modernity (Smith, 1990, 180). There is a dearth of 'world memories', says Smith, 'that can be used to unite humanity' (Smith, 1990, p.166). Other obvious obstacles would have to be the widening gap between zones of prosperity and others. Anthony Smith argues that the ongoing dissemination of 'global communications'
is not to be confused with 'global culture'. Today's emerging culture', he claims
't is tied to no place or period. It is context-less, a true melange of disparate
components drawn from everywhere and nowhere, borne upon the modern chariots
of global telecommunications systems (Smith, 1990, p.177). One is inclined to
disagree with his assertion that global culture 'answers to no living needs, no
identity in the making'; and yet, the limitations of the technologically over-
determined discourse of global communications in creating lasting emotional
commitments to such bloodless entities as 'global village' or 'world civilisation'
are obvious. Indeed, Smith insists that the power of the national imaginary to
enchant, organise and bestow meaning upon a predominantly urban, secularised
and individualised existence appears to sustain itself in the face of globalised
communications (Smith, 1990, pp.179-80; Poole, 1991). It might even be
rejuvenated as a result of this confrontation.\footnote{There has been an unprecedented growth in the literature on nationalism during the last decade or so. See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: London, Verso, 1991; Ernst Gellner, Nations and Nationalism: Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983; Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992; Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993. On the liberal tendency to denigrate Third world nationalism, see Alok Yadav, Nationalism and Contemporaneity: Political Economy of a Discourse. Cultural Critique Winter 1993-94: The academic characterizations of Third World nationalisms as fictitious, fraudulent, or dangerous have converged with the political demonisation of Third World economic nationalism within the changing structures of the contemporary world economic systems. \textsuperscript{P} 192. Marxist tradition's failure to recognise the significance of nationalism has been widely criticised. Due to the teleological framework of historical materialism, nationalism was liable to be considered a transitional ideology which could nevertheless be lent 'strategic' support in certain conditions. Furthermore, Marxism subjected non-European cultures to its ethnocentric methodology and racist biases prevalent in Europe. Thus, Marx and Engels were not willing to grant 'South Slavs' the capacity for self governance, believing that lesser races should either be absorbed by 'more energetic stock' or become minor allies of great nations. The 'residues' and 'fragments' of subjugated people, when they happened to exist within Europe, were suspected of being the 'standard bearers of counter revolution'. India was judged to be a static civilization which was fortunate to be colonised by the 'historical' people of Britain. See Ephraim Nimni. \footnote{Marx, Engels and the National Question}. Science & Society Fall 1989; Walker Connor, The National Question in Marxist Leninist Theory and Strategy and Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding: Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994. Even the more shrewd Marxist observers, including Tom Nairn, were inclined to regard nationalism as a symptom of under/uneven development, see Tom Nairn, The Break Up of Britain: London, New Left Books, 1997. Regis Debray has observed that Marxism, which took a determined stance against myths had to turn itself into a myth because, in the 'modern' world, myths had somehow learned to prosper despite spectacular feats of clear headed inquisition. See Regis Debray, Critique of Political Reason: London, New Left Books, 1983. In 1920, it was possible to imagine that the kernel of 'scientific humanism' was finally going to break its straight jacket of naivety, just as the young Soviet Union would slough off the old skin of Holy Russia and all its peasant mysticism. The scars now show that it was a mistaken belief. When Lenin was buried in 1924, many villagers came to Moscow's Red Square carrying icons of Lenin instead of Virgin. But, icons have not disappeared with industrialization. \textsuperscript{P} 20.}
The prospects of a 'genuine' dialogue between East and West are not particularly promising in this age of rampant consumerism and powerful media technologies which ensure that the world is adequately supplied with simplified representations of complex phenomena. The 'world' is increasingly penetrated by media technologies and reduced to images which are disseminated at a frenzied pace in the global media space. Largely de-sensitised Western audiences, fortified by passport controls and border patrols can now indulge in ultimate voyeuristic escapades and relish 'live' coverage of tragedies and disasters involving 'barbaric' and de-humanised 'others' who cease to arouse compassion. As Baudrillard has noted, electronic media are essentially 'cold' and depthless. This partly explains the intense stimulation verging on perpetual shock to which listless audiences are subjected by cultural industries.

Even at a more serious, scholarly level, signs are not as encouraging as one would have expected given the academic vibrancy of postmodern sensibility. Surveying several decades of exchanges having taken place under the aegis of 'East-West Philosopher's Conference', James Buchanan concedes that hegemonic paradigms of the Western academy continue to set the agenda in a forum that is meant to be genuinely cross-cultural. It has become clear over the years that the idea of unencumbered East-West dialogue taking place at a deep, metaphysical level and blossoming into a 'world philosophy' is somewhat naive (Buchanan, 1996, 312-13). Even at the more recent conferences which have been concerned, predictably, with postmodernity and globalisation, and which have been dedicated to 'other' views, Eurocentrism has refused to disappear from the presentations of the Western and non-Western delegates (with some exceptions of course). Regarding the proceedings of a recent conference Buchanan complains:

What is disturbing about this largely Western discourse on democracy and justice is the absence of any attempts to look at other cultural
traditions for insights and ideas. The discussion .... remains Western almost to the core and is in need both of taking more seriously the cross-cultural critique and of pursuing possible cross-cultural options. (Buchanan, 1996,327)

In the view of the modernist and postmodernist antipathy to all traditions except those which are suitably counter-cultural or anti-traditional, Heideggerian philosophy may be somewhat more receptive to other traditions. Whether the philosophy of Heidegger's later, 'quietistic' phase can do justice to the more brutal aspects of inter-cultural encounters is a different matter.

**Modernity, Nihilism and Method**

There is no simple way out of the rationalist-functionalist legacy of Western social theory, although it might be instructive to re-visit some notable attempts to reconcile theory's scientific edifice with the potentially explosive existential questions. It is through an exploration of what appear to be the cracks and 'weak moments' in the developmental telos of the social science enterprise that the persistence of older problems in newer guises may be recognised and alternative possibilities visualised. Max Weber's case is instructive in this regard. He recognised the objectivity and power of societal modernisation without losing sight of the fact that subjective dispositions and intentions may not be entirely reconcilable with these processes. Furthermore, he made the tantalising observation, following Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, that energies derived from one set of values often produce objective results at variance with the original value-orientations. Thus, the 'other worldly' asceticism of the Calvinist sects facilitated the birth of modern capitalism which proceeded to unleash secular, worldly, hedonistic attitudes. It is this 'paradox of consequences' which some post-metaphysical thinkers contrast with the modernist faith in scientifically fortified
intentionality and social engineering of both the reformist and revolutionary kinds. Furthermore, it is alleged that postmodernist inversion of subjective foundationalism overlooks the tensions inherent in the modern subject's relationship with rationally structured contexts of action. What results in the postmodernist discourse is thus the conflation of the normative and functional dimensions.

The question of the intellectual's dilemma which Weber sought to address through his doctrines of 'value', 'interest' and 'vocation' fails to engage the postmodernist sensibilities to the same degree. Weber appears to concur with the Nietzschean diagnosis that the cultural horizon of modernity is overlaid by clouds of nihilism in the wake of God's demise. One consequence of the disintegration of religious perspective is the wide-spread feeling that ultimate values have departed from the de-sacralised, rationally processed public space and that it is up to each individual to work out his/her spiritual predicaments. In such circumstances, it is easy for modern individuals to become disillusioned with their activities in the public sphere, since these do not seem to possess any significance other than functional. Thus, the modern intellectual, being a sceptical, exposed creature may be invaded by ultimate questions and transcendental yearnings. However, his sphere of activity demands specialised outlook and rigorous, self-denying application of objective rules. In a curious move which has not ceased to provoke controversies, Weber could posit a rather mysterious, unconditional realm of values as the ultimate source of the scholar's outlook and, a realm of facts to which objective, scientifically verifiable procedures apply. While a scholar's value-orientation may determine his choice of subject, once the choice is made, he is expected to follow the conventions of his field and the demands of the subject matter with the dignified asceticism worthy of the scholarly vocation. Whether the quasi-religious notion of vocation is a sufficient bulwark against the spectre of nihilism is debatable. In the absence of binding values which may bestow meaning
upon one's professional activities, what is to motivate one to pursue them with quasi-religious zeal? Thus, a postmodernist might construe Weber's move as an example of the modernist failure of nerve and nostalgic search for consolations which evades the challenges and opportunities of postmodernity. The idea of 'vocation' or 'project' may provide an illusory unity to the multiplicity of drives and reduce uncertainty, but a postmodernist would prefer to dispense with the remnants of theological motifs and embrace radical uncertainty of the post-metaphysical epoch.

Notions of 'spirit', 'truth', 'inwardness', 'culture', 'morality' and even 'art' through which a vanishing (bourgeois?) subject seeks to perpetuate his faith in the viability of his representations are gradually losing their power to entrance and console. Even the existentialists' rhetoric of despair and absurdity, it may be remembered, became a substitute for the meaning that was supposedly being lost. For the 'true' postmodernist, the world is neither a faded copy of some transcendental original nor a transitional Being on its way to perfection. The awareness that God is not only dead but practically irrelevant, and the associated idea of man's finitude, ought to produce neither dread nor sadness. If the loss of metaphysical absolutes causes distress and disappointment in some, it is due to the fact that they had been central to the modernist thinking, almost to the extent of becoming psychologically addictive. After a suitable period of mourning, their absence will cease to engender feelings of emptiness and loss in a blissfully disenchanted subject. Nor will the reality of here and now be devalued through damning references to perfect forms and untrammelled content which became tainted in the daemonic course of history. Postmodernists refuse to anchor 'theory' in notions such as subjectivity, dialectics or 'scientific objectivity'. The subject, being a construct of symbolic, discursive and disciplinary practices can never hope to master these to secure access to some pure, unadorned reality. These are indeed powerful and provocative ideas.
Sympathetic critics of postmodernist positions concur with the general thrust of the postmodernist attack on the metaphysical rigidity of idealist, empiricist and Marxist epistemologies but they tend to disengage themselves from the sceptical paralysis in which many post modernist positions terminate. Max Weber’s approach is often presented as a comparatively balanced, nuanced way out of the idealist and sceptical closures. In Stephen Crook’s view, for instance, Weber’s intriguing methodological proposals may be refined to overcome the schematic character of many postmodernist formulations:

On a sympathetic reading, Weber grants the object–constitutive role of ‘interests’ while maintaining a series of gaps or tensions between interests, objects and outcomes. The causal chains of Weber’s historical sociology serve to bridge the gaps in ways which (always from a particular ‘point of view’) take on an ironic quality ... Another part of the solution lies in insisting that causal relations have an independence from object–constituting ‘interests’, even though they operate within object–domains which interests have constituted (Crook, 1991, p. 197)

Weber’s critics maintain, of course, that by rendering knowledge–constituting ‘interests’ and values inaccessible to analysis, Weber in effect makes the theorist invisible and endorses the values of his class or community. Thus, the subjectivity of the theorist and the processes whereby it is formed is placed beyond the jurisdiction of scholarly analysis and elevated to the status of a noumenal foundation (Lukacs, 1971, p.151). Likewise, a post–modernist would be inclined to invert Weber’s scheme and argue that it is the dominant discourses and institutional constraints which determine a scholar’s outlook regarding theoretical and extra–theoretical matters; rarely does he make unencumbered existential decisions. That the idea of a value–sphere untainted by functional constraints is no more than a consolatory myth in the context of modernity’s neutralising operations. A post modernist would also emphasise that values are not pre–cognitive givens
underpinning scholarly discourse but emerge in the play of discursive practices (Crook, 1990, p. 120). Thus, "Analytical attention is shifted to the practice of judgement" or evaluation which produce and sustain value (Crook, 1991, p. 211).

It may be remembered that in Weber's account, it is the notion of inwardness that allows a semblance of meaning to individuals existing within the 'iron-cage'. But, he is careful not to associate this reflexive, existential potential with an emphatic notion of freedom. A Weberian might reply to the postmodernist that it is all very well to proclaim 'contingency' and 'undecidability as epistemological virtues but that is not going to get anyone out of the iron-cage. The only 'freedom' available to the intellectual workers may be the freedom to theorise and they may indeed theorise away the objective constraints which render their intellectual revolts relatively benign. Call it a 'rubber-cage', if that is more comforting, but a cage is what it remains (Gellner, 1987, pp. 152-65). Being able to peep through the bars, being able to deny or forget the existence of an outside may offer some consolation and critical insights but politically motivated scholarship will do better than to deny the reality of incarceration. To paraphrase Adorno, it is not all that radical to deify a 'life that does not live', any more than to celebrate the demise of a subject that was subject only in name.

It may be possible to sublate the modernist melancholia in the postmodernist valorisation of hedonistic abandon and schizoid dissociation but it is not altogether clear if the enduring existential questions have disappeared or socio-cultural

---

8 In his well known critique of Weber's fact value distinction, Leo Strauss argues that since Weber's distinction is itself the result of his peculiar value orientation (which he terms tragic) and is not based on rational criteria, it may be treated as non binding. Furthermore, its logical consequences are relativism and ultimately nihilism. Weber's approach forbids rational scrutiny of values, once chosen. Strauss wonders why Weber favours return to pre-theoretical awareness embedded in one's attunement to the "life world" as the only effective antidote to nihilism. See Nasser Behenegar, Leo Strauss and Max Weber: A Search for Genuine Social Science, *The Review of Politics* vol. 59, Winter 1997, pp. 108-12; also Gregory Bruce Smith. The Post Modern Leo Strauss, *History of European Ideas* vol. 19, nos. 1 3 p. 192-93.
conditions have mutated beyond recognition or if the re-configuration of global power relations warrants globalisation of postmodernist sensibility. To dramatise the metamorphoses of the 'radical' consciousness, one could say that in the wake of the Faustian empire builder comes the Promethean dismantler and after the critical labours of the late modernist Sisyphus appears the aging Dionysus but there is every likelihood that his bacchanalia would be enacted in the midst of ruins and under the punishing glare of the same old sun. In other words, progressive refinement of theoretical consciousness does not necessarily reflect radical transformation of modernity's material and political constraints. Still less does it constitute evidence of a more robust relation having crystallised between theory and practice in the late modern or post modern context.

Weber's methodological agonies and antinomical formulations may not be the appropriate fare for the tastes honed on utopian appetites or sceptical abandon, but given the rather dismal results produced by the monumental attempts to harmonise theory with practice, Weber's ideas merit closer attention. They do not offer perfect solutions, but they may suggest a more nuanced alternative to the overly schematised and polemical accounts of modernity and postmodernity being produced by the master thinkers and their epigones. More importantly, they highlight the paradoxical character of the political and intellectual constructions of the imperilled subject. The paradox originates in the disenchanted condition of the contemporary epoch where the individual must navigate his desire for experiential and epistemological coherence, for viable identity and satisfying social relationships, through fragmented 'life-orders' commanding distinct value-orientations. Weber counsels the modern individual to relinquish as grandiose and absolutist the desire that his deepest convictions be embodied in the public sphere. The only dignified course of action would be to carry out his duties in the relevant sphere of activity while keeping the spiritual anguish and sentimental longings to the private realm. This, it will be recalled, is the 'ethic of responsibility' which
Weber prescribes for the majority of men and women. It is only up to the highest authority, the nation-state, to choose 'ultimate values', not in compliance with rational protocols but 'decisionistically', that is, in acts of will conceived in absolute terms as self-legitimating and creative. Only world historical personalities, chosen by spiritual powers of unspecified origin to pursue the vocation of politics at the highest level are allowed to transcend the objective constraints of a given historical situation to realise 'substantive' goals. Now there is some contention as to whether Weber confines charismatic, world-historical individuals to pre-modern times or whether he allows the possibility of their existence at certain junctures of the modernist transformation but it is clear that the problematic of subject's fate in the age of rational domination is central to Weber's outlook. And, he explore the myriad dimensions of this problem in ways avoid reductionist explanations, whether idealist, empiricist or Marxist.

If Weber's diagnosis of modernity is on the whole correct, then it could be argued against postmodernist advocacy of anti- or post-metaphysical attitudes that it is precisely the uncertainty and anxiety generated by the necessity to function in different, often conflicting value-spheres without the solace of an encompassing perspective, which generate the desire for over-arching mediating frameworks. In other words, the attempts to re-enchant the abstract, rationalised subjectivity on the one hand, and ruptured sociality on the other, do not cease in modernity. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that these attempts will always be confined to the privatized realms of the aesthetic and erotic. As a matter of fact, some tendencies within postmodernism could be encouraging just such a re-enchanting aestheticization of the public sphere - assumed to be the preserve of bourgeois sobriety. Another notable example of what from the Weberian perspective may be termed pseudo-enchantment is the dramatic proliferation of culture industries which have become global in scope and effect since Adorno and Horkheimer first analysed the phenomenon. It is possible to read Weber against the grain and argue that he
wanted to resist a number of unsettling possibilities which follow more or less logically from his own diagnosis of modernity. Given that the modern self is overburdened by objective constraints which exacerbate existential anguish and give rise to psychic fragility in the absence of traditional supports, how is it expected to persevere in the mode of bourgeois asceticism and resist more immediate and 'grosser' strategies of re-enchantment, even escape?

But if it is a question that haunts Weber's corpus, it haunts postmodernism no less, especially when it attempts to formulate alternatives to modernist epistemology or grapple with the question of values. After all, Lyotard's and Foucault's and Baudrillard's visions evince distinct affinities with the Weberian prognosis that modern society is becoming an iron-cage because rational bureaucratic structures have usurped the possibilities of qualitative change and standardised the processes of subject formation. It may be said that the analyses of Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard and Derrida have sought to uncover the pervasiveness of domination and regulatory networks both at the level of social existence and at the deeper level of cultural patterns, mythical substrates and linguistic systems which condition social interaction and intellectual production. But as critics are quick to point out, these positions become so extreme and totalising as to lapse into disabling monisms of 'power' and 'discourse' in the case of Foucault, and of 'code', 'text' and 'desire' in the cases of Baudrillard Derrida and Deleuze respectively. There seems to be an analogous move towards a monism of desire in Lyotard's early work but his more recent, Wittgensteinian emphases may have added refinement to his theoretical repertoire. Nevertheless, even his later work is unable to prevent the flattening of the normative dimension and the loss of perceptible distinctions which characterise the work of his compatriots, encumbered no doubt by the problematic of ideology critique which persists in their outlook, although in sublimated forms.
Consequently, the issue of subject formation is explored at length by the postmodernists, but only in the context of dominant discourses, epistemological paradigms, disciplinary practices and inescapable cultural and psychological dependencies. Every phenomenon is revealed to be the effect of power, making it virtually impossible to distinguish one form of power from another, for instance political power from the effects of power encoded in a literary text. Culture too is regarded, in an undifferentiated manner, as the effect and medium of power, without any serious attention being paid to the differences of context, content or location. In a strangely metaphysical and reductionist move the questions as to the worth or validity of particular cultural phenomenon are collapsed in genealogical reconstructions that aim to demonstrate their origins in webs of power. The problem becomes compounded from the political - theoretical perspective when all collective emancipatory projects and even their theoretical elaboration are declared to be inherently repressive and potentially totalitarian. A naïve student might wonder why that should be so because isn't everything permeated by power in any case? Moreover, when there are hardly any criteria at hand, least of all moral ones, to distinguish one sort of power-play from another, how is one to judge any political practice as flawed?

No wonder that some political theorists are sceptical of postmodernism's potential to contribute to political inquiry. Although that may be an extreme judgement, nevertheless, it does seem that many postmodernists, while taking issue with Weber's neo-Kantian defence of subjectivity do tend to exacerbate the objective, systematising tendency of the Weberian project. This move is oddly reminiscent of Talcott Parsons and his followers in America who, in the post-war years, endeavoured to construct from Weber's texts a 'value-free', evolutionary and somewhat de-politicized institution of Sociology which was to function as a solid pillar of the advanced industrial world. The recent revival of Weber, however, paints a different portrait of the master. It is a darker, grimmer, Nietzschean Weber
offering chilling prophesies about modernity and the fate of hollow men. No longer a tiresome methodologist, he emerges as a cultural philosopher of first rank; one who is eminently qualified, even dangerously so, to participate in the intellectual conversations of these times of cultural trouble. He turns out to be a contemporary of Heidegger, a mentor of Adorno and an elder but no less eccentric relative of Foucault. Nevertheless, he remains a sobering influence and continues to raise some disturbing questions for both modernists and postmodernists. To those who would put forward subjectivist alternatives including the curious variety which may be termed subjectivism without subject, his tough-minded analyses of the objective constraints which modernity brings to bear upon the subject should be disquieting. On the other hand, those like Habermas and Luhman who try to expand his account of modernisation processes in the Western societies will be reminded that the integration of modern individuals into rational frameworks is seldom complete or unproblematic, nor can it be assumed to remain amenable to systematic management for all times to come. Even if the system appears robust enough to be able to run its logical course, the cultural-existential costs involved should give optimists something to think about. The last, chilling section of The Protestant Ethic makes it clear that Weber was by no means a liberal admirer of modernisation although nothing could be further from his outlook than the conservative fantasy of arresting the flow of time. Despite his tortured agnosticism he was too much of a Nietzschean to give serious thought to such wistful schemes and persevered throughout his life, in this paradoxical, tragic but dignified attitude.

As Weber explained in his 'Science as a Vocation' lecture, political demagoguery may be an easy option for journalists and other 'windbags' but educators ought to resist it, if only because the lecture hall is scarcely the forum for ideological combat. It imposes harder, much harder tasks upon the teacher.

9The work of Wolfgang Schluchter and Ralph Schroeder exemplifies this trend.
Through selfless, patient and rigorous engagement with the subject matter, he or she is to initiate impressionable intellects into the discipline of learning and judging so that they might sustain themselves as responsible agents in a world where the task of judging and choosing is becoming increasingly complicated. Letting the personal dimension intrude into scholarly disquisition may be an admirable sign of the teacher's humanity but it could prove counter productive if it results in his/her failure to instill in the students a certain amount of strength and discipline which are indispensable for the achievement of worthwhile objectives and even personal fulfillment. Those without strong wills and character can benefit neither themselves nor society nor world at large. They might not cause too much harm, although they might, but they are unlikely to resist evil, both within and without. Despite the traces of secularised Protestantism (asceticism) which persist in Weber's ethic of responsibility, it must be noted that it maintains some connection with Nietzsche's emphasis on self-mastery and anticipates (late) Foucault's focus on self-discipline as a desirable strategy for the post-metaphysical subject. The affinities between these positions become even more clear when contrasted with post modernism's treatment of subjectivity as a vehicle of repression which is to be subverted through total release of libidinal energies.

Weber's is doubtless a demanding ethic with classical overtones which is not expected to become popular in post modern times, although it makes one wonder if post modernist theorists and educators are simply opting for self-expression rather than striving to live with the pressures and conflicts of modernity with requisite grace. Are they to be counted among the 'last men' who are not equal to the task in any case? But should one not investigate the social and cultural pre-conditions of their activity to understand their 'treason' better? Could it be that 'intellectualist anti-intellectualism' which they typically practice allows them to both heroically disavow their intellectual credentials and claim the mantle of 'culture bearers' from the back door as it were? How can they couch their analyses in the most abstruse,
academically enhanced vocabulary, yet claim to further the interests of the 'plebs'? How can they stress the constructedness of all norms and the irremediable complicity of truth and power but claim something resembling epistemological immunity for their own statements? How is one to judge their transition from scholarship to a form of 'academic prophesy' celebrating 'undecidability', 'contingency' and 'otherness' as authentic values while rejecting the notion of authenticity?

Weber's position is not difficult to guess. For him, these 'scholars' have failed to withstand the contradictory demands of the age, either giving in to the temptation to play politicians or taking refuge in sceptical quandries. After all, whoever lives must make choices based on some moral-existential orientation, even in the midst of the post modern condition. Rather, it is in these times when unifying, transcendental frameworks are either absent or not so dominant; when boundaries and roles become ill defined, that the imperative to choose between the 'warring gods' may assume even greater urgency. As Weber elaborates in 'Science as a Vocation':

So long as life remains immanent and is interpreted in its own terms, it knows only of an unceasing struggle of these gods with one another. Or speaking directly, the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice.(Weber, 1991, p. 152)

In these disenchanted times, it is more important for teachers to lay bare (in a systematic, dispassionate manner) the contradictory tendencies in front of the pupils so that they may be able to clarify the ultimate meaning of their own lives. It would not be responsible conduct on their part to discourage students from making conscious choices based on clear thinking, offering them dubious products of 'academic prophesy' instead. Weber is adamant that, 'academic prophecy, finally,
will create only fanatical sects but never a genuine community, being a debauched
product of weak will, slovenly judgement and unhealthy narcissism. Now, 
Weber’s judgement may be dismissed as overly severe and pessimistic, but it is
interesting that Lyotard’s account of the post modern condition proceeds along
similar lines although it reaches different conclusions. Nevertheless, it too
highlights the existence of an increasingly differentiated sociality and value-
pluralism, rejecting transcendental narratives of legitimation. Thus, Lyotard writes
in *The Postmodern Condition*:

Science possesses no general metalanguage in which other languages
 can be transcribed and evaluated. There is no reason to think that it
 would be possible to determine metaprescriptives common to all ... language games or that a revisable consensus like the one in force at a
given moment in the scientific community could embrace the totality of
metaprescriptions regulating the totality of statements circulating in the
social collectivity. (Lyotard, 1984, pp. 64–5).

However, these apparent similarities conceal substantial differences between
the positions of Weber and Lyotard. First of all, the ambiguities of the Weberian
account of modernisation must be noted in order to contrast it with Lyotard’s
account of the post modern condition. As Charles Turner has observed with regards
to Weber’s perspective, value pluralism or autonomous development in modernity
of various life-orders with immanent logics, is not exactly a harmonious state in
which randomly mutating differences may playfully cohabit (Turner, 1990, p.
100). Such a neat scenario would hardly justify the dark tone of the passages which
enunciate the grim struggle between uncompromising forces intent to leave their
indelible mark upon the world. As Turner explains:

Weber’s concern is directed to the manner in which individual value-
spheres can become the sites for the construction of universalist claims,
that is, foundations for the unity of culture. The old gods which ascend
from their graves do not rest content with the government of a particular
province of culture. They are to provide criteria by which the whole of
cultural reality might be justified. With the alleged collapse of religious
forms of speculative knowledge, the animating principles of individual spheres themselves take on a speculative character. This gives rise to rival anthropologies and world-views in which reality can only be legitimated as the type of phenomenon peculiar to those domains. (Charles Turner, 1990, p. 110).

Thus, intellectual elaborations or narratives associated with different spheres stake their claims to universal validity and privileged access to phenomena of real importance, questioning the relevance and explanatory power of other narratives. Economists, sociologists, psychologists and cultural critics all argue for the superior explanatory power of their particular disciplinary perspectives. It is important to relate this phenomenon to the Nietzschean account of religion's supercession by science which constitutes the backdrop of Weber's reflections on modernity. According to Nietzsche, once cultural coherence associated with the centrality of religious perspective is shattered by the onslaught of positive knowledge, the search for the sources of overall meaning of the disenchanted existence begins in earnest because science cannot justify itself, other than in utilitarian terms which cannot be adequate for cultural beings. The absence of an all-encompassing framework to replace monotheistic systems which had provided coherence to pre-modern cultures and forms of subjectivity unleashes the sceptre of nihilism because systematic explanations of phenomena cannot satisfy or eliminate the agents' need to experience life as meaningful. To put it slightly differently, thanks to the enduring imprints of theological patterns of thinking, the longing for intellectually coherent guarantees of truth and meaning does not disappear in a setting that has otherwise become secularised. At this juncture, the temptation to elevate rationality itself to a quasi-divine state may become irresistible, although rationality cannot quite replace religion or overcome it without struggle. Likewise, other attempts to inject meaning into existence must overcome grim resistance from scientific perspective. As Ralph Schroeder observes:
In the modern world, various secular attempts to endow life with an overall meaning still persist. Yet these attempts are bound to come into conflict with Science. Science is a world-view that replaces others, yet it undermines all attempts to construe the world as a meaningful totality. It replaces the previous content of the sphere of intellectual life but fills it only with the content of an impersonal kind which is subject only to the demand of objectivity. (Schroeder, 1992, p. 125)

At one level, then, the conflict between religion and scientific rationalism is fundamental. Whereas the former interprets the world as an essentially meaningful phenomenon, the latter treats it as a set of causal mechanisms amenable to objective explanation. Moreover: 'To the (dualistic) idea that the orderliness of the "world" is anchored "transcendently", in an other worldly realm, it opposes the (monistic) idea that the source of the world's coherence is immanent to the world' (Turner, 1990, p. 111).

This is an important distinction, although one should note that scientific rationalism replaces religion's transcendental foundationalism with immanent foundationalism and fails to do away with the principle of foundations as such. Furthermore, as Leo Strauss has tried to demonstrate, scientific perspective does not manoeuvre 'orthodoxy' in a sustained intellectual or normative encounter taking place on a neutral territory partly because irreconcilable premisses of the two perspectives preclude such a fair exchange (Behnagar, 1993, p. 114). Thus, far from constituting an intellectual refutation of orthodoxy, scientism overcomes it performatively as it were, through the overwhelming compulsions of a world whose structures resist religion, treating it as an otherworldly, irrational, outmoded phenomenon.  

---

10 See Nasser Behnagar, Leo Strauss's Confrontation with Max Weber: A Search For Genuine Social Science, The Review Of Politics, vol. 59, winter 1997, pp. 97-126. According to Strauss, the conflict between science and religion is irreconcilable since the two are based on different orientations toward the world. Thus, orthodoxy, was merely laughed out of its position. In Strauss' opinion, the conflict between science and orthodoxy, far from being resolved, is precisely the source of creative tension which has been vitalising Western civilisation, pp. 123-25. Also, Gregory Bruce Smith, 'The Post Modern Leo Strauss', History of European Ideas, vol. 19, no. 1, 1993, pp. 191-97.
refutation of the so-called spiritual phenomena once modernity's key structural transformations become established. But, it would be simplistic to equate secularisation with the destruction of metaphysics because thinkers such as Heidegger believe that modernity itself signifies the triumph of thoroughly metaphysical, life-denying impulses which become embodied in monumental structures of rational control, systems of disenchanted, representational thinking and are reinforced by technology which threatens to obliterate natural distinctions as well as the cultural specificities of different places. Viewed in this way, secularising effects of modernity are immanently connected to the brutal, metaphysical drive to penetrate the mystery of being and de-vitalise it.

Leo Strauss has argued that it is a legitimate function of philosophy to resist disenchantedment of the world and protect the uninitiated from truths meant for the eyes of the 'few'. What distinguishes philosophers from ordinary mortals is the former's capacity to withstand the threat of nihilism associated with a disenchanted, philosophical perspective. It is a grave error, says Leo Strauss, to expect philosophers' fortitude from the masses; an error to which he attributes the bulk of modernity's catastrophes. According to this view, unbridled ideology critique which exposes enduring myths and popular beliefs as groundless, deceptive and ultimately cynical constructs, contributes to the nihilistic destruction of order, plunging societies in spiritual disorientation and terror.¹¹ Hence, Leo Strauss's pronounces 'esoterism' as the appropriate mode of philosophical communication in that it delivers scrupulously coded messages to the initiated without showing disrespect for popular truths. Philosophy, he suggests, is to be protected from 'city', just as 'city' is to be protected from philosophy. In fact, philosophy may contribute more to the welfare of the city indirectly than through direct intervention in politics. It may be remembered that modernity signifies extreme perversion of

natural hierarchies for Strauss; being a morbidly rational age which not only exaggerates the perfectibility of human beings but indeed deifies it. But since the rational, stubbornly optimistic thought of the enlighteners denies the dark, tragic side of human nature, it is ill equipped to cope with it. It expects the problem of evil to disappear with time and education, as though it were a species of error. What the hysterical proliferation of 'theories' in the relativist and historicist climate of modernity has disfigured and effectively buried in clever babble is the gems of ancient wisdom which might enable the moderns to see modernity in a different light; a light that is not its own. Adorno's expression may not have been as cryptic as that of Strauss, and he probably did not share Strauss' enthusiasm for 'esoterism' and philosophical aristocracy, yet there are elements in their critiques of modernity which offer a sobering counterpoint to the more exuberent strategies of French post modernism.

For Nietzsche, of course, modernity is a condition denoting extreme refinement of life—denying, resentful, nihilistic tendencies which hide their real identities behind masks and metamorphoses and prosper by imposing elaborate and ultimately degenerative regimes of sublimation ('repressive de—sublimation?') on whatever is different. In Nietzsche's opinion, modernity represents the perverted will to power of the 'many' who cannot endure life's beautiful and terrifying aspects. These distorted, 'inverted' creatures resent the ones who are still capable of tragic, active engagement with life: Socrates, Christ, but also priest—hoods of one sort or another including the modern priest—hood of knowledge are part of the elaborate, if unconscious conspiracy of the weak, the resentful and the deformed against the 'few' who can truly live, create, suffer and command. Even the majority of aesthetic entrepreneurs, critics and 'irrationalists' who purport to liberate life from rational—nihilistic moulds facilitate reflexive appropriation of untamed energies. A Nietzschean will not surrender the mad philosopher's perplexing insight that beneath modernity's egalitarian ethos, theoretical sophistication and
aesthetic intensity lies the cataclysmic source of all its depressing effects, namely, the dark and convoluted will to power that is always striving to conceal its true colours from itself and everyone else. Although will to power yearns to overcome everything, the impotent subject is equally desperate to convince everyone that it labours in the name of exalted ideals. The frustrated will to power may turn inwards and impair the subject's ability to experience its connections with life in an enriching, empowering manner, squandering its vitality in stubbornly maintained fortifications that prolong the subject's resentful isolation. While the domination of a truly alive and resourceful subject may be productive in some ways, the thoughts and actions of the brittle, poisoned, vacuous subject of (post) modernity are more likely to disfigure the living forms.

A Nietzschean could therefore adopt a sceptical stance towards ecstatic proclamations of modernity's end if that event is supposed to liberate the multiplicity of violently integrated, repressed and marginalised narratives and desires from the bondage of rational frameworks. He would strive to distinguish between the desperate yearning for liberation and the 'actual' destruction of metaphysical constellations linking ideas and mentalities with concrete structures which would be a pre-condition for such a liberation. He would also juxtapose the fecund ambiguity of pre-theological polytheism and Dionysian affirmation of life with the post-modernist espousals of difference and contingency which are shot through with one-sided, rigid, hysterical rejection of modernist positions. It could be suggested in the light of Nietzsche's observations that since pre-theological polytheism was an attitude encompassing multiple and interpenetrating currents of reverence for different gods, it could not have failed to develop a certain 'inner plasticity' in the self. It may be argued that although post modern self mimics it, it lacks this plasticity and, is riven by quasi-theological conflict between different intellectual tendencies. Despite its overpowering desire for radical breaks and ambiguities, postmodernism is still riddled by dualisms which are the most
enduring legacy of monotheism. As we have learned from Nietzsche and Weber, the great monotheistic systems subjected the multiplicity of scattered, non-antagonistic cultic and magical practices to the centralising imperatives of dualistic schemas, non-negotiable commandments and rigid hierarchies. By subsuming the wonderous diversity of beings, things and gods under the Manicheanism of good and evil, mind and body, this world and beyond, heaven and hell, and so on, monotheism contributed greatly to the disenchantment of the world and the genesis of rational, divisible, fully mapped out, disciplined self. One cannot rule out the possibility that post-modern 'condition' (as distinguished from desire) is characterised more by ideological sectarianism than by non-ideological, ambiguous play of differences.

Provocative as it may sound, post-modernism resembles Buddhism in some ways (though it certainly differs from it in others). 12 As Nietzsche observes, Buddhism emerged after Hinduism had developed into a complex but rigid system of theological speculation which imposed severe discipline upon its adherents without being sufficiently attentive to contemporary realities. This caused some members of the aristocracy to become disenchanted with it to and to seek comfort in anti-intellectual, immanentist positions. Likewise, it could be suggested that postmodernism represents the Buddhistic phase of Enlightenment in which intellectualist disenchantment with an over-developed Reason has become attractive to certain elements of the privileged strata. Nietzsche's analysis presents Buddhism as an example of upper class decadence, just as Christianity is the most dramatic case of proletarian nihilism. Compared to Christianity's resentful and sentimental

12 For an interesting comparison of Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction to the approach of Buddhist sage Nagarjuna, see Ian Mabett, 'Nagarjuna and Deconstruction,' in Philosophy East and West, Vol. 45, April 1995, pp. 203-225. Some followers of Derrida have, of course, sought to disassociate him from postmodernism as popularly understood, namely an irrational and anarchistic cultural philosophical movement that repudiates notions of meaning, normativity and critical rigour associated with the Western tradition. They want Derrida to be understood as a philosopher who has introduced new, revolutionary standards of rigour to the Western tradition, ones that can account for previous errors, excesses and biases. See Christopher Norris (1991); Geoff Bennington (1994).
falsification of reality, Buddhism displays a cool, detached, realistic outlook, because:

it arrives after a philosophical movement lasting hundreds of years; the concept of 'God' is already abolished by the time it arrives. Buddhism is the only really positivistic religion history has to show us, even in its epistemology (a strict phenomenalism) (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 141).

Concerned as it is with the problem of suffering rather than sin, Buddhism stays aloof from moral concepts and is in this sense beyond good and evil (p. 141). Thus, 'Buddhism is a religion for late human beings, for races grown kindly, gentle, over-intellectual, who feel pain too easily. Buddhism is a religion for the end and fatigue of civilization' (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 144). Is it possible that postmodernist gestures constitute a similar retreat from a culture made abstract and cumbersome by an excess of rational, ideological antagonisms while life has become more comfortable in the West? Is it a form of radical scepticism which, having derided scientific rationalism, is now dangling between a mute longing for enchantment (which it seeks in other locales) and contemplation of its own superfluity in the face of science? In the spirit of Nietzsche's observation that tragic feeling is not life-denying but life-enhancing and springs from an excess of life and strength, one may ask whether postmodernism's glib rejection of tragic attitude as modernist and therefore nostalgic can be interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of those who, being unable to confront the more brutal aspects of global existence, want to cover it with a linguistic-aesthetic veneer? Whereas tragic attitude draws sustenance from the profoundest contact with existence, the postmodernist transcendence of tragedy may represent intellectually overdetermined evasion of existence. To quote Nietzsche, 'The tragic man says yea to the most excruciating suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying, to be able to do this' (Nietzsche, 1924, p. 421). It is only by positing a relatively unproblematic relationship between intellectual constructs and existence; rather, by de-constructing existence from texts that textual de-construction of the socalled
modernist positions can create the impression that epochal transformations are taking place. It is conceivable that such polemical rejection of modernist positions, by constructing the latter in characteristically modernist spirit as outmoded, mistaken or otherworldly, conceals affinities between the two positions, pre-empting the search for alternative.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, differences between Weber's and Lyotard's conceptualisation of modernity become clearer. It seems that a crucial difference between the two approaches is Weber's tragic attitude with its neo-Kantian emphasis on the question of value and Lyotard's preference for the Wittgensteinian notion of language games. While both accounts stress differentiation and absence of an over-arching narrative, Weber's account highlights the ever present possibility of conflict between apparently distinct and absolutised validity claims. The locus of conflict, in Weber's account, is the modern subject, that is, a cultural being. Lyotard's focus, on the other hand, is objectivist in that he emphasises the multiplicity of rules which are immanent to linguistic practices. Charles Turner's words capture this distinction admirably:

> Whereas rules are inextricably bound up with or immanent to the linguistic practices they constitute, values for neo-Kantianism have a validity wholly independent of the existence of the empirical reality they order in constituting an object domain' (C. Turner, 1990, p. 111).

Now, both reject as undesirable a scenario where a particular value-orientation or language game would elevate itself to the status of grand narrative, but whereas Weber is alert to that possibility, Lyotard with his commitment to instability and flux, does not seem to consider it a serious problem in the present state of the world. In the final analysis, Weber's subject is a cultural subject that makes choices, and sometimes even extreme ones which collide with objective, immovable constraints. That is precisely the tragic element of existence. By contrast, 'Lyotard's subject is a procedural, not a valuing subject' (C. Turner, p. 114). It would seem that postmodern celebration of
differences becomes a theoretically vibrant enterprise partly because it can dispense with the cultural–existential problematic in a gesture of righteous denial which legitimates itself with the avant-gardist totem of novelty. Adorno's meditations on subjectivity, knowledge and politics in the context of modernity will be examined next. In many ways, he strives to escape the problematic aspects of Weber's position as well as that of postmodernists.
CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNITY AND SUBJECTIVITY:
THEODOR ADORNO
CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNITY AND SUBJECTIVITY:
THEODOR ADORNO

Thinking of the older generation of critical theorists was influenced by Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Marxist analytics of capitalism, Walter Benjamin’s utopianism and the Weberian notion of formal rationality as transposed by Lukacs into the problematic of reification. Indeed categories such as totality, dialectic, contradiction, mediation and negativity form a considerable part of their theoretical repertoire and structure some of their empirical studies. However, it would be equally unfair to argue that the totality of their endeavour is reducible to the said categories and influences, for that would amount to a denial of the sheer magnitude and diversity of their contributions which have engaged generations of students from a plurality of disciplinary backgrounds and ideological affiliations. It would also give the impression that their appropriation of those influences was uncritical. However, even a cursory look at their work would indicate that Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse routinely transgressed disciplinary boundaries and their affiliation with Marxism was anything but simple. Instead of trying to reduce their work to a coherent whole whose parts exhibit neat, logical connections between the philosophical, empirical, political and personal dimensions, it might be worthwhile to focus on the tensions which make the Frankfurt theorists’ insights so challenging.

Just to take Adorno’s case, the tension between utopian negativity which seems to chafe at every symptom of a ‘life that does not live’ and his celebration of simple pleasures like ‘lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky’ is thought provoking (Adorno, 1985, p. 157). Or consider his views on culture. On the one hand, he seems to argue that the cultural sphere functions in the late capitalist society
as a site of integration where isolated, distracted and often exhausted consumers are anaesthetised through user-friendly products and dream-scapes which preclude the exercise of critical faculties or active engagement. He suggests that the notion of culture as something ethereal, dissociated from the complex of material relation has little validity other than as an ideology by means of which the ruling strata may underscore and legitimise their superiority and distinctiveness. And yet he does not want to dispense with the concept of culture because it retains something of the utopian promise of universal happiness and reconciliation:

"culture is the perennial claim of the particular over the general, as long as the latter remains unreconciled to the former... The twisted feeling of irreconcilability in the relation of culture and administration is characteristic of this situation. It bears witness to the continuing antagonistic character of a world which is growing ever more unified. (Adorno, 1978c)"

Attributing such tensions to unclarity or idleness would be inappropriate in my opinion. Some critics have sought to portray Adorno as a nostalgic modernist, ignoring the complexity of his views on art, modernity and freedom which can scarcely be reduced to standard Marxist pieties. Thus, in an early article, Lyotard asserts that Adorno clings to Marxist notions of alienation, use value and dialectics in a tragic, nostalgic manner which has no political relevance in the contemporary world. As he puts it:

"The dissipation of subjectivity in and by capitalism, Adorno, like Marx, sees there a defeat, he will only be able to surmount this pessimism by making of this defeat a negative moment in a dialectics of emancipation and of the conquest of creativity. But this dialectic is no less theological than the nihilism of the loss of the creative subject, it is its therapeutic resolution in the framework of a religion, here the religion of history. (Lyotard, 1974, p. 127)"

Adorno's longing for the absolute other of the existing society whose identity remains undisclosed is, in Lyotard's opinion, a form of 'demythologised christianism' or negative theology. This quasi-theological attitude, claims Lyotard, engenders passivity and withdrawal from the political arena (p. 128). Adorno's (and Marx's) world view
is alleged to be dominated by capitalism. Adorno abstracts from the complexity of capitalism as a socio-cultural phenomenon and subjects it to transcendent and totalising, not to say moralistic criticism and so his thought becomes nihilistic (p. 131). Given his Nietzschean sensibilities, Lyotard has little use for transcendent judgements and concludes that Adorno's attitude is tragic but ultimately futile. Whereas Lyotard sees nothing but the Marxist face of critical theory, Peter Putz discerns Nietzsche's influence. He foregrounds historicist, anti-foundational thrust of critical theory, highlighting in particular Adorno's sensitivity to perspective and nuance: 'Critical theory resembles Nietzsche's thought both in the radicality of the questions as well as in the refusal of an answer' (Putz, p. 114, 1981-82).

Goran Therborn's response typifies Marxist attitude to critical theory. He foregrounds Hegel's influence on Adorno's and Horkheimer's thinking, indicting them for having abandoned genuinely empirical, political-economic concerns in the favour of philosophy. As a matter of fact, he situates critical theorists in the tradition of German idealism since they dwell upon the distinction between 'Understanding' and 'Reason' and, like other idealists and romantics, fall for a metaphysically fortified conception of Reason. In this tradition, Reason or Vernunft is substantive, transformative and is seen to be the most appropriate transmitter of the subject's creative energies whereas 'Understanding' or Verstand represents the perspective of someone contemplating mere external dimensions of phenomena (Therborn, 1977, p. 88).

In Therborn's view, critical theorists' idealist tendencies are to blame for their hostility towards science. While it may be true that Adorno and Horkheimer were sensitive to the anti-positivist current in German culture, one cannot overlook what

---

distinguishes their contribution from that of 'conservatives' like Martin Heidegger and Leo Strauss. Indeed, it is precisely their vigorous but critical engagement with the most powerful tendencies of the age and the refusal to placate political and intellectual monopolies of Left and Right which distinguishes the critical theorists' work from the bulk of 'engaged' as well as 'value-free' scholarship of their contemporaries. If they were suspicious of positivism's alleged political neutrality and scientific pretensions, they were no less sceptical about the mountains of dubious research meant to 'prove' the truth of Marxist dogma. It needs to be pointed out that Therborn's belief in the viability of revolutionary politics is underwritten by his faith in 'scientific socialism'. And, while the critical theorists may have been resembled hard boiled Bolsheviks in the eyes of Karl Popper's followers, the fact remains that as the pragmatics and polemics of the cold war drowned out utopian anthems in Europe and America, critical theorists' belief in the robustness of substantive reason became unsustainable. Their hope that humanity's longings for freedom and meaning are inextinguishable, had functioned as a kind of insurance against the possibility of historical regression and methodological drift. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno seems to give up the ghost (of Hegel) by declaring: the whole is false.²

It is proposed in this chapter that Adorno's critique of 'methodologism' and dogmatic thinking in general was grounded in his quasi-vitalist conception of the subject-object relationship. In such a characterisation, the object is treated as a reservoir of energy from which the petrified, self-enclosed subject of modernist epistemology could draw nourishment. Since this position is akin in some ways to the more recognisably 'post modern' thinking, it will be necessary to place Adorno's thought in the ensemble of ideas and situations which distinguish it from other

²See Paul Piccone, From Tragedy to Farce: The Return of Critical Theory, New German Critique no. 7, Winter 1976. What eventually happens to Adorno is that he loses faith. He no longer believes in the possibility of a universal history and must reject the Hegelian teleology to fall back on an abstract Kantian moralism which can neither explain itself nor realize its ethical ideals. The theoretical retreat from the unrealizable collective subjectivity of earlier generations to bourgeois individuality is not itself historicized and dialectically articulated within the logic of the false totality.' p.100.
theories. It is intended to delineate Adorno's contribution to critical theory as a prelude to a more detailed study.

Adorno is a complex but rewarding thinker. His thought marks the culmination of critical reflection on the problem of knowledge and subjectivity which was initiated by Kant and Hegel. In this tradition, the primacy of the subject is thoroughly scrutinised but the notion of subject is not abandoned as a burdensome remnant of the metaphysical tradition. Nevertheless, premonitions of the post-modern turn in which the notion of subject would be systematically de-constructed are audible in Adorno's work. Thus, in a certain sense, his work functions as a mediation, albeit an ambivalent one, between the discourses of modernity, anti-modernity and post-modernity. It would seem that Adorno's thought contains the moment of disintegration without yielding to it; that it engages the most significant tendencies of the age - intellectual, cultural and political - from a critical position that eschews academic detachment without lapsing into anti-intellectual dogmas or political sloganeering. Adorno's critique relentlessly deciphers un-examined premises of the supposedly authoritative perspectives and highlights their tautologous and reifying proclivities but it does not cease to engage with the world. It strives to combine rigorous appraisal of objective constraints with a stubborn belief in the ability of the agents to respond to their environment in a creative manner.

Although Adorno's observations on the object domain of social sciences are scattered throughout his work, his well known engagement with the empirically minded philosophers and sociologists over the issue of 'positivism' is particularly illuminating. In addition, *Negative Dialectics* contains an extended statement of his methodological concerns. These texts will therefore be central to the present discussion which aims to demonstrate the relevance of Adorno's thought to the development of critical theory as a multi-disciplinary approach with the potential to grapple with the complexity and fluidity of the 'post modern condition'.

121
Dialectic of Enlightenment : Genealogy of the Dis-enchanted Subject

With Kant's inquiry into the conditions of knowledge was born the critical tradition of German philosophy which culminated (or degenerated, depending upon one's point of view) via Hegel and Feuerbach in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Although Kant maintained that the essence of the 'thing' remains inaccessible to the knowing subject, he qualified his scepticism by proposing that mind is not a tabula rasa whose capacities are limited to registering the effects of external objects more or less like a machine. Rather, the subject 'constitutes' or constructs objects of knowledge with the help of mental 'categories' which however are pre-given. While Kant's universal subject reigns supreme in the realm of sensible phenomena, an unbridgeable gulf separates it from the intelligible or 'noumenal' realm of pure forms. However, if the subject cannot have direct access to the transcendental dimension, it can somehow sense its dissociation from it.

Hegel considered this schism between subject and object gratuitous, indeed an impediment to philosophical speculation. He endeavoured to remove it by positing a grandiose subject that maintains a dynamic relation with the totality of objects although it is said to consume objective reality in the final moment of self-realisation as absolute subject. At that juncture, history as a constant struggle between consciousness and nature on the one hand and between different subjects hungry for recognition, comes to an end. Kantian dualism disappears in Hegel, but so does the object as a more or less independent entity. In an age suffused with the optimism of Enlightenment, Left Hegelians and particularly Feuerbach were wont to interpret Hegel's notion of absolute subject as a euphemism for autonomous, universal but nevertheless sensuous human subject; a subject that can contemplate its liberation from nature as well as metaphysical illusions and become consciously human. Marx, who
admired Feuerbach's radical interpretation of Hegel reconstructed the former's concept of 'species-being' to denote the ideal of emancipated, reconciled human collectivity of the future. Needless to say, Marx was an apostle of Enlightenment even though he opposed some of the pathologies associated with the pattern of capitalist development dominant during his lifetime.

Critical theorists evince a certain amount of disillusionment with the ideals of the Enlightenment including the notion of universal subject whose constitution presupposes, among other things, an instrumental relationship with nature. Although Adorno is reluctant to renounce the utopian and critical moments of the Enlightenment thinking, his scepticism is rooted in his experience of life in the late capitalist society. As many scholars have pointed out, Adorno's pessimistic outlook on modernity was shaped in part by the years he spent in America as a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. This experience is subjected to a searching analysis employing Nietzschean, Weberian and Luckacsian insights and late capitalist society is declared to be the preserve of instrumental rationality gone mad.

Appropriating certain elements from Nietzsche's geneological account of subject formation, Adorno recognises that modern subjects are to a large extent constituted within intricate frameworks of domination which anticipate and often neutralise resistance. However, unlike postmodernists, he does not recommend total dissolution of subjectivity as a viable strategy of resistance, subversion or escape.\footnote{See Martin Jay, 'Adorno in America', \textit{New German Critique} no. 31, Winter 1984, pp.157 182. Peter Hohendahl, 'The Displaced Intellectual? Adorno's American Years Revisited', \textit{New German Critique} no. 56, Spring Summer 1992. An important source of Adorno's reflections on his experience of migrancy is, \textit{Minima Moralia}, London, Verso, 1974.}

\footnote{Also see James Glass, 'Multiplicity, Identity and the Horrors of Selfhood: Failures in the Post Modern Positions', Political Psychology, Vol. 14, June 1993. 'To live the life (the facts) of multiple selfhood is to not know where one self begins and others end. It is to be lost, without any sense of historical continuity to one's being. I would submit this kind of 'freedom' is not liberation but enslavement to a contingent world, a frightening internal and external set of perceptions that have the power to impose serious, if not deadly, emotional fragmentation and psychological dislocation.' P. 276. Italics in the original.}
With the progressive atrophying of Oedipal conflict in 'fatherless societies' where traditional modes of socialisation have been supplanted by the intrusive and atomising structures of monopoly capital, egos have become so brittle that elements of capitalist-militarist ideology penetrate the subconscious more or less directly. Not surprisingly, consumerism reigns supreme in these circumstances; it feeds upon the generalised anxiety, keeps identities in flux and incorporates ever larger sections of the population in a vast spectacle. Pleasure and distraction become inseparable in a development that could hardly be called revolutionary. With the offerings of 'culture industries' becoming a permanent feature in the lounge rooms and leisure-scapes of the middle classes, Enlightenment finally degenerates into 'mass deception'. As they put it:

Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same time mechanization has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardised operations (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 137)

At the risk of simplifying his account somewhat, it may be stated that the notion of subject becomes ideological for Adorno whenever it is used to characterise individuals existing in contemporary societies or when it is meant to imply that individual freedom is desirable or even possible without liberating society as a whole. Unlike post modernists, Adorno did not renounce the promise of subjectivity as such, realising as he did that the notion emerged only when certain pre-conditions for its actualisation had been fulfilled. Marcuse too was irked by the relentless but misguided campaign which 'radical' theory had been undertaking against the notion of individuality. What disturbed him in particular was the fact that 'radical' theory had apparently forgotten the fascist propagandists' assault on the notion of individuality

---

and 'private sphere'. Like Adorno, Marcuse believed that the dramatic erosion of mediatory structures in the monopoly phase of capitalist development had exposed the individual to overpowering frameworks of integration, rendering her/him virtually defenceless. It was somewhat baffling in such circumstances that 'radical' theory should carry on its onslaught on a collapsing subject. After the world-wide demise of revolutionary movements, the task of resistance has fallen to the subjects' capacity to acknowledge the suffering caused by the unmitigated degradation of identity and natural resources which fuel capitalist development:

To be sure, the concept of the individual as developing freely in solidarity with others can become a reality only in a socialist society. But the fascist period and monopoly capital have decisively changed the political value of these concepts. The 'flight into inwardness' and the insistence on a private sphere may well serve as bulwarks against a society which administers all dimensions of human existence. Inwardness and subjectivity may well become the inner and outer space for the subversion of experience, for the emergence of another universe. Today, the rejection of the individual as a "bourgeois" concept recalls and presages fascist undertakings. (Marcuse, 1979, pp.38-39)

While the crisis of the bourgeois subject may have become acute in the context of late capitalism, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the 'pre-history' of this subject to Greek epics which already contain de-mythologising tendencies. What else is enlightenment, after all, than stubborn refusal of myth becoming increasingly self-confident, productive and finally, absolute? The opening sentences of Dialectic of Enlightenment present the matter unequivocally:

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p.3)
The uncompromising empiricism of Bacon's 'experimental philosophy' ventures to extirpate even residues of enchanted thinking which may have survived in Plato's and Descartes' deductive, mathematical programme of enlightenment. After the unleashed power of rationality renders everything calculable and manipulable, having declared the world to be without spirit, Enlightenment hurtles towards the kind of 'metaphysical neutrality' that will consume the original promise and go blind, abandoning what remains of life to the deafening echoes of libertarian slogans and the ether of absurdity. In other words, when the critique of metaphysics becomes total, it congeals into an anti-metaphysics which is unable to offer any solace to the bewildered subject. In such a state of affairs, distinctions become increasingly arbitrary and even superfluous. Even that thought which is most resolutely focused on practice and 'results' can get mired in intractable problems and produce uncanny results. As Horkheimer remarks, 'In pragmatism, pluralistic as it may represent itself to be, everything becomes mere subject matter and thus ultimately the same, an element in the chain of means and effects' (Horkheimer, 1947, p.46). One is impelled to raise similar questions about post modernism's pluralistic and emancipatory claims and wonder if it

---

6 Adorno, Theodor, and Horkheimer, Max. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London, Verso. In an attempt to illustrate de mythologising tendencies in Greek thinking, Adorno and Horkheimer remark that, just as the images of generation from water and earth, which came from the Nile to the Greeks, became here hylozoistic principles, or elements, so all the equivocal multitude of mythical demons were intellectualized in the pure form of ontological essences. Finally, by means of Platonic ideas, even the patriarchal gods of Olympus were absorbed in the philosophical *Logos*. p.6. Even discursive renditions of myths exemplify rational, systematising tendencies. 'In place of the local spirits and demons there appeared heaven and its hierarchy; in place of the invocations of the magician and the tribe the distinct gradation of sacrifice and the labor of the unfree mediated through the word of command. The Olympian deities are no longer directly identical with elements but signify them .... The gods are distinguished from material elements as their quintessential concepts. From now on, being divides into the *Logos* (which with the progress of philosophy contracts to the monad, to a mere point of reference), and into the mass of all things and creatures without. This single distinction between existence proper and reality engulfs all others. Without regard to distinctions, the world becomes subject to man.' p.8.

7 See Horkheimer, Max. *The Eclipse of Reason*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1947. Horkheimer urges caution towards pragmatism which often presents itself as the natural alternative to Platonism and other types of rational absolutism. He notes that pragmatism tends to idolise natural sciences and reduce thought to practical relevance and 'mere conduct'. Thus, it has some affinities with anti-intellectualism celebrated by hard core industrialism. Ultimately, pragmatism can offer no objection to the achievements of conquerors and tends to sanction the status quo.Pp.48 50. 'In face of the idea that truth might afford the opposite of satisfaction and turn out to be completely shocking to humanity at a given historical moment and thus be repudiated by anybody, the fathers of pragmatism made the satisfaction of the subject the criterion of truth. For such a doctrine there is no possibility of rejecting or even criticizing any species of belief that is enjoyed by its adherents.' p.52.
represents a departure from the fundamental values of the Enlightenment. It may be that in the present conjuncture, the Enlightenment need no longer rail against superstitions and ideologies because it has already either absorbed them or else exiled them to 'other' realms which are divested of significance. But if indifference to metaphysics is no longer a product of painstaking intellectual labour but an experience intrinsic to contemporary existence, could it mean that the modern subject has indeed made substantial gains in maturity and freedom? Adorno and Horkheimer disagree:

This kind of neutrality is more metaphysical than metaphysics. Ultimately, the Enlightenment consumed not just the symbols but their successors, universal concepts, and spared no remnants of metaphysics apart from the abstract fear of the collective from which it arose. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p.23)

As previously mentioned, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the genesis of irreverent, cynical individuality, which was to become paradigmatic in the context of the Enlightenment, to ancient Greece. In their ground breaking analysis of *Odyssey* in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they note that the hero of Homer's epic has to repress his instincts when confronted by great forces of a timeless order, but he ends up extending the cycle of domination to other men and nature. In this way, he acquires the strength and cunning to become a rational subject and proceeds to lay the foundations of civilization. In order to pursue his goals rationally, he forbids himself unguarded communion with nature. Likewise, he treats simpler creatures and modes of social organization with a mixture of cunning and brutality that reveals him to be the prototypical imperialist. Coalescence of instrumental rationality and imperialist drive in the subjectivity of the heroic explorer is dramatically illustrated by his encounter with sirens and the one-eyed beast Polyphemus and also during his sojourn in the blissful land of lotus-eaters. By resisting the enchantment of mythical forces, rejecting erotic reconciliation with nature and denying his identity for the sake of survival, he fortifies himself against the beauty, innocence and suffering of others to pursue his 'self-
interest efficiently. Odysseus, whom Adorno and Horkheimer identify as the precursor of bourgeois entrepreneurs, treats natural and even supernatural powers as mere instruments, thereby providing dramatic expression to the processes whereby Enlightenment emerges from and dominates myth. But they note that the force with which the Enlightenment opposes myth can harden into mythical compulsion and become blind even to the well-being of the subject that is meant to be its beneficiary. It is precisely when the deluded subject celebrates its conquest of myth by consecrating its own omnipotence into a myth that it risks self-destruction:

Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken; for ... the substance which is dominated, suppressed, and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination; it is, in fact, what is to be preserved. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986, p. 54-55)

Moreover, rationality, which so often presents itself as the opposite of mimesis does so deceptively and at its own peril:

The ratio which supplants mimesis is not simply its counterpart. It is itself mimesis: mimesis unto death. The subjective spirit which cancels the animation of nature can master a despiritualized nature only by imitating its rigidity and despiritualizing itself in turn. Imitation enters into the service of domination inasmuch as even man is anthropomorphized for man. The pattern of Odyssean cunning is the mastery of nature through such adaptation. Renunciation, the principle of bourgeois disillusionment, the outward scheme for the intensification of sacrifice, is already present in nuce in that estimation of the ratio of forces which anticipates survival as so to speak dependent on the concession of one's own defeat, and — virtually — on death. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986, p. 57)

The gesture of Odysseus securing his life with a lie about his identity is the prototypical nominalist gesture whereby the subject abstracts from its substance and construes its own identity instrumentally. This gesture reverberates through the ages, marking modernity as the epoch haunted by an identity crisis which it cannot quite overcome:
From the formalism of mythic names and ordinances, which would rule men and history as does nature, there emerges nominalism - the prototype of bourgeois thinking. The artifice of self-preservation depends on the process which decrees the relation between word and thing. Odysseus' two contradictory actions in his encounter with Polyphemus, his answering to the name, and his disowning it, are nevertheless one. He acknowledges himself to himself by denying himself under the name Nobody: he saves his life by losing himself. This linguistic adaptation to death contains the schema of modern mathematics. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 60)

Thus, the promise which inspired the overthrow of feudal patrimonies and which was to unleash progressive forces across the gagged face of earth degenerated into the delusion that oversaw the refinement of primordial fear into the principle of cynical rationality which structures modern existence. In this account, civilization turns out to be what, in dissonant moments, it was always suspected of being — an elaborate sacrifice to death. It could win its sublime visage by signing away its substance to the forces that kill. It is no wonder then that its products continue to bear the traces of mortification even in the midst of emancipatory proclamations and material plenty. The calculation of probabilities that is meant to account for adverse consequences more than the ones desired, invades not only the structure of modern consciousness but the epicentre of desire itself. As if in obedience to the older Hegel's sober pronouncements, one tends to desire only what one is likely to attain, thus subjecting desire as well as its object to the framework of rationality. 'Real' increasingly becomes rational along with 'choice'.

While the subject of the Enlightenment is fundamentally unfree and unfulfilled in their opinion, Adorno and Horkheimer interpret imperialism as 'the most terrible

---

8 Adorno and Horkheimer contend that, The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice. In other words: the history of renunciation. Everyone who practices renunciation gives away more of his life than is given back to him: and more than the life that he vindi- cates. This is evident in the context of the false society in which everyone is superfluous and is deceived. But society demands that the man who tries to escape from universal, unequal, and unjust exchange, and not renounce but immediately seize the undiminished whole, must thereby lose everything even the miserable leavings that self preservation allows him. This immense though superficial sacrifice is required against sacrifice itself. Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 55.
form of *ratio*. It is in the context of imperialism that rationality abjures even nominal connection to the utopian promise of the Enlightenment and turns cynical, prompting the radically disciplined subject to unload the noxious by products of asceticism upon the colonised and recover some of its predatory elan. As Marquis de Sade's Francavilla maliciously observes:

Take its god from the people that you wish to subjugate, and then demoralize it; so long as it worships no other god than you, and has no other morals than your morals, you will always be its master... allow it in return the most extreme criminal license; punish it only when it turns upon you. (Cited in Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p.89)

**Redeeming the Object: Adorno's Negative Dialectics**

Rebelling against Hegel whose dialectics surrenders objective reality to the universal subject, Adorno retreats to Kantian dualism in moments of extreme discomfort, but only to regroup his forces, not to retire. Although Kant's notion of thing-in-itself makes no direct reference to corporeal substance, yet it preserves something of the non-identical from the grasp of the voracious subject. As Adorno remarks in 'Subject and Object':

Even after the second reflection of the Copernican term, there remains some truth in the most questionable theorem: in the distinction between the transcendent thing in itself and the constituted object. For then the object would be the non-identical, free from the subjective spell and comprehensible through its self-criticism... It would not be disenchanted *mundus intelligibilis* rather it would be more real than the *mundus sensibilis* in so far as Kant's Copernican turn abstracts from that non identity and therein finds its barrier.(Adorno, 1978b, p.507)

Adorno's keenness to envision the liberation of object from the spell of oppressive subject rivals Hegel's ambition to overcome Kantian dualism. Hegel feels that Kant's celebration of the formal autonomy of an essentially vacuous subject represents the subject's indifference to the object. Although Adorno knows that Kant
may have been absolutising the values of the ascendant bourgeoisie which include ritual valorisation of the bourgeois subject as free and universal in the face of increasing atomisation. However, Adorno refrains from endorsing Hegel's move which appears to condone perpetual domination of the weak and the different in the name of universal integration. This refusal becomes especially poignant in the wake of Communism's crisis. However, what is routinely forgotten in the post modern climate of opinion is Adorno's other refusal. This is the refusal to abandon the ideal of universal harmony. Thus, Adorno's thought cannot be assimilated to 'bourgeois' scepticism which likes to regard itself as the last word in sophistication. Exasperated by the uncommon texture of Adorno's thought, impatient critics leap to unwarranted conclusions. There is little doubt that one underestimates the complexity of Adorno's thought at substantial cost to one's understanding of its content. Like Nietzsche, he provokes flat-footed interpreters and leaves them disconsolate.

Hegel's was a seminal influence on Adorno; indeed, the very rigour of the latter's negative dialectics is a testimony to Hegel's method. Hegel's accomplishment was to undertake systematic explication of the romantic intuition that the world is a unified whole in which man and nature, mind and matter, high and low, are permeated by the same creative spirit, so all aspects of Being enrich one another. Thus, man could realise his creative potential only through spontaneous exchange with nature and mind would become lifeless if it were to remain alienated from matter. The great romantics like Schiller, Schelling and Holderlin experienced and expressed in powerful, evocative language the widespread distress generated by the rapid pace of industrialisation in Europe. Their nostalgia for untramelled nature was provoked by the degradation of 'life-world' to the level of pliable objects; after all, they perceived deep affinities between man and nature. Hegel's dialectics records the intricate and dynamic character of this affinity even though it concludes by assimilating concrete objects to the consciousness of the subject. Nevertheless, Hegel's subject attains universality only after long and tortuous engagement with objects. In other words,
Hegel's subject, unlike Kant's, is not declared to be universal from the outset. Had the subject been self-sufficient to begin with; remaining unaltered in the course of its explorations, then reference to the object would be superfluous. As Hegel explains, the subject gains in substance only when it opens itself to the plenitude of what is not immanent to it; what is not a projection of its own consciousness; in other words what is different, although it will be mastered in due course. In the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes:

Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this relation or of the being of something for a consciousness, is knowing. But we distinguish this being-for-another from being-in-itself; whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this being-in-itself is called truth. (Hegel, 1977, pp. 52-53)

Fully aware of what unclarified affirmation of integration might mean in the context of late capitalism, Adorno holds on to the moment of 'truth'; to object's 'being-in-itself' before it is imprisoned in arbitrary 'knowing' by the imperious subject. Adorno suspects that Hegel was possibly overwhelmed by the objective tendencies of the age to give up the moment of 'truth' which his thought undoubtedly contained. The subject, according to Adorno, depends upon the object for self-realisation almost as much as the latter depends upon the subject, in fact even more, since a subject is firstly an object and only latter does it ascend to subject hood. To make the object conform to arbitrary criteria, the subject must suppress those aspects of its own make up which relate spontaneously to those aspects of the object which are to be liquidated during the latter's constitution as an 'object for the subject'. Hence, those impulses in the subject which yearn for objectification but fail to discover a commensurable object may be experienced by the subject as something strange, even pathological. The price that the subject must pay for its arbitrary control of the object domain is the discipline which it must impose upon itself to adapt to an impoverished world of objects. In *Dialectic of
Enlightenment Adorno and Horkheimer provide a genealogical account of the renunciations which determine the stable disposition of the bourgeois subject, uncovering the catastrophic telos permeating the Enlightenment gone blind and become forgetful of its promise.

Written several years later, Negative Dialectics retains some of the earlier insights while revising others, with Adorno resorting to unusual strategies to rupture the 'spell' which envelops subjective consciousness in 'totally administered' societies. No wonder then that it resembles less the works of academic philosophy than a string of meditations which read at times like Zen Koans. As Gillian Rose notes, this is entirely consistent with Adorno's convictions. In the late capitalist societies which are dominated by the principle of abstract exchange, even the most unlike things are presented as equivalents. The distinction between the original and the substitute becomes ambiguous since wants are manufactured after the products with which they are meant to be satisfied. Real needs, in which traces of spontaneity may still be discerned, are treated as anamolies to be 'managed' and not as legitimate demands of enlightened subjects. Tired, unsatisfied workers become targets of culture industry's anaesthatising deluge. Increasingly, grown ups find it difficult to exercise their critical faculties and children to play. More often than not, they resign themselves to being consumers and little else. As their attention spans shrink under the deluge of stupifying stimuli, they are liable to comprehend only that which is presented to them in most explicit terms. Unfortunately this reinforces their craving for fully processed, user-friendly products and perpetuates the reign of the ever same although hysterical voices regularly proclaim 'break throughs', 'discoveries' and 'paradigm shifts', as though to distract from the fact that hardly anything changes for the most desperate. In these conditions, the likelihood increases that the imperilled subject will identify with the seductive facade of the dominated objects and with the compelling voice of authority. Thus, intellectual resistance is forced to become acutely, even absurdly vigilant.
It is concerns such as these which underpin Adorno's criticism of art-forms that purport to be emancipatory but end up reinforcing the spell which emanates from the pores of the 'dominated totality'. Born and bred in the radically de-familiarised urban waste-lands, the impotent subject clings desperately to artful representations of power and intimacy; anything that is forcefully presented as seductive and familiar. Adorno is notoriously suspicious of art forms and philosophies that promise easy, unmediated access to the 'real thing'. Indeed, it is with this point in mind that he undertakes critique of existentialists who, in their zeal to express nothing but the absolute truth of the 'human condition' in re-enchanted language, spin an esoteric web of words in which the texture of the things disappears. But, when a thought becomes allergic to the world of objects whose false or violent character it is resolved to criticise, it tends to reinforce the spell that stupifies the subject and undermines thought. Thought must engage with the world, and do so with hope:

The conflict between subjectivity and forms is undiminished, but under the universal rule of forms a consciousness that feels impotent, that has lost confidence in its ability to change the institutions and their mental images, will reverse the conflicts into identification with the aggressor. (Adorno, 1990, p.94)

Adorno insists that existential ontology represents the desire of the thoroughly conditioned subject to posit itself as unconditioned since this subject is not prepared to confront the objective constraints which delimit its existence. Even in moments of acute despair when the existentialist makes a fleeting contact with the truth or falsehood of his condition, he turns his face away in fear or disgust. Adorno's own work, even at its most philosophical, is full of startling references to actual situations which save his dialectics from esoterism and remind the reader that thought by itself cannot change the world. What is conveniently forgotten about Adorno's thought is that although, following Marx and Weber, it highlights the regulative mechanisms of the late capitalist society, it refuses to eternalise them. While the 'false universal' may be dominant at
present, it would be dogmatic to insist, in the manner of existentialists, that subject-object dialectic has frozen for all times to come. It is upon the object's 'preponderance' that Adorno pins his hopes, arguing that something in the object necessarily escapes the grasp of the subject even when the subject appears all but invincible. He is adamant that this aspect of the object underpins the very idea of dialectics: 'The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder' (Adorno, 1990, p. 5).

This 'something' which escapes conceptualisation and is dismissed by the subject as inessential, participates in the constitution of the concept. Not only that. It holds the subject under a secret judgement - a counter-spell as it were, which, despite its apparent weakness, has the potential to explode not only the formal mask of the object but also that of the subject. This irregular, unassimilable element persists on the boundary of the concept, both nourishing and threatening it, suppressed yet violently alive:

By itself, the logically abstract form of 'something', something that is meant or judged, does not claim to posit a being and yet surviving in it - indelible for a thinking that would delete it - is that which is not identical with thinking, which is not thinking at all. (Adorno, 1990, p. 34)

The irreducible plenitude of the object is capable of igniting liberation of the subject from the spell that the subject has cast upon itself and everything else. The spell is prolonged by the propensity of the Western thinking to reduce the world to the status of objects, but also because the subject in actuality was hardly ever autonomous. A fundamentally insecure subject is irresistibly drawn towards tales of metaphysical grandeur and world-conquest. It is not without interest for this discussion that Hegel came close to recognising the power of the non-identical, but so eager was he to drive his train of sublations to the crescendo of universal reconciliation that he bypassed the
'exit' so to speak. This 'event' or 'decision', unquestionably excessive and overdetermined by theological compulsions, seems so fateful in retrospect, especially to the philosophers. However, in the short-lived prelude to the aborted moment of 'truth', Hegelian dialectics pre-figures Adorno's negative dialectics quite remarkably. Hegel writes in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*:

The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it. But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom - this is the tremendous power of the negative, it is the energy of thought, of the pure 'I'. Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. (Hegel, 1977, pp. 18-19)

Despite his overpowering 'identitarian' drive, Hegel has to admit that non-identical is the energy which drives thought towards concretion and animates 'the pure I' which he considers 'unconditioned' elsewhere. However, given his infamous thirst for the absolute, nothing from the sphere of the living could be allowed to negate the universal subject and so he has to invoke death or non-being as a stand-in for this negative. It is the measure of Hegel's ambivalence towards the non-identical that even as he recognises its power, he feels compelled to conjure it away as non-actual. He insists that the non-identical is by definition estranged from its 'real' context, and would cease to have actuality or meaning outside this context - its own, that is. What significance could a mere fragment have without being recognised, interpreted and blessed by the universal subject? Where could it derive its identity if not from 'its own' context? From thought? But, could the content of thought be other than daemonic if it is not grounded in a secure relationship with things? A groundless thought? A thought without home? Could thought be grounded in anything other than a home (land)? What would a groundless thought be a thought of? Of things that are not its own? Of things that do
not recognise it; 'other' things? Alien thought? Just thought? A thought that has nowhere to return to? A thought on its own? Interminable thought?

For Adorno, by contrast, non-identical represents the subversive potential of the object that may ignite the remnants of spontaneity in the subject to de-legitimise the values of a coercive totality. While Adorno does not intend to absolutise non-identity like some post-modernists do, he does appear to invest it with the same power to terrorise, fascinate, de-mystify and substantiate that Hegel attributes to death when he writes that, 'Spirit is the power only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being' (Hegel, 1977, p. 19).

It is by confronting the negative and struggling with it that the spirit gains in strength and consciousness. Reason becomes reason in the substantial sense of the word only after it has endured the kiln of madness; the realm of radical otherness. Adorno expresses a similar thought in *Negative Dialectics*:

> Philosophy must do without the consolation that truth cannot be lost. A truth that cannot plunge into the abyss which the metaphysical fundamentalists prate about - it is not the abyss of agile sophistry, but that of madness - will at the bidding of its certainty principle turn analytical, a potential tautology. (Adorno, 1990, p. 34)

It is here, one may argue, that Adorno faces the challenge of post-foundational thinking squarely and almost cringes in trepidation, returning Hegel to the security of the philosophical tradition and invoking Nietzsche's haggard ghost. Indeed, 'Understanding' as opposed to 'Reason' has the de-merit of avoiding this menacing but potentially regenerative surplus in the object. Understanding is static and abstract, content to record the general and obvious features of the object from without. Seldom does it venture beyond the superficial and arbitrarily drawn boundaries which it complacently identifies with the structures of the real. On the other hand, the decision
to abandon oneself to the plenitude of the object could be fraught with unforeseeable risks. One thinks of the gift / curse of forgetfulness associated with the songs of sirens; muteness caused by staring into the head of Medusa, and the risk of losing one's name by crossing the sacred boundary and drifting to the other side of the mountain.

It does not take much to pronounce the death of philosophy, but Adorno recognises that stakes are very high indeed. It seems that thought must immunise itself against the possibility of deception or destruction with something like faith before it could proceed to negotiate the object, and yet guarantees of victory tend to exact enormous price from thought's other. Examples of Hegel and Marx should suffice in this respect. Can thinking cast off its Olympian habit; its identity, and go down to commune with non-thinking? Adorno is less sanguine about the prospects, like his nemesis Heidegger, who had to learn the hard way that the task of overcoming Western metaphysics might involve having to transcend Western culture and its hazardous avocations. Western culture and its metaphysical crown cannot be forgotten overnight; hegemony of 'concept' has to be worked through and opened up from inside towards the non identical, it cannot be made to disappear by the force of will or conviction alone.9

Adorno, it may be said, has shown us the way to the heart of the object, but it passes through our own hearts because it is not mere polemic to suggest that even 'rational' and 'enlightened' subjects, and particularly them, are also objects. In the final analysis, the dichotomy between subject and object is indeed misleading, especially when ontologised. As subject and object constitute one another, interpreting their apparent distinctness as mutual indifference or antagonism, or collapsing them into sameness would be wrong. Subject and object could be harmoniously related without ceasing to be different. What is made to wear the label of 'different' or

---

identified as 'dangerous', superfluous or exotic is in effect forcibly defined in relation to some abstract standard:

It is precisely the insatiable identity principle that perpetuates antagonism by suppressing contradiction. What tolerates nothing that is not like itself thwarts the reconciliation for which it mistakes itself. The violence of equality - mongering reproduces the contradiction it eliminates. (Adorno, 1990, pp. 142-43)

The manner in which Adorno has criticised the totalising imperatives of both capitalism and 'actually existing socialism' may suggest that he valorises unmediated particularities. However, that is not the case. As he goes on to clarify, it is the false universal that constructs particularities in relation to itself. He does indeed want to alert the individual to ideologies that would sacrifice her/him in due course but he makes it abundantly clear that esoteric and self-intoxicating discoveries of 'subversive' formulas which demonise references to a shared experience of suffering under capitalism and imperialism are not likely to provide any ideological weapons to the exploited and the marginalised. Notwithstanding his strictures against the evils of collectivisation, it is safe to say that he would have refrained from celebrating the standpoint of radical, contentless subjectivity in the midst of a subjugated collectivity. Nor indeed does he abandon the utopian hope of reconciliation - a condition in which the object would not have to follow the standards of an indifferent subject. 'Reconciliation', he writes, 'would release the non-identical, would rid it of coercion; it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them' (Adorno, 1990, p. 60). And:

To define identity as the correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept is hubris; but the ideal of identity must not simply be discarded. Living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concept's longing to become identical with the thing. This is how the sense of non-identity contains identity. The supposition of identity is indeed the ideological element of pure thought, all the way through to formal logic, but hidden in it is also the truth moment of ideology, the pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism. (Adorno, 1990, p. 149)
This conception is not without hope, although its concrete implications would have to be carefully worked out. In the final analysis, the liberation of object from the commodity status is a precondition of the subject's liberation. He explains that fetish character of commodity is not mere subjective illusion but an objective condition which produces individual consciousness as spell-bound. Thus, in a letter to Walter Benjamin, he writes:

The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather it is dialectical, in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness. This means that consciousness or unconsciousness cannot simply depict it as a dream, but responds to it in equal measure with fear and desire. (Adorno, 1986, p. 111)

However, if the individual consciousness is penetrated by influences drawing sustenance from the structures of the capitalist economy, then it is clear that reconciliation cannot be decreed and clarity of thought is not sufficient by itself. Moreover, it becomes less clear how a predatory if spell-bound subject would relate spontaneously to the dominated object if the structural barriers to undistorted communication remain in place. If we accept the premise that subjective consciousness under late capitalism is mediated through and through by the principle of abstract exchange, then the issue of locating a privileged vantage point for de-mystifying critique becomes problematical too. It becomes harder still to interpret remarks such as the following if one were to liken 'totally administered societies' to fate:

If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms ... it is up to these individuals to make the moral and, as it were, representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it cannot see or, to do justice to reality, will not allow themselves to see. (Adorno, 1990, p. 41)

When a thinker as vigilant as Adorno makes a statement such as this, it calls for closer scrutiny. As a matter of fact, it is not unusual for Adorno to dramatise a situation
in all its crushing details so that evasive thinking and pseudo-solutions may be avoided. Lest his words be interpreted to legitimate something like a nobility of Nietzschean geniuses, he promptly adds the following warning:

Elitist pride would be the last thing to befit the philosophical experience. He who has it must admit to himself how much, according to his possibilities in existence, his experience has been contaminated by existence, and ultimately by the class relationship. (Adorno 1990, p.42)

Politics and Method: The Positivist Controversy

Much has been written about the debate between Adorno and Popper which took place at the notorious Tubingen conference. There is still some confusion as to what actually took place and the true significance thereof. However, Adorno's contribution to the conference and his extended introduction to the volume entitled, The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology, offer the clearest account of his views on a range of methodological issues which have been central to the debates in social sciences. Whereas positivism of the Vienna Circle as subsequently modified by Karl Popper is the overt target of Adorno's critique, it is not difficult to deploy his arguments in the contemporary theoretical debates involving poststructuralism and Habermasian version of critical theory. Since poststructuralist and post modernist antipathy to metaphysics tends to gravitate towards the positivist extreme, Adorno's ability to develop coherent critiques of idealism and positivism without getting mired in sceptical paralysis, anti-theoretical decisionism or political quietism cannot be ignored. Furthermore, positivism cannot be assumed to have been superseded either as an epistemological framework or research method in Economics, Sociology, Politics and many other fields. Indeed, the bulk of research on the so-called developing societies continues to be informed by fairly conventional, positivistic conceptions of method.
Whereas Ralf Dahrendorf regards the exchange between Adorno and Popper as an abortive affair, David Frisby argues that there are substantial political and epistemological differences between their respective methodological positions. One contentious issue is of course the appropriate conception of theory in the context of social sciences. This issue harks back to the earlier debates in Germany about the relationship between 'facts' and 'values', natural and cultural sciences and between knowledge and politics (Frisby, 1976, p.x). While it has been suggested that Adorno criticised an outmoded version of positivism to which Karl Popper no longer subscribed, it is important to note that Popper did not abandon his decidedly sceptical attitude towards theory and especially 'dialectics'. And, that is precisely the issue which engages Adorno.

It is my contention that disagreements between Adorno and Popper are rooted in their respective epistemological and political stand points. Popper may have distanced himself from the crude positivism of the Vienna Circle and attempted to theorise ideas and dispositions in a relatively tolerant manner in his later work yet his consistent attacks on theory and 'dialectics' belie his affinity with the supremely confident scepticism of his erstwhile mentors. Adorno argues that positivists violate the integrity of the object when they appropriate it with pre-fabricated procedures legitimatized in turn by reverent allusions to 'scientific method'. What underpins this fetishism of method is the subject's indifference to the object (Adorno, 1976, p.32). This indifference is the result of objectively conditioned perception that the subject has little in common with object. Denial of the fact that both subject and object are embedded in specific contexts allows the subject to dominate and imprison the object in arbitrary forms (Adorno, 1976, 41). Once disconnected from the object, subjective consciousness considers itself omnipotent; this is really meant to compensate for the loss of real object to an indifferent method. Adorno does indeed remark that Popper's formalism smacks of pre-Kantian faith in logic (Adorno, 1976, p.26). He regrets that positivists have failed to learn any lesson from Hegel who demonstrated the
inadequacy of ‘monochrome formalism which only arrives at the differentiation of its material since this has been already provided and is by now familiar’(Hegel,1977,p.9).

Adorno wonders if rhetorical affirmation of openness and plurality is meant to conceal the reification and blandness which a deterministic and distorted relationship between subject and object inevitably produces. By failing to account for the mediations which mediate deceptively, positivists cling to the mediated phenomena and misinterpret them as something untainted, pre-given; indeed as ‘pure facts’(Adorno,1976,p.30). Thanks to their craven regard for nominalist taboos, positivists refrain from theorising; from synthesising and interpreting and so, they overlook the connections without which particular social phenomena cannot become intelligible.

The other serious problem with positivism is related to the implicit assumption that the subject of knowledge is free from social determinations and prejudices, not to say appropriately enlightened: ‘Since Hume, positivism has regarded careful reflection upon the subject (of perception) as superfluous. The consequences are inevitably borne by the truth-content of protocol sentences’(Adorno,1976,p.54). Thanks to the influence of positivism, social sciences remain blissfully unaware of the power relations which are involved in their constitution as academic fields (Adorno,1976,p.34). Since the objects of social sciences are markedly different from the objects of natural sciences, Adorno argues (somewhat like Weber) that social sciences should not surrender the interpretive function to scientific imperatives nor strive for the exactitude of natural scientific explanations (Adorno,1976,p.33). Human beings cannot be treated like inert, neutral objects because they are blessed with consciousness and are embedded in intricate cultural contexts. Besides, they are capable of changing even while being observed and classified. If social phenomena do at times become unusually clear and predictable, that does not necessarily signify the triumph of social sciences. More often than not, what it signifies is the degraded state
triumph of social sciences. More often than not, what it signifies is the degraded state of humanity because only in a comprehensively regulated society, where people's behaviour, thoughts and dispositions have become greatly standardised would positivism thrive as a penetrating methodology.

Adorno does not oppose empirical research, only insists that in an undeniably mediated situation where direct access to significant phenomena is occluded (so far as atomised subjects are concerned) by a preponderance of ideologies, distortions, propaganda and other mechanisms of coercion, research be grounded in theoretical perspectives which can illuminate socio-historical contexts and discursive ensembles. Ideally, theory and empirical research will have a dialectical relationship. Without overall guidance and critical refinement provided by theory, empirical research becomes an exercise in data collection which may actually reproduce the prevalent conception of 'the way things are'. On the other hand, if theory fails to be continually enriched by empirical contents, it would become vacuous, self-obsessed and domineering. Contrary to what positivists may claim, Adorno's goal is 'both increased exactness of empirical observation and the force of theory which inspires interpretation and transforms itself in it' (Adorno, 1976, p.33). However, Adorno's definition of 'exactness' is bound to differ from that of positivists. Furthermore, it is not to be confused with 'literalness'. The notion of exactness in cultural sciences, he argues, must incorporate a degree of 'unliteralness'. Indeed, This unliteralness... paraphrases the concept of interpretation which interprets being as non-being (Adorno, 1976, p.34).

If theory abandons the interpretative task of situating a given set of 'data' in the proper socio-historical context and pretends to be a natural science, then, in its desire to produce orderly hierarchies of plausible statements, it is bound to relinquish the
generated through intra-mural skirmishes of experts, or 'scientific community' as Popper calls them, then, it is likely to become dissociated from normative concerns of the larger community (Adorno, 1976, pp. 28-30). It would be naïve to conflate 'academic' with apolitical, as Popper does, and to equate 'apolitical' with something that does not entail political consequences or has no connection with the sources of power. Positivism, Adorno claims, 'specifically lends itself', in keeping with the entire nominalist-sceptical tradition, to ideological abuse by virtue of its material indeterminacy, its classificatory method and finally, its preference for correctness rather than truth (Adorno, 1976, p. 30). If 'truth' is placed dogmatically under the Olympian sign of falsifiability which convicts in advance every insight likely to threaten the possibility of consensus, then theory may well be consigned to the scrap-heap of obsolete technologies.

In the 'post-ideological' world where technocratic fascism expands its empire without having to invoke lofty ideals, Popper's distinction between 'extra-scientific evaluations' and 'questions of truth' cannot be allowed to remain un-examined. 'Questions of truth' whose value-neutrality Popper takes for granted and which he wishes to resolve through scientists' debates with a minimum of external interference, are not easy to disentangle from the so-called extra-scientific evaluations except, perhaps, in an ideal society where the struggle to possess, increase and express power has become greatly pacified and science has merged with imaginative play. Popper, in his presentation at the Tubingen Conference does admit that the problem of 'value-freedom' is a particularly complicated one and that it might not be possible to purge scientific activity of extraneous influences and subjective prejudices of the operatives (Popper, 1976, p. 96). Yet, the limitations of his approach become apparent when he reverts to treating scientific activity and its paradoxes as mainly technical issues which ought to be confined to their specific domain. Thus he declares:
It should be noted that the paradox disappears quite of its own accord if we replace demand for freedom from attachment to all values by the demand that it should be one of the tasks of scientific criticism to point out confusion of value and to separate purely scientific value problems of truth, relevance, simplicity, and so on, from extra scientific problems. (Popper, 1976, pp. 97-98)

Faith invested in words 'confusion', 'purely', 'relevance', 'simplicity' and 'extra-scientific' betray Popper's affinity with Positivism. Underlying this sentimental espousal of openness is the same dogmatic nonchalance with which logical positivists would bifurcate reality into clear and confusing, relevant and irrelevant, scientific and unscientific, pure and impure halves.

Critical theorists stress the necessarily mediated character of data which they treat as ciphers. It is through interpretation that 'history' which is congealed in phenomena may be de-ciphered. This is what Adorno means by 'making the object speak'. By contrast, 'objective description' of postivists takes phenomena at their face-value, getting so overwhelmed by the excess of appearance that it cannot grapple with the complexity of underlying patterns. It should be clear that critical theorists and critical rationalists have different conceptions of the subject-object relation and draw different conclusions from it; this difference underlies their methodological quarrels. For Adorno, the objects of social science are irreducibly cultural whereas Popperian rationalists are loath to distinguish between natural and cultural sciences.

**Constellation: Metaphor or Method?**

Given Adorno's antipathy to excessive formalisation it is difficult to systematise his own methodological alternative or determine with certainty whether it measures up to his ideal of 'deciphering' which implies recovering the transitoriness, independence and specific physiognomy of the object without reifying it. However, in *Negative Dialectics* he refines his strategy of circumventing idealism's oppressive
conceptualisation and Phenomenology's refined idealism which nonetheless remains uncritical of the forces and processes involved in its own genesis. As usual, he wants to avoid the opposite extreme of methodological individualism which positivism invariably recommended to the social scientists. Thus, with considerable audacity, Adorno goes on to develop the Benjaminian motif of 'constellation' into a sophisticated alternative to the arid methodologism of positivistic social science. The key to understanding this notion is Adorno's reluctance to subsume diverse phenomena under dogmatically constructed and maintained conceptual hierarchies. Susan Buck-Morss has attempted to pinpoint what distinguishes 'constellation' from concept. She writes that, 'In constructing it was continuously necessary to return to the phenomena themselves, the more so as the ideas were not eternal but historically specific constellations' (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 94). Terry Eagleton has remarked that the notion of constellation seems to offer a refined alternative to the decidedly more possessive and reifying epistemologies of Descartes and Kant which are anchored in the notion of autonomous subjectivity (Eagleton, 1990, p. 329). He explains that:

In this kind of micro analysis, the individual phenomenon is grasped in all of its overdetermined complexity as a kind of cryptic code or riddling rebus to be deciphered, a drastically abbreviated image of social processes which the discerning eye will persuade it to yield up. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 330)

Constellations are to be composed, not imposed. Rather than approaching the object directly and from a fixed standpoint, provisional categories designed to relate to its specific facets and contingent moments encircle it carefully, delicately. The emphasis is on being sensitive to discontinuities, not on covering them up with conceptual secretions. In this sense, a 'constellation' would be a network of monadological categories which stand in loose and contingent relations to one another. Interestingly, this configuration coincides with Adorno's image of ideal society where different elements co-exist without antagonism or having to surrender their identities. As he explains in Negative Dialectics: 'The constellation illuminates the specific side
of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden' (Adorno, 1990, p. 162).

Problematising a long-standing orthodoxy of radical theory, Adorno's approach labours to redeem appearance. At the same time, it hopes to foster the liberation of the object from the weight of historical sediment by making this sediment manifest, preferably in an exaggerated, explosive manner. Indeed, contradictions frozen in the object are to be startled by unexpected juxtaposition of its different facets which the conceptual monads uncover. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Adorno presupposes and indeed seeks openness, behind, within, and beyond the reified object domain; it is in this liberating space that the promise of dialectical, that is, spontaneous and mutually enriching relationship between subject and object is to be redeemed. As though distilling the essence of his negative dialectics, he writes: The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility - the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one' (Adorno, 1990, p. 52).

Critical theory cannot be satisfied with representing the given state of affairs, rather, it must compose 'dialectical images' intuited by a sensitive and vigilant subject into discursive forms, although these forms are not to be allowed to congeal into hermetic, self-sufficient, self-perpetuating systems. Nevertheless, the critical theoretical enterprise is necessarily constructivist. The process of construction involves mutual disenchantment of subjective and objective elements. But, as mentioned above, mutual disenchantment of different impulses, such as the mimetic and rational, does not imply neutralisation of desire or obliteration of the traces of suffering, nor is it meant to foster wishful, spurious reconciliation of irreconcilable elements. What it is meant to designate is non-repressed co-existence of discrepant moments. The distinction between self-discipline and fanaticism; between composition and subjugation, is crucial for understanding Adorno's thought, as it is for understanding
that of Nietzsche. To summarise, the figure of constellation signifies loosely connected, discrepant elements of the flexible but nevertheless rigorous theoretical construct which must remain open to non-identity and is for that reason also vulnerable to the effects of domination. Adorno would of course argue that such vulnerability is preferable to rigid theoretical armour of both idealism and positivism which may guarantee internal coherence but only to produce gigantic tautologies that keep disturbing aspects of reality at bay.

The context of Adorno's later formulations is the universal reign of commodification in late capitalism where the dream of emancipation through technology and social reform has imploded into the nightmare of technocratic fascism, having liquidated even the remnants of the bourgeois subjectivity along with its cognitive and aesthetic analogues. Unfortunately, the utopian alternative has also been consumed. What is theory to do in such circumstances? When the pervasiveness of commodification has inundated the memories of a reconciled past and has debased nature, when 'leisure' and domestic space have also been colonised thanks to the fantastic development of culture industries, sporting spectacles and organized tourism. Even the distinction between ideology and reality is no longer self-evident. Theory cannot exploit with its customary self-assurance the disjunction between 'what is' and what 'ought to be', or the one between the real and its supposedly distorted representations. Nor can it unproblematically invoke some pregiven, universally valid, transcendental norms to inspire critical practice and political action. The materialist scrutiny of metaphysics which was initiated by Marx and furthered by the relentless drive of capitalist modernisation has ensured that 'all that is solid melts into air' including Marxism itself.

But, can the notion of constellation withstand the severe demands with which the present conjuncture confronts thought or is it just another 'beautiful' formulation that cannot quite replace the hard sociological labour of the more familiar categories? It
is quite legitimate to ask whether constellations are more likely to mimic the late capitalist or post-modern flux and de-centring than offer critical insights? Can a theory with holistic ambitions dispense with the need to provide a coherent account of the totality? Indeed, even as he concedes that the notion of constellation represents, 'perhaps the most strikingly original attempt in the modern period to break with traditional versions of totality', Terry Eagleton stresses that any thought orientated towards change cannot afford to dispense with the idea of totality, because whatever its other limitations it does underline the systemic character of capitalism and specify 'which institutions are more central than others in the process of social exchange' (Eagleton, 1990, pp.330-31). Likewise, Frederic Jameson admires the elegance of Adorno's approach but adds that a clear understanding of capitalism in the contemporary period is necessary to determine the relevance of different theoretical positions (Jameson, 1990, p.209).

It may be that Adorno's model of uncompromising, unassimilable, minimalist modernism too has been appropriated by powerful corporations to embellish the facade of consumer society.\footnote{Thus, in his conclusion to *Aesthetics and Politics*, Jameson observes, 'What is ultimately fatal to this new and finally itself once more anti-political revival of the ideology of modernism is less the equivocal rhetoric of Adorno's attack on Lukacs or the partiality of his reading of Brecht, than very precisely the fate of modernism in the consumer society itself. For what was once an oppositional and anti social phenomenon in the early years of the century, has today become the dominant style of commodity production and an indispensable component in the machinery of the latter's ever more rapid and demanding reproduction of itself. That Schoenberg's Hollywood pupils used their advanced techniques to write movie music, that the master pieces of the most recent schools of American painting are now sought to embellish the splendid new structures of the great insurance companies and multinational banks... p.209.'} If that is the case, then the supposedly outmoded position of a Lukacs might have become relevant again. If the violent imperatives of late capitalism have exploded the unity of experience and impaired perceptual apparatus through excessive stimulation and if the individuals become increasingly forgetful of the overall configuration of the dominant system, then the notion of totality may have regained its critical, if not utopian potential:
For when modernism and its accompanying techniques of "estrangement" have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be "estranged" and corrected by a more totalising way of viewing phenomena. (Jameson, 1990, p. 211)

Stanley Aronowitz, while expressing admiration for the uncompromising negativity of critical theory, suggests that it should dispense with its Spenglerian pessimism (Aronowitz, 1992, pp. 313-14). In his view, critical theory's suspicion of traditional categories of social science often conflicts with its interpretive ambitions:

...in place of determinate categories of which positive science is so fond, negative theory in its quest for the sources of transformation is caught between a critique of categories as fulfilling an ontological need, and its own will to explanation, a program which requires positive, unhistorically mediated categories. (Aronowitz, 1992, p. 297)

In a somewhat similar vein, Habermas and Wellmer question Adorno's extreme negativity and emphatic notion of truth, opting instead for an expanded and differentiated conception of reason which is expected to transform critical theory into a viable social scientific enterprise besides preserving some of its enduring concerns. A reflection on these issues would have to address some of the contemporary debates involving post modernists and critical theorists. Paradoxically, it is by considering the different conceptions of aesthetics at stake in these debates that the political relevance of the theories of Adorno and post modernists may be properly understood.
CRITICAL THEORY, POSTMODERNISM AND AESTHETICS
CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL THEORY, POSTMODERNISM AND AESTHETICS

There has been an on-going debate about the extent to which Adorno's views resemble certain postmodernist claims about the relationship of culture, politics and society. A number of similarities between the work of Adorno and that of postmodernists and post-structuralists have been pointed out. These include their sensitivity to the totalitarian character of modern rationality and Western metaphysics and, their wariness towards the grandiose conception of the subject underpinning epistemological-political tyrannies of modernity. How the thinkers from Frankfurt and Paris respond to the crisis of modernity has been another basis for comparisons. It has been argued, for instance, that they combine a radical critique of existing political systems with an equally radical aversion to projects of collective emancipation, opting instead for esoteric procedures of de-construction or negative dialectics which are stimulated by a quasi-mystical invocation of the 'non-identical'. Thus, in the eyes of many Marxists and liberals, they are 'irrationalists', solipsists and nihilistic followers of Stirner and Nietzsche who have regressed to the pre-Marxist moment of 'mere' criticism.

Jurgen Habermas, who is undoubtedly the most influential among the present critical theorists, has argued that Adorno's Nietzsche inspired critique of modernity and rationality veers perilously close to the murky terrain of the postmodern. Habermas has developed this position at length in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Adorno and Horkheimer are seen to mount an extreme, totalised critique of Reason by reducing it to its instrumental moment, a gesture endemic to postmodernism. Likewise, they are said to conflate the rational subject of modernity with the bourgeois subject whose genesis they trace to Greek epics. It is necessary to
examine Habermas' critique because given his influence, it threatens to become the definitive evaluation of the older generation's contribution. More seriously, it characterises the bulk of their work as irrational, nihilistic and defeatist, thereby detrating from its complexity and worth as a possible resource for critical thinking.

There are others who endeavour to 'rescue' critical theory from a corrupting association with postmodernism. Typically, they distinguish the former's 'rational' character and 'liberal' valencies from postmodernism's Sadian and Heideggerian proclivities. However, such 'sympathetic' critics, who are fascinated by the Nietzschean problematic and cling to Adorno as a relatively 'sane' voice from the labyrinth, duly abandon him for the more 'grounded', patriarchal, European Habermas when the attention shifts to 'concrete' proposals of a social and political nature (Held, 1980; Wellmer, 1993). But, once major premises of Adorno's critique of modernity are accepted, Habermasian response to the 'pathologies' of modernity could hardly be viewed as adequate. The other problem with such approaches is their constrictive interpretation of Adorno's work, driven as they are by the impulse to distinguish Adorno's more 'rational' positions from the 'extreme' ones of postmodernists. It will be argued that categories such as 'rational' and 'irrational' are simplistic and even misleading when applied to Adorno's work. To conflate Adorno's work with postmodernism and post structuralism would result in disabling closures, as would the attempt to posit a rigid, non-negotiable dichotomy between the two bodies of work. As the dialogue between critical theorists and postmodernists is commencing at a serious level, stereotypical representations on both sides are giving way to a recognition of ambiguities, paradoxes and similarities as well as differences. Indeed, neither critical theory nor postmodernism is a homogeneous field, although their focus on the predicaments of modernity allows comparison between their problematics and suggests the possibility of dialogue.
The same is the case with Adorno's work, animated as it is by a wide range of political, cultural and philosophical concerns centred around modernity and the predicament of the subject. However, it would be necessary to highlight what gives his work its distinctness before one could ask if a fruitful articulation of critical theory with some of postmodernist and Heideggerian insights might be a possibility. It will be argued that Adorno's rigorous, dialectical approach, which dwells on tensions and specificities of phenomena, resisting crude 'resolutions', is something that has few parallels in the social theory and methodology of his contemporaries. Thus, the dialectic between myth and reason; between subject and object and, between art and society, is enacted in a careful, non-dogmatic manner which may be juxtaposed with the manner in which these issues are treated in the work of Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. This is not to deny that Adorno's work registers the crisis of subjectivity even though it does not celebrate it. As a matter of fact, it is Adorno who is in many ways the most astute interpreter of Nietzsche who is too hastily dismissed by Habermas and many others as an irrationalist. The other notable features of Adorno's work include his enigmatic notion of utopia, his idiosyncratic interpretation of the Western philosophical tradition and his refusal to disengage from concrete problems of existence in the face of sceptical and nihilistic temptations. This thesis contends that the thought of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse continues to be of great importance for the development and enrichment of critical theory.

However, as several postmodernist theorists, including Bataille, Lyotard, Deleuze and Gattari, have argued, pleasure and excess can be creative as well as subversive. They believe that in the empire of total or near total rationality, having a rational attitude towards the system would only validate its underlying premises and values. From their perspective, even critical attitude, notwithstanding its complexity and ambiguities, is ultimately rational and ascetic, not least because of its continuing resort to dialectics as a kind of insurance against nihilism. In fact, the manner in which
the followers of Bataille respond to the threat of nihilism is what separates them most decisively from Adorno. As I hope to show, this difference is of political significance. But, rather than asserting the 'correctness' of Adorno's position, I wish to suggest that Lyotard and Baudrillard raise important questions for critical theory which should not to be dogmatically evaded. Given the seriousness of the challenges facing political reflection at present, it would be naïve to expect perfect solutions from any particular author or school. The most promising site of dialogue between Adorno, Lyotard, Baudrillard and indeed, Heidegger, appears to be the interrelation of aesthetics and politics. As it is, aesthetic intuitions play far from negligible role in these thinkers' conceptions of modernity. Moreover, aesthetic issues are central to the postmodern reflections on contemporary societies where culture and politics are presumed to have been caught up in an unprecedented wave of aestheticization.¹

**Adorno and Benjamin on the relationship between aesthetics and politics**

The exchange between Benjamin and Adorno raises important theoretical issues and illustrates the dilemmas of the political-theoretical projects embarked upon by post-structuralist and post-colonial theorists. Although both Adorno and Benjamin were uncompromising critics of capitalism and based their enquiries on materialist dialectics, their exchange offers such analytical refinements that its relevance for an understanding of contemporary debates in critical theory cannot be exaggerated. The intriguing topics of discussion include the relationship between myth and history,

¹Although some trace the use of the term 'post modern' to Arnold Toynbee, its current signification is generally thought to have emerged in discourses on aesthetics and architecture. See, for instance, Charles Jencks (1987). For attempts to explain postmodernism as an expression of larger cultural material transformations in late modernity or late capitalism, see David Harvey (1990) and Frederic Jameson (1984). Other thoughtful analyses of postmodernism which take into account the residual effects of the counter cultural movement and the changing role of intellectuals in the Western societies, see Dick Hebdige (1996), Jeffrey Alexander (1995) and Zygmunt Bauman (1993). For competent analyses of the French scene, see Peter Dews (1986b) and (1987).
cultural effects of commodity fetishism, relationship between art forms and modern subjectivity and, at a more general level, the relation of politics and culture.

The metaphysical and religious connotations of the modern works of art were astutely deciphered by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Work of art in the age of mechanical production'. In a remarkably 'postmodern' move, Benjamin argued that artworks were bound to lose their quasi-religious 'aura' of uniqueness once their replicas became available to the masses. Benjamin considered this trend democratic, which is not surprising given his optimistic, rather utopian view of technological development. His younger friend Adorno, however, took a different view of the situation. He admired the originality of Walter Benjamin's thesis but pronounced its conclusions seriously flawed: it was important to ask whether the aura of the art works would be appropriated by free subjects or whether it would be usurped by the logic of commodification. If artworks were to surrender their aura to commodification, then it would be naive to assume that this would contribute to democratisation. Adorno pointed out that aesthetic distance and formal complexity exemplified by genuine artworks actually stimulate the critical faculties of the observer because they invariably challenge structured ways of seeing. Indeed, 'Significant works of art struggle to restore humanity's waning capacity to perceive' (Wolin,1979,p.121). That the loss of aura would bring the artworks down from their pedestal into settings familiar to the common person may superficially resemble democratisation, but when viewed in the context of a society becoming increasingly commodified, it would weaken the subject's capacities for sound judgement. A coherent subjectivity, capable of sound judgement and restraint is likely to prove a stronger bulwark against the mesmerising spectacles of technocratic fascism than one that is excitable and prone to mimetic excesses.

Adorno could also point to the Zhdanovite monstrosities which were decreed into existence to redeem the 'official' definition of 'Socialist Art' in Stalin's Russia.
According to this definition, the relatively complex forms and abstract tendencies were either 'bourgeois', 'decadent' or 'aesthetic'. Adorno could also cite the Nazis' success in exploiting 'simpler', popular, 'organic' forms to denigrate critical thinking and foster murderous parochialism. Of course, Walter Benjamin could reply that Adorno's aesthetic is cognitivist, ascetic, somewhat nostalgic and possibly elitist. And, that Adorno overstates the extent to which austere works can engage the attention of the typical visitor to art galleries and museums. Adorno does seem to attach too great and enlightening a significance to the products of modernist high culture which are arguably becoming marginal to the cultural processes of the contemporary societies. Quite possibly, it is the mass culture, not high culture, that is the arena of political contestation and identity formation in (post) modern societies. Adorno was notoriously reluctant to engage with the specific products of mass culture despite being the pioneer, along with Max Horkheimer, of the theory of 'Culture Industry'. Indeed, several critics have fastened their attention on Adorno's 'mandarin' sensibilities and Nietzschean proclivities to question his suitability for a Marxist project of universal emancipation. Others believe that stunned by the Nazi catastrophe, Adorno went on to cultivate something like paranoia towards pleasure associated with aesthetic experience (Eagleton, 1990, p.358). Undoubtedly, Adorno was greatly concerned to prevent the outbreak of 'barbaric' abandon and 'regressive tendencies', which may explain the persistence of certain Kantian elements in his theory (Osborne, 1989, p.30).

Adorno felt that Benjamin's outlook was characterised by a struggle between Jewish Messianism and a somewhat naive and optimistic Bolshevism. While the former attracted him to the Kabbalah and conservative-romantic figures such as Ludwig Klages, the latter, Brechtian tendency, prompted him to overvalue the emancipatory potential of technological development at the expense of social analysis. Thus, Benjamin was inclined to contrast a mythical-utopian conception of temporality with the minutely calculated, commodified experience of time in the bourgeois society. Like members of the artistic avant-garde, he anxiously awaited the demise of the
'autonomous', 'useless' artwork, ensconced in hermetic grandeur beyond the networks of consumption. His argument was based on the cultural-historical analysis of art's origin and function. As he explained, works of art were in the first place ritual objects, embedded in distinct traditions:

We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual — first the magical then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of 'beauty' (Benjamin, 1973, p. 225–26).

Although art's sacred status was challenged during the Renaissance by the wave of secularisation and the cult of beauty, the mortal blow was delivered by 'the first truly revolutionary means of production, photography', which was contemporary with the genesis of socialism. This put the institution of art on the defensive: 'art reacted with the doctrine of l'art pour l'art, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of ''pure'' art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter' (Benjamin, 1973, p.226). However, the revolutionary masses, becoming increasingly aware of their strengths and desires were determined to cast aside the metaphysical taboos separating them from the world of objects to assert their presence in all spheres of existence (Benjamin, 1973, p. 225). The appropriation of quasi-sacred spaces by the masses would 'humanise' the world by putting an end to the human sacrifice that preserves and embellishes 'special' objects and spaces for the enjoyment of the privileged few:

To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction... The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception (Benjamin, 1973, p. 225).
Anticipating Baudrillard's dramatic pronouncements, Benjamin remarks that the
notion of an 'original' or 'authentic' print loses significance once art works become
reproducible at a large scale (Benjamin, 1973, p.226). That is a revolutionary
development, because 'the instance the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable
to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on
ritual, it begins to be based on another practice-politics' (Benjamin, 1973, p. 226). It
may be pointed out that the leading Marxist thinkers of the time were desperate to
understand and combat fascism by developing an adequate cultural-political response.
A disturbing aspect of fascism was its success in using art for propaganda purposes; in
its extreme form, it sought to obliterate the distinction between the social, the political
and the aesthetic. In Germany, the Nazis were able to project anti-intellectual and
populist tendencies on a monumental scale to generate mythical enthusiasm for the
destruction of democratic culture. Marxist theorists were divided in their response to
this unsettling phenomenon.

Lukacs interpreted fascism as 'petty bourgeois irrationalism'; his remedy was
resolute dissemination of the Enlightenment classics with their sober admiration of
science, rationality, secularism and progress. In the aesthetic sphere he advocated the
virtues of socialist realism and dismissed other tendencies such as Expressionism,
Minimalism and Surrealism as either irrational, decadent or elitist (Lukacs, 1963).
Inasmuch as they sought to exploit the cosmic isolation and corrosive insecurity of the
bourgeois individual, they were dangerous. His friend Ernst Bloch, on the other hand,
was more attentive to the utopian-therapeutic potential of religious and mythical
precepts which fulfilled, in his opinion, certain deep-seated needs of the masses in the
midst of blandness and insecurity produced by the capitalist transformation. Fearing
that the aridity of the socialist doctrine could drive the peasantry and 'lumpen' elements
into the arms of the conservatives, he suggested that Marxist calculus of economic
determinations be supplemented by mythical and spiritual elements. Not surprisingly,
Bloch was drawn towards Expressionism which was more responsive, in his opinion,
to the raw energy of the masses than other modernist tendencies (Bloch, 1980, p. 26). Bertolt Brecht who took exception to Lukacs's rigid and doctrinaire stance, proposed a revolutionary aesthetic which attached great significance to experimentation. Brecht was on the whole closer to Bloch and refrained from dismissing pleibian, non-proletarian sensibilities as irrational or reactionary (Brecht, 1980).

Reconciling dialectical materialism with messianic longings could not have been an easy task for Benjamin. Adorno noted that he was given to agonising oscillations between a crude materialism and apolitical mysticism (Adorno, 1980a, p. 128–130). The principal deficiency of his approach, in Adorno's view, was to ignore the complex mediations linking aesthetic and social in a bid to seek 'direct' solutions as though objectively established spell of commodities could be broken through volition or the bewitched subject set free by automatic development of the forces of production. Adorno insisted that flights into myth or positivity are to a large extent conditioned by the rational, commodified context which they wish to transcend, as though miraculously. The illusion of timelessness and mythicality is intrinsic to the experience of commodification. The challenge for the critical intellectual is to resist the desire for direct communion with 'life force', 'community' or even 'masses'. In an intricately mediated state, the promise of direct communication is mostly deceptive even when it does not lead to authoritarian consequences. Now, Adorno made it clear that he was not interested in preserving some aristocratically defined aesthetic tradition or magical qualities of authentic works. So, he took issue with Benjamin when the latter appeared to conflate the aura of religious and magical objects with that of 'autonomous work of art'. Arnold Schoenberg's music, Adorno insisted, is 'not aural':

it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth ... but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom (Adorno, 1980a, p. 121)
In short, Benjamin associates distracted reception of art with democratic tendencies, while Adorno is not so optimistic. To be absorbed in a work of art, says Benjamin, is to be detached from one's surroundings and from oneself. Doesn't it represent a continuation of magical-mythical thrallom, with reverent subject surrendering its critical faculties to the spell of the numinous object towering above the heads of ordinary mortals? (Benjamin, 1973, p. 24). Benjamin adds that learning in a distracted state is the usual mode of human interaction with environment, notably with architecture, which may be considered the prototypical site of cultural-aesthetic perception. Are'n't buildings appropriated 'by use and by perception'? (Benjamin, 1973, p. 272). Tactile appropriation is accomplished more by habit than by conscious effort. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception which occurs much less through rapt attention than by 'taking in' various features of the construction in incidental fashion. This 'de-centred' mode of appropriation acquires canonical status in modernity (Benjamin, 1973, p. 242).

Benjamin's theory privileges participation over contemplation. In this perspective, the significance of the 'new' is inseparable from an optimistic appraisal of societal transformations which are expected to reduce the efficacy of static, cognitivist approaches to perception and judgement: For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation (Benjamin, 1973, p. 272). One could argue, following Benjamin, that to respond to art in cerebral, detached, ascetic modes is to validate the ideology of aestheticism which perpetuates hierarchies of 'high' and 'low', 'mind' and 'body' 'beautiful' and 'gross', fostering conformist dispositions. Furthermore, such an approach may curtail emancipatory drives and vitiate imagination by subjecting the experience of the new to cognitive taboos. Benjamin's optimistic position stipulates that the emerging, technologically based forms of popular art, such as the film, be embraced wholeheartedly by the masses and integrated into their social
being. Confinement of art to the quasi-sacred sphere of museums and art galleries appears to be a form of bourgeois defence against the subversive potential of the new. Accordingly, museums, art galleries and other institutions of aesthetic preservation are liable to be viewed by some radical scholars as sites of 'spiritual' coherence and enchantment for sections of the bourgeoisie in an otherwise secular context. Following Bourdieu's analysis of the social determinants of aesthetic judgement in contemporary Western societies, it may be argued that in a self-consciously democratic age, when feudal patterns of social stratification and ostentatious displays of privilege are ritually de-valued, protocols of aesthetic judgement and consumption function as markers of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1986).

Thus, in the tradition of radical analysis stemming from Benjamin and extending to postmodernism, the elitist valorisation of aesthetic over popular is repudiated as a form of domination and exclusion. For instance, when the classics of the Western tradition are exalted as emblems of civilization and refinement, cultural achievements of non-Western societies cannot be expected to retain more than peripheral, derivative, deviant or exotic status. Benjamin and postmodern theorists presume that deconstruction of the distinction between high and popular culture, along with other such binaries, will release the libidinal and imaginative resources to create democratic, life-enhancing forms of culture and politics.

Adorno's argument becomes understandable in the context of his belief that modern societies are reified and modern subjectivity is crisis ridden. He suggests that works of art have become overly encumbered by the functional imperatives of a commodified society where even immediacy has turned into a fetish. So, what may seem like their death in the relatively protected space of museums has the potential to release the art works' true meaning or 'second life' (Adorno, 1974, p.182). His analysis of Paul Valery's and Marcel Proust's reflections on the museum is illuminating in this regard:
Valery takes offence at the chaotic aspect of the museum because it distorts
the work's expressive realization; for Proust this chaos assumes tragic
character. For him it is only the death of the work of art in the museum which
brings it to life. When severed from the living order in which it functioned
... its true spontaneity is released - its uniqueness, its name, that which
makes the great works of culture more than culture. (Adorno, 1974, p.182)

It has been noted that Benjamin's account is underpinned by faith in the utopian
telos of the cultural and material processes; a faith which Adorno and Horkheimer did
not possess to the same degree. While Benjamin's optimism saved him from the kind
of cultural pessimism which affected Adorno's judgement on occasions, it did have its
drawbacks. Thus, Benjamin was not sufficiently attentive to the possibility of film
being appropriated by powerful capitalist interests and turned into a form of 'mass
deception', although he was aware that actors' personality cults were manufactured
outside the studios to compensate for the 'shrivelling of the aura' (Benjamin, 1973, p.232). In short, Benjamin tended to overvalue the emancipatory
potential of the technologically based mass cultural forms, without paying sufficient
attention to the forces which would attempt to appropriate technological breakthroughs.

Eagleton has characterised Benjamin's position as 'left functionalism', insisting that
'there is no automatic virtue in the integration of culture and common life, any more
than there is in their dissociation' (Eagleton, 1990, p.374). Benjamin might respond
that his strategy of engagement with the realm of popular culture with the intent of
wresting it from the fascist hegemony was something that Adorno's fixation on
relatively abstruse works could not even attempt.

Adorno's critique of Benjamin's arguments provide useful insights into his own
aesthetics. Moreover, it suggests ways of conceptualising postmodern aesthetics and
of distinguishing it from Adorno's own approach to aesthetics and politics. Adorno's
critique of Benjamin's continual methodological oscillation between positivism and
mythology in his study of Baudelaire is quite pertinent in this regard. As he puts it:

the theological motif of calling things by their names tends to turn into a
wide-eyed presentation of mere facts. If one wished to put it very
drastically, one could say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched. Only theory could break the spell. (Adorno, 1980a, p. 129)

In these observations, which could have been aimed at some of postmodernism's methodological excesses, Adorno seems to be questioning the unmediated juxtaposition of myth and facts which is symptomatic of the mimetic appropriation of commodified relations. The theorist's task is not exhausted by mimesis: it is to develop mimetic image dialectically by elaborating social mediations:

The task of criticising ideology is to judge the subjective and objective shares and their dynamics. It is to deny the false objectivity of concept fetishism by reducing it to social subjects, and to deny false subjectivity, the sometimes unrecognizably veiled claim that all being lies in the mind, by showing it up as a fraud, a parasitical entity as well as demonstrating its immanent hostility to the mind. (Adorno, 1990, pp. 197-98)

However, critical theory is not to overreact to the flawed mediations of the subject and idolise an equally deceptive objectivity as though it were possible to abolish the subject and have unmediated access to 'things in themselves':

It is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy. (Adorno, 1990, p. 181)

Adorno's Aesthetic Theory

Adorno is adamant that any art worth its name ought to foster critical thinking on the social situation and so, he refuses to define art as therapy or mere amusement. However, in a reified totality where religion and metaphysics have been replaced by mindless work and equally mindless amusement, authentic works of art may, paradoxically, be seized upon as vehicles of a lost spirituality:
Through its inevitable break with theology, with the absolute truth of the claim of salvation, a secularization without which art would never have flourished, it is condemned to grant consolation to being, to existence; a consolation which, deprived of the hope of an Other, reinforces the spell from which the autonomy of art wanted to free itself. Even the principle of autonomy is suspected of providing such consolation: by effecting to posit an external totality, rounded, closed unto itself, this image is transferred to the world in which art finds itself, the world which produces it. (Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*, p.10. cited in Wolin, 1979)

Art, which emerged as a powerful resource of secularisation is caught in the paradoxical situation of having to perform theological functions in a society which has not been able to fulfill the revolutionary promise implicit in the decline of religion. In other words, contrary to Benjamin's reproach that 'autonomous' art preserves religious attitude, it is the unfulfilled state of the world which forces that role upon art. The 'disenchanted' world is both too disenchanted and not disenchanted enough. It is too disenchanted to yield to the 'immediate sensuous presence of art's enchanting quality' but not disenchanted enough to 'erase' it, despite the fact that its veneer of rationality is threatened by this remnant of magic (Adorno, 1984, p.86). While it appears to have overcome magic, religion and metaphysics, modern world remains magical in a bad sense- it still lies under the spell of commodities (Adorno, 1984, p.86). Thus, art tends to be construed either as a substitute for religion or an irrational, dangerous temptation. Consequently, modern art in its authentic moments must confront and 'obviate the magical commodity fetishism of the disenchanted world by means of its own magical moment, which is blackness' (Adorno, 1984, p.86). Magic, however, is deceptive only when it 'claims to be real'. Without such a claim, it 'is a facet of enlightenment: its illusion disenchants the disenchanted world.' Indeed, 'By dropping its claim to truth, the stripped-down magical moment helps us understand the nature of aesthetic illusion and aesthetic truth (Adorno, 1984, p.86).

Torn between the sacred and profane, between love of the world and what the world has become, art twists into an enigma. Unable to relinquish its mimetic comportment toward reality, even towards a 'false' one, yet powerless to alter the state
of the world, it responds to this dilemma by internalising the dialectic between mimesis and rationality: it turns against its own concept, abjuring the search for coherence, 'organic unity' and 'classical beauty', becoming 'fractured' and adopting 'dissonance' as a constructive principle; in effect 'de-aestheticising' itself (Wolin, 1979, p. 112; Osborne, 1989, pp. 36-37; Zuidervaart, 1991, pp. 192-93). In a secular but unfree society, genuine art has little choice but to lose its innocence; growing rational, darker, even ugly, to forestall the possibility that it might bestow a semblance of beauty and harmony upon an unreconciled totality. Indeed, if 'all reification is a forgetting', then art will labour to reawaken the memory of horrors in the face of 'progressive' and ahistorical modes of thinking.

Art and utopia

In the absence of substantive value orientations in the 'totally administered' societies, authentic art works become cryptic repositories of truth. Even in the absence of concrete alternatives to the existing society and, despite the failure of the revolutionary subject to materialise in the advanced industrial societies, some art works persevere in their negative stance towards the status quo. Their negation does not take the form of ecstatic withdrawal into another order of reality or programmatic denunciation of the existing situation in the manner of 'committed' art; indeed, neither retreat into an untrammeled state nor consolatory flights to a totally liberated future could be adequate. Adorno refuses to name the specific features of the utopian condition which he continues to invoke in the face of his own pessimism, paradoxically.

See Adorno (1984): The dialectic of mimesis and construction resembles its logical prototype in that the one realizes itself only in the latter, not in some space between them. Construction is not a corrective of expression, nor is it a shorting up of experience by means of objectification, but is something that has to emerge in an unplanned way from the mimetic impulse. P. 65.
Art works negate the degenerate state indirectly, not polemically, just as they invoke utopia. However, they engage with reality in the profoundest sense imaginable: 'Art can conceive reconciliation, which is its idea, only as the reconciliation of what has been estranged. Were it to simulate the state of reconciliation by joining the world of mere objects, it would negate itself' (Adorno, 1991, p.250). To simplify matters somewhat, art works absorb the pain and darkness of the false state of things to the extent of becoming dark and almost speechless, even though their *raison d'être* (if such a term can be used for art works) is to *shine* and to *speak*. 

Nevertheless, traces of resistance and utopia are preserved in their form which does not yield to the violated contents in a gesture of servile imitation. That the art works manage to be composed and express something of the subject's degradation and longings (which may be *conspicuous* by their absence, precisely) suggests that objectively, the subject is not yet fully integrated in the reified totality. It may be that in a state of radical positivisation and banality, truth can only be expressed in this negative, cryptic manner:

Art is semblance even at its highest peaks; but its semblance, the irresistible part of it, is given to it by what is not semblance. What art, notably the art decried as nihilistic, says in refraining from judgements is that everything is not just nothing. If it were, whatever is would be pale, colourless, indifferent. No light falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence. Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world of barter is the resistance of the eye that does not want the colours of the world to fade. Semblance is a promise of non semblance. (Adorno, 1990, pp.404-405)

Through its persuit of imminent laws of form in the face of opposition from the utilitarian society, the work of art holds up the image of a higher type of praxis to the one prevailing in that society. Art suggests a form of praxis that is 'beyond' mindless labour. This is art's critical aspect:

---

3 See Adorno (1984): 'As society congeals into a system of total interdependence, those works of art which store up the experience of this totalizing process become the antithetical other of society. Using the term abstract in its loosest sense for a moment, we can say that abstractness in art signals a withdrawal from the objective world at a time when nothing remains of the world save its *mortuum*. Modern art is abstract as the real relations among men. Such notions as realism and symbolism have become completely invalidated.' PP. 45-46.
Art’s *promesse du bonheur*, then, has an even more emphatically critical meaning: it not only expresses the idea that current praxis denies happiness, but also carries the connotation that happiness is something beyond praxis. The chasm between praxis and happiness is surveyed and measured by the power of negativity of the work of art. (Adorno, 1984, pp.17-18)

In the absence of ‘radical’ contradictions, epistemological guarantees and plausible political alternatives to capitalism, art works function as paradoxical, tremulous vehicles of ideology critique.4 Indeed, if critique is absorbed without trace by the overwhelming compulsions of the commodified totality, then other ways of illumination will have to be found; ways that ‘stimulate’ critical consciousness indirectly, by inviting a kind of ‘second reflection’. Adorno’s aesthetic theory purports to set up a critical framework which is adequate to the level of technological development, so that, faced with the Medusa’s head of reified totality, critical intellect would not lapse into romantic, anti-modernist postures which often lead to apolitical or politically ambiguous outcomes. Hence, technology is not uncritically demonised in *Aesthetic Theory*. Rather, authentic art works, by facing up to the power of technology and registering it in their innermost core are expected to amass resistant energies to enable the subject to prefigure different types of understanding and action:

Whereas traditionalists wail about the dehumanization of art - and everything else - by technology, it is in fact this same technological process that enables the supreme creations of today to speak in a way which has nothing to do with the deliberate communication of a humane message or statement. What looks like reification is actually a latent language of things - a language that articulates itself through the radical use of technology. Thus, technological reification in art tends to move away from the notion that meaning is necessarily and always human meaning, embracing instead the idea of the potential meaningfulness of nature. (Adorno, 1984, p.89)

*Aesthetic theory* is to be envisaged as a form of knowledge with political import just as negative dialectics must strive to redeem the non-identical whose traces animate

---

4However, Adorno is careful not to endow art with a miraculous, world transformative capacity which could be misconstrued as a substitute for praxis: ‘One has to be downright naïve to think that art can restore to the world the fragrance it has lost.’ *Aesthetic Theory* p. 59.
the authentic work: What works of art really demand from us is knowledge, or better, a cognitive faculty of judging justly: they want us to become aware of what is true and what is false in them (Adorno, 1984, p.22). Whereas negative dialectics and aesthetic theory may be said to complement one another, Adorno, unlike postmodernists, is mindful of collapsing rational dimension into the aesthetic and vice versa. Furthermore, he is not prepared to dispense with the subject in the manner of postmodernists:

For unlike discursive knowledge of reality, something from which art is not distinguished by degrees but categorically distinct, in art only what has been rendered subjective, what is commensurable with subjectivity, is valid. (Adorno, 1991, p.250).

It is precisely the liquidation of the dialectical tension between rationality and mimesis, he argues, which leads to modernist and anti-modernist excesses: mimesis becomes increasingly rational and rationality degenerates into obsessive imitation of itself. He warns that, 'Art should not and cannot be schematically reduced to the dichotomy of mimesis and construction (Adorno, 1984, p.65). In many ways, Adorno’s framework recalls Nietzsche’s elaboration of the unencumbered play of Dionysian and Apollonian elements which are said to lend beauty and tragic grandeur to the culture of Greece before Socrates. As Nietzsche elaborates in The Birth of Tragedy, with the advent of Socrates, the rich, empowering dialectic of substance and form degenerates into the exorbitation of theoretical attitude on the one hand and attenuated tragedies of Euripides on the other, that is, into a disabling polarisation and even antagonism of the rational and the aesthetic. It would not be correct to say that Nietzsche and Adorno are partial to the 'irrational', Dionysian pole of the dialectic (Schoolman, 1997; Sloterdijk, 1989). Herbert Marcuse has presented the core of the Frankfurt School's critical aesthetics with great clarity:

---

5 Also Adorno (1984): Ever since the subject has been emancipated, the mediation of the art work through the subject has become indispensable if regression to spurious facticity is to be avoided. P. 56.
Inasmuch as art preserves, with the promise of happiness, the memory of the goals that failed, it can enter, as a "regulative idea," the desperate struggle for changing the world. Against all fetishism of the productive forces, against the continued enslavement of individuals by the objective conditions (which remain those of domination), art represents the ultimate goal of all revolutions: the freedom of the individual. (Marcuse, 1979, p.69)

Compared to Lyotard and Baudrillard whose perspectives are radically disenchanted, Adorno may appear tragic and somewhat nostalgic. Modernist artworks of the kind that Adorno tends to admire - Schoenberg's atonal music, Beckett's absurd, monstrous plays, Kafka's paradoxical fables - are as though dumb struck by the crisis of meaning, viable identity and coherent forms, even though such responses are characteristically understated in these works given their minimalist construction. Nevertheless, they seem to be precariously balanced between a devastated tradition and a monotonous present relentlessly consuming futures that might be different. Thus, Adorno could write of Beckett's disintegrating figures that,'even the memory of their particular misfortune becomes enviable in view of the vagueness of the general disaster, and they laugh as they remember it'(Adorno, 1991, p.266).

Just when shadows envelop the nakedness of ruins in a melancholy veneer, the desire for return becomes intense but it is resisted, as it must, and one goes on although one cannot. Not knowing why or how. Like Beckett's invalids. Like the 'survivors' of concentration camps and torture chambers who eventually commit suicide. Longing for a past in which one could live refuses to die despite the knowledge that the place where one lived has decayed. It is not to be suppressed, but recognised as just that — a longing. And, the imperative to go on, even after the decay of historic opportunities, even after the eclipse of hope and yes! reason, is to be obeyed. That is the paradox which lies at the heart of Adorno's latter work, structures his readings of Beckett and Kafka and informs his understanding of Schoenberg's enigma. Adorno is indeed the philosopher of the endless end; one who is notoriously suspicious of fresh starts and paradigm shifts. Hanging from the cross of reason, he
tries to resurrect a promise that he will not name. Nemesis of false prophets, he wants to perform that last, unseemly miracle. 6

For post modernists, Adorno’s restless engagement with tradition is ultimately nostalgic; even his cautious, ambivalent, attempt to secularise transcendental hope is dismissed as an unsavoury remnant of theological cravings. However, Adorno knew that repression or abstract denial of tradition could expose an insecure subject to the hypnotic power of nostalgia. By contrast, Benjamin, with his affinities to Surrealism and other avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, believed that the distinction between art and life must be undermined and bourgeois forms liquidated in the interests of revolutionary praxis. Somewhat like Albert Camus, Adorno expressed his reservations about the ‘missionary zeal’ of the avant-gardists, considering some of their ‘radical’ formulations naive, even infantile. Thus, he noted that, in their hysterical denial of conventions and obsession with novelty, the Dadaists were, ‘thrown back upon the point of pure and abstract subjectivity’, losing touch with the world that they wanted to change. 7 Dissolution of the aesthetic sphere could foster a spurious,

---

6 Peter Burger (1992) argues that a minimalist attunement to meaning in an apparently meaningless context and utopian comportment are what distinguish Adorno from postmodernists. Whereas, for Adorno, it was still unquestionably the case that even the works of modernity which cast off all representational intentions still expressed something about social reality, precisely this interpretive assumption has begun to falter. With the fading of a future dimension to society, the capacity to relate works of art to reality as bearers of meaning seems also to be waning. Its place is taken either by a curious inclination to content oneself with a literal reading of what is narrated (the story says what it says) or what might be termed a metaphysical enthusiasm for the meaningful sign. By comparison, the catastrophic world view of an Adorno still has a great utopian content, since for it signs still have something definitive to say. P.110.

7 Also see Albert Camus, ‘The Dandy’s Rebellion’ in The Rebel, where he refers to the perverted romanticism of Sade’s followers who adopt the ascetic posture of killing art while making a religion out of it. He considers this to be a resentful, uncreative gesture which can only negate and destroy. Pp. 43 50. Despite his espousal of engagement in What is Literature?, Sartre’s long excursus on Surrealism offers a similar assessment. The Surrealists’ imaginary destructions, he writes, do not destroy a thing in the real world, they are a form of retreat from the world. By repudiating subjectivity, they deprive themselves of the mediatory link to the world, consequently, their representations of the world do not amount to more than arbitrary juxtaposition of equally abstract differences. Even on a more recognisably political plane, they fail to engage with anything other than superstructures and ideologies, railing against Christian Civilization and awaiting complete transformation of collective consciousness. In the face of challenges which the post war world poses for the humanity, that amounts to playing flute while Rome is threatened by flames. Sartre notes that although Surrealists appear to repudiate the bourgeoisie, their exhibitions are thronged not by workers but by the bourgeoisie. He does concede, however, that Surrealism can make important contributions in the realm of imagination. Pp.221 228. Intriguingly, he discerns in Surrealism a streak expressed more dramatically by Marinetti and the Futurists when they speak of the cold,
'apocryphal' reconciliation between art and life if the dominant tendencies of the capitalist society remained unchanged. Likewise, he maintained a cautious stance towards traditions, combining his attacks on conservatism with an appreciation of creative resources enshrined in traditions. He remarked, for instance, that Shoenberg's daring innovations presupposed profound contact with the tradition being 'confronted':

Only that which has been nourished with the life-blood of the tradition can possibly have the power to confront it authentically; the rest becomes the helpless prey of forces which it has failed to overcome sufficiently within itself. Yet the bond of tradition is hardly equivalent to the simple sequence of events in history; rather it is subterranean. (Adorno, 1974, p. 154.)

For the neo-paganistic destroyers of monotheistic temples, every conceivable trace of the sacred has to be exterminated. They sense the imperceptible rustle of a shadow even between the dregs of nostalgia and chill of despair and god! they scream. This may be an itinerant, foresaken god but a god is a god and cannot be allowed to exist. Even this pariah deity may prompt the construction of a temple. Postmodernists are consistent and thorough. They cannot stop killing everything resembling gods in order to forestall the possibilities of re-enchantment. They think

---

8 See Richard Wolin (1979), p. 109. In contrast to Benjamin's optimistic view, Adorno fears that the actual demise of autonomous art would result in the elimination of the essential critical capacity which art retains only by virtue of having elevated itself above the domain of social interests. Given the extension of the reifying logic of commodity production... to all spheres of bourgeois life in the 20th century... political administration, law, culture, etc. the sources of qualitative opposition to that logic were already precariously few in number. An apocryphal end of art would entail the disintegration of aura without the authentic transposition of its utopian promise to the domain of social life itself.

9 See Peter Dews, The Limits of Disenchantment, London, Verso, 1995. He is baffled by the stance of thinkers such as Rorty and Derrida who insist on pushing the process of disenchantment to extremes as though it were some exhilarating adventure and not the brutal condition prophesied in the work of Nietzsche and Weber. He notes that some postmodernists want to eliminate every residue of 'soft heartedness' from the world. They have considered it their job to track down and eradicate those last traces of meaning which adhere to the human world, to dissolve any supposedly intrinsic significance
that they have survived the end of modernity and are able to subsist heroically and even creatively on the disenchanted fare. But cannot one ask, following Nietzsche, if they have the innocence of creators? Do they feel the movement of something new within them or, are they also wasted remnants of a world that cannot quite know how to end?

It may be that Adorno is tragic. It is more likely that he is painfully suspended between a tragic modernity and the farcical dawn proclaimed in the discourse of postmodernity. His ideal of expression, it may be remebered, is muteness. Not silence though: a language bursting with expression but one that cannot open up by itself. He is not the one to build linguistic monuments that bask in their own glory and cast shadows all around. If graves could burst and the dead could emerge in the world as a handful of dust and two or three hollow bones, that would be Adorno’s ideal of expression. That would be the ‘truth content’ of expression after Auschwitz. How can one expect this earth to give birth to anything but aborted foetuses? \(^\text{10}\) Of course, post modernists tend to disagree.

The image of body that Auschwitz stamps on Adorno’s imagination is that of a ‘suffering’, defiled body which is not even allowed to rot. He would find the post modern cult of ecstatic body: of a body in throes of pleasure, as simply obscene. Obsessive fixation on the body, far from signifying liberation from moral and metaphysical constraints, represents further degradation of the subject. As he notes, ‘the historical crisis of individual finds its limit in the individual biological entity which is its arena’ (Adorno, 1991, p.257). In the wake of catastrophes, a disintegrating subjectivity casts envious glances on a forlorn body which is all that now remains of it: Beckett’s characters behave in precisely the primitive, behavioristic manner

\(^{10}\)See Adorno (1991): ‘After the second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one’s own damaged state useless.’ P.244.
appropriate to the state of affairs after the catastrophe, after it has mutilated them so that they cannot react any differently; flies twitching after the fly swatter has half-squashed them' (Adorno, 1991, p. 251). Furthermore, as Terry Eagleton observes: 'To posit the body and its pleasures as an unquestionably affirmative category is a dangerous illusion, in a social order which reifies and regulates corporeal pleasures for its own ends just as relentlessly as it colonises the mind' (Eagleton, 1990, p. 6).

By way of contrast, it would be instructive to consider problems which arise for Lyotard and Baudrillard when they attempt to transcend the perspective of ideology critique. It may be remembered that the Frankfurt theorists did not reject all the insights of Marxist theory even when their position regarding historical materialism became somewhat ambivalent. Adorno, for one, was aware of the explanatory potential of the notion of reification in the 'late' capitalist world and argued that the notion of subjective autonomy was increasingly becoming mythical in such a condition. However, the notion of subject remained only partly ideological for Adorno.

**Lyotard: Language and Desire**

In his early work, Lyotard endeavours to make a distinction between 'expression' and that which is expressed, arguing that the implicit sense of the world is never entirely captured by language. It is precisely those aspects of the object which remain beyond the grasp of language (because, comprising *donée* of perception they are prior to linguistic codes) that call forth desire. Unlike Lacan, Lyotrad does not claim at this stage that 'unconscious is structured like a text'. He contends that unconscious is the locus of desires with the capacity to disrupt the order of the text. Desire, being primitive and relatively unstructured has the potential to overflow the checks and balances of formal systems which direct the flow of desire to pre-existing channels in order to render it productive but also manageable. Somewhat tentatively,
Lyotard attempts to link the conscious and unconscious by the notion of an intermediary, namely, 'phantasy'. Phantasy absorbs the intensity of desire, thereby reducing its threat to the regulatory codes of various kinds. For Lyotard, of course, this containment of desire is performed for the benefit of established power and is in this sense ideological. As one of his commentators notes:

In his articles and interviews dating from the immediate post-68 period, this static quality of phantasy, its ability to immobilise desire, begins to take on a political significance for Lyotard; he argues that, in many forms of cultural production – religion, advertising, cinema, political propaganda – the transgressions of the order of discourse required for the realisation of the figural nature of phantasy are subordinated to the aim of producing a representation within which desire can be captured and enticed to an illusory fulfilment. In waking life the excessive disorder of the dream would generate anxiety, and must therefore be mitigated by the imposition of a 'good form'; the work of desire is concealed by its product. On this basis Lyotard can suggest that the co-operation of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, of Eros and Logos, represents the fundamental operation of ideology, an operation in which desire is made to overlook its own disruptive radicality. (Dews, 1987, p. 126)

When Lyotard reflects on the political consequences of the fact that desire is rarely allowed to erupt in its primeval intensity, he calls to mind Marcuse arguing his thesis of 'repressive de-sublimation' although Lyotard remains more abstract by comparison. In Discourse, Figure for instance, too stark a juxtaposition of 'a figural-energetic theory of the unconscious' with a totalising and de-vitalising conception of secondary processes leaves one a bit uneasy' (Dews, 1987, p. 130). In his eagerness to celebrate the spontaneity of desire, Lyotard hesitates to theorise concrete mediations, leaving his work in the grip of an awkward dualism which casts its shadow on his political theory as well. Seeking to transform the given situation in the 'here and now' he fails to engage with the structural constraints which may be affecting 'here and now' but which cannot be comprehended by focussing one's attention solely on the 'here and now'. Identifying Marxism too closely with the deeds of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and imputing paradigmatic significance to the events of May
68, he denounces as totalitarian everything that smacks of 'teleology', 'mediation', 'dialectics' and 'totality'. Thus, his work fits in rather well within the cultural climate of France in the 1970s and 1980s when intellectuals started to abandon Marxism and the intellectual vacuum thereby created was filled by the likes of Bernard Henry Levy and 'new philosophers' whose scathing dismissals of Marxism went some way towards clearing the intellectual ground for the conservative revival.

Characteristicly, Lyotard terms 'dialectics' a diabolical form of thought since it predetermines the outcome and demands that present be sacrificed for the spurious promise of a blissful future, especially when the alternative represented by Marxism has proved to be deeply flawed. By refusing to let go of the negative moment of a dialectic that degenerated into catastrophe, someone like Adorno could only play the devil's advocate against the present, that is, criticise it in the name of negation elevated into a principle (Lyotard, 1974, p.136). Thus, Adorno remains trapped within the ascetic logic of capital; to its 'bufoonery' which no critique will be able to overcome (Lyotard,1974,p.136). As Lyotard goes on to elaborate:

The critical relation cannot criticize itself, it can only parody itself in the derision of autocritique. And in this impossibility, it shows that it is still an authoritarian dominating relation, that it is negativity as power. This power is that of language, which annihilates what it speaks of. Criticism can only redouble the empty space where its discourse plunges its object; it is cloistered in this space of vacuity, it belongs to language and to representation, it can no longer think the object, the work and history, except as language. But at the same time it understands that what it is in the process of destroying itself today is precisely the problematic of language; the asceticism of the work, the asceticism of history and politics. Now criticism, far from criticizing asceticism, hopes that it will be redistributed differently. (Lyotard, 1974, p.135)

Capitalism will not yield to critical war of attrition, no matter how protracted and sophisticated. No amount of cleverness and reflexive fortification can survive the deluge. What is required, he says, is an 'affirmative politics' which does not fall for a 'representative (a party) of the negative': a question Adorno fails to answer probably because of his tragic attitude of clinging to the past while mounting 'radical' critiques on
the present (Lyotard, 1974, p.133, p.136). To operate in the nostalgic mode like Thomas Mann and Arnold Schoenberg, whose works Adorno celebrates as the epitome of uncompromising modernism, is surely to risk becoming farcical because capitalism in its contemporary form is beyond tragedy (Lyotard, 1974, p.133). 'We have the advantage over Adorno,' he claims, 'of living in a capitalism that is more energetic, more cynical, less tragic. It places everything inside representation' (Lyotard, 1974, p.128). Lyotard wants to explore forms of politics which bypass cynical, negative and ascetic frameworks of thought which are ultimately consistent with the logic of capitalism. That Adorno identifies minimalist art works as sites of residual autonomy and authenticity which may be critically redeemed in the interests of a paradoxical enlightenment indicates the extent of his desperation. In Lyotard's view, 'What brings us out of capital and out of "art" is not criticism, which is language-bound nihilistic, but a deployment of libidinal investment. We do not desire to possess, to "work", to dominate... What can they do about that?' (Lyotard, 1974, p.136). Lyotard's judgement that critical theory's negativity risks becoming total and lapsing into self-perpetuating, vacuous and ultimately impotent 'standpoint' is not without an element of truth. When critique becomes overly critical, it may indeed appear to abdicate concrete reality. Ironically, Adorno levels precisely the same charge against Martin Heidegger although for different reasons: 'Fundamental ontology' abandons society in excessively affirmative, ecstatic modes!

As we have seen, Lyotard's own strategy in his post-Marxist period is hardly different to Marcuse's 'Great Refusal'. Interestingly, he has had to modify that stance in his more recent works which aim to qualify the extreme character of his earlier rejection of modernist positions. This illustrates the dilemma which theories, critical or otherwise, inevitably encounter when they attempt to transcend capitalism and ascetic modes of inquiry abstractly. That is, in striving to oppose capitalism as a total system, they end up becoming totalistic themselves, either proposing ill conceived 'frontal assaults' on the Leviathan or turning into obsessive, self-centred enterprises which are then accused by their 'engaged' critics of having withdrawn from the world. It would be fair to say that
the problem is not entirely theoretical and there are few neat, magical solutions in sight. Hence, those who become impatient with the necessarily abstract, protracted character of theoretical labour often present alternatives which are hardly superior to what they dismiss in others as forms of self-indulgence, irresponsibility and more perversely, 'collaboration' with the enemy. And yet, it would be impossible to deny that exponential increase in the quantity and sophistication of theoretical activity has been accompanied by the aggravation of problems requiring urgent solutions. Hence, the impatience with theory which becomes evident in the responses of agents confronting severe forms of deprivation and injustice should also be understandable to the theorists.

Life after Theory: Jean Baudrillard

One of the most dramatic attempts to transcend the theory-practice problematic by undertaking a kind of paradigm shift is represented by the work of Jean Baudrillard which cannot be ignored by a critical theory that tries to grapple with its own past and the complexity of the present situation. Jean Baudrillard's work constitutes arguably the most radical challenge to social theory as a body of propositions claiming some relation to reality. He questions the widespread use of categories such as 'subject', 'autonomy' and even 'reality'. His well known critique of the Marxist theory of alienation challenges that tradition's complacency regarding its own cultural determination and demonstrates that fanatical perpetuation of unexamined 'principles' can result in massive blindspots which vitiate a theory's grasp on the subject matter (Baudrillard, 1975). Recent developments in capitalism, he claims, have superseded the parameters of Marxist theory. Thus, it can no longer be assumed that there is a unified subject of history, either in existence or in the process of genesis, that will reclaim its pertained essence at the end of history. In the present instance, identities are generated through codes which are no longer subject to the laws of political economy; these codes have become more than 'relatively' autonomous. He stresses the
importance of mediatised reality, arguing that the passivity of consumers has become so acute that their desire to constitute themselves as autonomous selves through acts of consumption bind them to the very system that must keep them dissatisfied. The distinction between 'use value' and 'exchange value' is no longer the privileged hinge of 'radical' critique now that the processes of exchange have saturated the 'natural' core of the commodity and the subject; producing them both in the nostalgic mode as imitations of imitations. Invocations of 'use value', 'authenticity' and 'origins' not only facilitate more consumption but conceal the fact that these terms refer to something that cannot be present.

The post modern societies are constituted by dynamic, interpenetrating webs of highly differentiated codes and a bewildering variety of images which apparently amuse the consumers but also programme them to such an extent that any other conception of reality is automatically divested of experiential and imaginative correlates.11 It is not useful, he argues, to be clinging to the precepts of social theory, whether traditional or critical. The radical posture of theory is little more than nostalgic indulgence in theological rituals and wish fulfilment. When reality as we used to know it implodes, critical or recuperative labour of intellectuals could only be interpreted as anxious but ultimately comic manoeuvres to constitute themselves as autonomous subjects. Nonetheless, quasi-prophetic narratives and odysseys of self-discovery continue to prosper. As a matter of fact, such quests are invariably valorised, re-packaged and given ample 'coverage' until the 'beautiful' protagonists fade away in exhaustion or embarrassment, to be replaced by other simulations.

11Also see Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death New York, Penguin, 1986. He observes, for instance, that television 'has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience.' P. 87. Since entertainment is the 'supra ideology of all discourse on television', even the coverage of disasters inevitably trivialises them. The frame in which they are presented constantly reassures the audience that they are not to be taken seriously, that it is all in fun, so to say.' P. 87.
Predictably, Baudrillard's utterly disenchanted, consciously provocative vision has elicited extreme responses from conservatives, liberals, Marxists and just about everybody else. Thus, his ideas have had to percolate on the fringes of academia for years before winning a degree of legitimacy in the ascetic, melancholy realm of pure knowledge. Even now, many scholars dismiss his 'theory' as a suggestive but ultimately trivial mish mash of McLuhan, Nietzsche and an aging Dadaism that is content to shock with words now. For many on the Left, Baudrillard is the epitome of self-indulgent Parisian intellectual who has the temerity to ignore devastating crises and neo-imperialist savagery to stare at the dance of ephemeral forms on bland surfaces and say that it should remain a meaningless game, that is, uninterpreted and uninterrupted. That once interpreted, it will become tragic, metaphysical and therefore real. It is modernism, he claims, that harbours nostalgia for the real and hankers after reassurances and foundations. A post modern thinker can only deal in 'hyper-reality', more often than not, seductively. He trumpets the end of representation since there is no longer a subject with a pre-given, irreducible, unique core that may be represented, expressed or even repressed for that matter. Theorists' who cling to such antiquated notions forget that postmodern society is distinguished not by production but by reproduction and exchange of signs; by simulations and metastatic proliferation of objects which are more adequately conceived as 'floating signifiers', embarked as they are on a tortured but ultimately futile quest for a transcendental signified that might put a stop to their periphrasations:

The reality principle coincided with a determinate phase of the law of value. Today, the entire system is fluctuating in indeterminacy, all of reality absorbed by the hyper reality of the code and of simulation. It is now a principle of simulation, and not of reality, that regulates social life. The finalities have disappeared; we are now engendered by models. There is no longer such a thing as ideology; there are only simulacra. (Baudrillard, 1990, p.120)

Baudrillard has little doubt that older forms of thinking and resistance have become redundant in this situation. He advocates seductive postures and fatal
strategies'. Human beings as they are conventionally defined might well disappear, although that would not necessarily be a bad thing. Besides, they will not be succeeded by some deodorised version of the Nietzschean Superman: it is more likely that they will effortlessly metamorphose into radically post-conventional, post-ideological, thoroughly disenchanted quasi-objects who are free of metaphysical pathos and humanistic conceits. These thing-beings will be reconciled with the system that produces them, being little more than its extensions. Or, to quote Slavoj Žižek out of context, they will come to 'love their symptom'. But this sinister version of Kant's 'eternal peace' or Hegel's state of universal reconciliation is not the final scenario of the endless end. Even stranger things are in store for the unaware. Here is a typical Baudrillardian revelation:

We are in the third order, no longer the order of the real, but of the hyperreal, and it is only in the third order that theory and practice, themselves floating and indeterminate, can catch up with the hyperreal and strike it dead. (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 121)

To many of his critics, Baudrillard is someone who has been so overwhelmed by America and its system of monstrously smooth effects; by its highways and monotonously flickering lights; by the seemingly inexhaustible supply of white-washed faces and Pavlovian smiles, that everything about the 'post modern world' has acquired an irresistible, super-natural aspect for him. However, Baudrillard might retort that it is futile, not to say foolish and possibly tragic, to try to interpret the outbreak of such transparence and banality using old world categories like labour or 'exploitation'. 'Class struggle' too has become an irredeemably metaphysical category in the hyperreal context where surfaces have devoured depth, foreground has absorbed background and where even signifiers are ready to forget the signified and become delirious, enjoying every bit of it. There is no longer any point in activating traditional dichotomies in which one term must always get preferential treatment: use-value over exchange value, material base over ideological super-structure, pristine essence over
alienated, perverted appearances etc. For Baudrillard, exchange-value always already participates in the designation of use-value, superstructural phenomena always already condition the material base from which they are supposed to emanate and essence is always already saturated with appearances. Hence, coercively established dichotomies which are ultimately consolatory may be abandoned now so that everything may be thought in terms of the almighty 'code':

Every object is translatable into the general abstract code of equivalence, which is its rationale, its objective law, its meaning, and this is achieved independently of who makes use of it and what purpose it serves. It is functionality which supports it and carries it along as code, and this code, founded on the mere adequation of an object to its (useful) end, subordinates all real or potential objects to itself, without taking any into account at all. Here, the economic is born: the economic calculus. The commodity form is only its developed form, and returns to it continually. (Baudrillard, 1990, p.66)

Decoded in the language of the Frankfurt School, it seems that Baudrillard's 'code' operates the principle of instrumental rationality. But while the Frankfurt theorists adopt a negative stance towards 'instrumental rationality' as something to be overcome through political activity, Baudrillard becomes progressively more fatalistic. In The political Economy of the Sign written in 1972, he appears to regret the erosion of symbolic dimension by the utilitarian drive of modernity. The tone and content of the following passage suggest as much:

Everything surging from the subject, his or her body and desire, is dissociated and catalysed in terms of needs, more or less specified in advance by objects. All instincts are rationalised, finalised and objectified in needs-hence symbolically cancelled. All ambivalence is reduced by equivalence. And to say that the system of needs is a system of general equivalence is no metaphor: it means that we are completely immersed in political economy. (Baudrillard, 1990, p.69)

By the time of Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976) Baudrillard's fatalism, nourished by his bewildered interpretation of the postmodern society as one that has integrated every form of resistance and overcome every possibility of qualitative
change by rational means, comes into its own. He proceeds to invest the 'hyperreal' system with such fantastic attributes that human objects would only experience profound resignation were they to contemplate their position in it. Nothing can undermine the system from without, although it might undermine itself some day as all perfect, hyperrational systems do. Any direct, confrontational strategy would end up giving a boost to the system's re-appropriate, disseminatory drive. The best that can be hoped for is that the system will run its course and experience a catastrophic reversal, having exhausted all possibilities and conquered every instance of genuine negativity. Those who aim to change things 'for the better' are advised to alter their strategy from focussed resistance and revolutionary escapades to one of radical compliance. Once the system develops into a grotesque tautology by eradicating differences, it is bound to choke on itself. Resistance conducted in the name of another principle could only rejuvenate the hyperreal vampire by providing the invaluable tonic of difference and negativity. Let the system plunge itself into the frenzy of conquest and self-adulation; let it consider itself self-sufficient and even invincible, and a time will come when it will saturate its universe with boredom and implode, like God and Communist dictatorships. So far, capitalism has been able to survive because the forces opposing it have actually contributed to its well being. It will face its first genuine crisis when every plausible alternative to it has been neutralised. In the meantime, however, it will continue to 'construct' enemies, or what has been termed 'artificial negativity'. Islamic Fundamentalism, Confucianism, Japanese trade surplus and even the spectre of inter-galactical warfare might be pressed into service when the chips are down. Baudrillard elaborates the problem in his unsurpassable style:

Such is the fatality of every system devoted through its own logic to total perfection, and thus total, absolute infallibility and thus incorrigible extinction: all bound energies aim for their own demise. This is why the only strategy is catastrophic and not in the least bit dialectical. Things have to be pushed to the limit, where everything is naturally inverted and collapses. At the peak of value, ambivalence intensifies; and at the height of their coherence, the redoubled signs of the code are haunted by the abyss of reversal. The play of simulation must therefore be taken further than the
system permits. Death must be played against death - a radical tautology. The system's own logic turns into the best weapon against it. (Baudrillard, 1990, p.123)

It will be noted that Baudrillard's strategy bears some resemblance to that of Heidegger who viewed technology as a perverse fate concealed in the history of Western metaphysics, but proposed that the logic of technological development is to be abetted not resisted. Heidegger's position has been widely criticised as metaphysical and apolitical; one whose political consequences turned out to be quite frightening. Baudrillard's antipathy to metaphysical theories is well known, yet his own theory cannot be said to have escaped metaphysics entirely. Nevertheless, certain distinctions are in order. In contrast to Heidegger's designation of National Socialism as a world historic force commensurate with technology's gigantism, Baudrillard recognises the futility of organised, collective action, whether in favour of or against the hyperreal system. Furthermore, it would be trivial to accuse Baudrillard of disseminating the vice of nihilism; a mildly amused Baudrillard would probably suggest that his interlocutors are either escapist or repressed theologians: isn't it the case that by raising the question of nihilism, they want to deny that we are already in the post-nihilistic era? At present, invocation of nihilism, or of despair, is likely to function as a consolation and to be dissolved in the sterile fluid of theoretical reflection.

The very zeal with which intellectuals in the Western societies are trying to 're-think', 're-write' and 're-imagine' past; the archeological fervour which demands that traces of life and 'civilization' be discovered beneath every slum and wilderness; the desperate search for life in other planets, are proofs that the game is up in the 'here and now' (Baudrillard, 1994, p.72). The deeper significance of these activities is such that we dare not grasp it. However, Baudrillard has few qualms about speaking the 'truth', as when he writes:

At all events, this mass resurgence of fossils and relics is troubling, as troubling as the signs which used to appear in the sky presaging great
events. We should be wary of all these phantoms ripped from their tombs. The information they provide about our past is a mask and I can already hear their sarcastic laughter. When our past has been exhumed, when all that had disappeared has reappeared, the dead will outnumber the living and there will be the same imbalance as will come about when there is more computing matter... and artificial intelligence on earth than natural intelligence. Then we shall be cast into sidereal space, the space of networks, or into fossil space, the space of the kingdom of the dead... (Baudrillard, 1994, pp.76-77).

In *The Transparency of Evil* Baudrillard has traced in some detail the implications of his general theory of post modern society or 'hyperreal' for the modernist conceptions of art and theory. His views, when juxtaposed with Adorno's, may enable us to appreciate the complexity of the cultural-political terrain confronting us at present. According to Baudrillard, we are now in the fourth order of value which he terms the 'fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value.' In the previous phase which was defined by the primacy of code, value developed 'by reference to a set of models'. By contrast, there are hardly any reference points now, so that, 'value radiates in all directions, occupies all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.5). Strictly speaking, the law of value has disappeared, leaving in its wake a state of general promiscuity; an 'epidemic of value, a sort of general metastasis of value.' How is this uncanny situation to be comprehended? We may recognise for a start that the 'orgy' is finally over. It may be remembered that 'orgy' ensued with the spectacular bonfire of modernity:

The orgy in question was the moment when modernity exploded upon us, the moment of liberation in every sphere. Political liberation, sexual liberation, liberation of forces of production, liberation of the forces of destruction, women's liberation, children's liberation, liberation of unconscious drives, liberation of art... This was a total orgy - an orgy of the real, the rational, the sexual, of criticism and anti-criticism, of development as of the crisis of development. We have pursued every avenue in the production and effective overproduction of objects, signs, messages, ideologies and satisfactions. Now everything has been liberated, the chips are down, and we find ourselves faced collectively with the big question: WHAT DO WE DO NOW THE ORGY IS OVER? (Baudrillard, 1993, p.3)
Baudrillard's accent is rather more Spenglerian here; a sense of loss has insinuated itself into his statements again. Exhaustion appears to be the defining trait of the post modern condition in which cultural activity is marked by frenzied 'simulation' of the orgy of liberation. Thus, 'we may pretend to carry on in the same direction, accelerating, but in reality we are accelerating in a void' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.3). Since the ideals and values in the modern West were shaped to such a degree by the myth of liberation and transgression, by what Spengler would call the 'Faustian' image of Man, the pervasive mood of dejection and disorientation is a more or less logical consequence of the fact that few horizons remain to be conquered. Not only that; nature appears to be hitting back at an increasing number of fronts, in some cases quite ferociously. Ever since modernity - that most shattering and radical of all revolutions - exploded upon us, we have been trying to manage the shock by constructing utopias which could only be termed benign in retrospect. Now that the distraction afforded by Marxism is gone, we are forced to confront the 'truth' of modernity. And, we are shattered by the realisation that having composed and consumed everything that came its way including pasts and futures, spirit and nature, modernity too is coming to an end; indeed, metamorphosing into something that we can barely recognise, let alone name. This 'event' is no less significant than that which Nietzsche had announced in the last quarter of the last century, namely God's death. It is conceivable that 'human beings' could survive as meaningful beings only with the help of old fashioned asceticism. 'Orgy' appears to have finished the meaningful beings in a matter of a few centuries. Nevertheless, it is impossible to resurrect the pristine spirituality or beauty of the bygone ages, although some of us might be tempted to draw up balance sheets and extract a few shreds of meaning from that activity as well.

The consequences of the diabolical transition to postmodernity are quite dramatic though. These include the implosion of the political, aesthetic, theoretical and erotic spheres as they have been traditionally understood. Unfortunately, these are not the 'beautiful' dissolutions dreamed up by Marx and awaited by his followers (Baudrillard, 1993, p.10-12). The political has not melted into the bliss of fully
recoiled sociality by putting an end to the tyranny of money lenders, politicians and
bureaucrats. Nor has the division of labour been 'sublated' in a harmonious condition
where one could paint in the morning, build cabinets in the afternoon and in the
evening, fraternise with neighbours. Nothing of the kind has occurred, says
Baudrillard. Perversely, the logic of modernity has mimicked the form of utopian end-
states while obliterating their intended content. The potential of each sphere has been
rationally maximised to the point where, losing vitality and hope for further
intensification, the individual spheres collapse into other spheres, generating strange
new forms; 'weak' forms though. Aesthetic becomes 'trans-aesthetic', political
becomes 'trans-political', sexual becomes 'trans-sexual', and so on. Just when politics
proper loses meaning in the Western societies, sexuality becomes politicised, madness
become politicised, language becomes politicised; everyday life in its entirety is
increasingly interpreted as a political phenomenon - a field containing infinite sites of
contestation and liberation (Baudrillard, 1993, p.9). 'The law that is imposed on us',
he muses, 'is the law of the confusion of categories. Everything is sexual. Everything
is political. Everything is aesthetic. All at once' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.9).

The full significance of this cannot be registered by the traditional, rational
social science which is still determined to prolong its wishful immersion in the pool of
depleted wisdom by perpetuating antiquated polemics between various 'schools'.
Needless to say, this strategy simulates dynamism without letting go of the obsolete
premises and categories. If Baudrillard's diagnosis is correct, then, it cannot be long
before the citadels of social science are deluged by confusion and metaphysical
permiscuity. The perverse logic of interpolation is as radical as it is disorienting; what
is more, it is bound to produce indifference on a planetary scale:

Each category is generalised to the greatest possible extent, so that it
eventually loses all specificity and is absorbed by all the other categories.
When everything is political, nothing is political anymore, the word itself is
meaningless. When everything is sexual, nothing is sexual anymore, and
sex loses its determinants. When everything is aesthetic, nothing is beautiful
or ugly any more, and art itself disappears ...this state of affairs is
epitomized by a single figure: the transpolitical, the transsexual, the transaesthetic. (Baudrillard, 1993, pp.9-10)

Radical pretentions of theory and heroic effusions of the avant-garde, says Baudrillard, are things of the past and must be recognised as such. There is little to 'anticipate' other than frantic repetition of the same and catastrophe 'in the long run'. Whatever modernity had set out to realise has been (de) realised. If modernity was expected to create new values with which to transform the agonies of living into beauty, then one has reason to be disappointed. What has happened instead is, 'a dispersal and involution of value whose upshot for us is total confusion - the impossibility of apprehending any determining principle, whether of an aesthetic, a sexual or a political kind' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.10). Consequently, what we are faced with, are systems 'undergoing total positivisation and hence desymbolisation' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.65).

How can theory of any kind hope to master this situation where identities are guaranteed to implode or leak into others; where symbols metamorphose into impure and truncated forms that are radically dissociated from material referents? Theory has to give up all pretentions of enlightenment because there is nothing which could guarantee its privileged access to things themselves. One's attitude to a 'delusional world' must be sufficiently 'delusional' although this will not produce knowledge in the conventional sense: 'Theory can be no more than this: a trap set in the hope that reality will be naive enough to fall into it' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.110). Since there is no discernible centre which could orientate the construction of causal hierarchies, theory cannot hope to do without a degree of chance and strangeness:

The essential thing is to point the search light the right way. Unfortunately, we don't know which way that is. We can only comb the sky. In most instances the events are so far away, metaphysically speaking, that they merely cause a slight phosphorescence on the screen. They have to be developed and enlarged, like photographs. (Baudrillard, 1993, p.110)
Baudrillard is adamant that art in the high modernist sense has lost its efficacy through an excess of production and criticism and that we have become indifferent to its potential as a subversive, transcendental or life-enhancing resource (Baudrillard, 1993, pp.14-15). Coherent, universalisable criteria of 'judgement and pleasure' are nowhere to be found. The crux of the matter is that in a hyper-real situation, 'Art, too, must circulate at top speed, and is impossible to exchange.' This could only mean that art works become self-referential, and yet they are all the same (Baudrillard, 1993, p.15). Thus:

We see Art proliferating wherever we turn; talk about art is increasing even more rapidly. But the soul of Art - Art as adventure, Art with its power of illusion, its capacity for negating reality, for setting up an 'other scene' in opposition to reality, where things obey a higher set of rules, a transcendent figure in which beings, like line or colour on a canvas, are apt to lose their meaning, to extend themselves beyond their own raison de être, and in an urgent process of seduction, to rediscover their ideal form (even though this form may be that of their own destruction) - in this sense, Art is gone. (Baudrillard, 1993, p.14)

All this goes hand in hand, of course, with a general aestheticization of life so that everything, from aesthetic practices and images of other cultures to earthquakes and massacres, gets re-deployed in de-contextualised, dis-enchanted frames in which anything is as legitimate as everything else and which do not deny anyone the right to be a 'creator' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.16). Like Byzantine icons that prevented reflection on God's existence, Andy Warhol's Campbell soup can 'releases us from the need to decide between beautiful and ugly, between real and unreal, between transcendence and immanence' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.17). And, from utopian fixations, one may add. The process that was started by hyperrealism and pop art, of elevating everyday life to 'the ironic power of photographic realism' has become general in the 'trans-aesthetic' of simulation (Baudrillard, 1993, p.18). But there is no need to panic and subject these developments to moralistic strictures because, predictably enough, morality too has faded away: 'Just as present-day art is beyond beautiful and ugly, the market, for its part, is beyond good and evil' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.19).
There is little doubt that Baudrillard's depiction of the real and theoretical problems or their hyperreal abolition, fails to impress Marxists. Marxist thought has been analysing for over a century the inadequacy of mere utopian or dystopian critiques of capitalism. The global and remarkably differentiated structures of capitalism, partaking of immensely diverse resource base on the one hand and a fantastic admixture of ideologies, institutions and regulatory conventions on the other; armed to the teeth, and seeking to reproduce themselves in ever wider spaces are unlikely to succumb to Baudrillard's death wish. Meanwhile, it would seem that Baudrillard, bent on subverting the distinction between material and non-material goes on liberating his theory from the constraints of sanity, overlooking with remarkable ease material determinations, historical sedimentations, contradictory developments, human suffering, resistance, and billions of people who continue to inhabit the pre-modern world around Europe and hyperreal America.

It has been suggested that Baudrillard's fatalism cracks all too easily into nihilism, which is not surprising given his allergy to the notion of agency. Without the prospect of guidance from conscious or somewhat conscious subjects, the system of demonic objects would indeed lose direction, miming the haphazard motion of atoms. Radical social theory is not expected to draw any benefits from this state of affairs. Stephen Crook traces the social and political inadequacies of Baudrillard's theory to the latter's crude inversion of metaphysics:

Physicalism is the beginning and end of Baudrillard's model of the social and of social change, forming the basis of an explicit rejection of the possibility of any radical social theory. But physicalism traps the argument in a curious loop.... Despite Baudrillard's enthusiasm for metaphors drawn from natural science, his project is metaphysical. The idea of the physical is a formal one, designating some wholly 'other' postmodern 'object=x' (Crook,1990,p.59) ['object=x' is the Kantian formulation of the noumenal]
This 'object-x' is said to be the irreducible, unconditioned, autonomous, unknowable 'in-itself' that legitimates post modernists' rejection of 'modernist' social theory. Gillian Rose could not be referring to anything else when she notes in *Dialectics of Nihilism* that some post modernists are inclined to make formalist appeals to a 'transcendent principle of the physical', a position which, in her opinion, is irredeemably metaphysical. Post modernist versions of Kantian 'in-itself', whether 'power' 'text' 'desire', 'Difference' or some indecipherable ontological fragment, are said to be constituted by abstracting from socio-historical processes and elevating the structures of the 'given' into a transcendental principle. This, in other words, is a case of immanence being totalised and interpreted as transcendence. However, this transcendental operation is generally un-acknowledged in postmodernist literature.

In his 'Baudrillard and the Politics of Post modernism', Christopher Norris concedes the force of Baudrillard's diagnosis of modernity's ills but notes the weakness of his specific analyses. Norris argues that Baudrillard's work terminates in a philosophical cul de sac due to its dependence on structural linguistics of Saussure. An idiosyncratic reading of Saussure enables Baudrillard to argue that the real' is constructed through intra-linguistic processes that allow no access to a world outside the prison-house of discourse (Norris, 1990, p.143). Whereas Saussure brackets the referential dimension of language for the sake of 'methodological convenience', that is, to carry out systematic analysis of the internal structure of language, Baudrillard and a good many post-structuralists make this exclusion absolute and indeed programmatic (Norris, 1990, p.143). Thus, Baudrillard cannot imagine any truth existing outside a specific order of signifiers. This 'order' then ends up being treated as an essence, since Baudrillard denies it an external determinant. But as Norris argues, one need not undertake such an authoritarian resolution of the relativist quandary. While the traditional notion of truth is surely inadequate to register the complexity of the present state of societal and intellectual development, it does not follow that the notion of truth
is to be reduced to some neo-pragmatist notion of 'consensus' much less that it is to be abandoned altogether:

Baudrillard's mistake is to move straight on from a descriptive account of certain prevalent conditions in the late twentieth century world to a wholesale anti-realist stance which takes those conditions as a pretext for dismantling every last claim to validity or truth. What this amounts to is, again, a kind of systematically inverted Platonism: a fixed determination to conceive no ideas of what life might be like outside the cave. (Norris, 1990, p. 140)

For modernists in general and Marxists in particular, political consequences of Baudrillard's nihilistic theory, and of post-Althusserian thought in general, are unmentionable. In the words of Stephen Crook, 'The nihilism of post-modernism shows itself in two symptoms: an inability to specify possible mechanisms of change, and an inability to state why change is better than no change' (Crook, 1990, p. 59). The above discussion suggests that post-Althusserian thought in France has been inclined to dissolve critical distinctions into monistic ontologies and to interpret reflexive dimension as oppressive, patriarchal and totalising. Anything that abstracts from immediacy or points beyond 'local' contexts, suggests deferral of gratification, stabilises meaning, identities and desires, disregards contingency, seeks guidance from science or philosophy, harmonises different inclinations, disburses promises of universal emancipation or truth, is deemed oppressive and 'ideological' although the notion of ideology seldom receives explicit mention in the post modernist and post-structuralist discourses.

Most critics of post-Althusserian thought appear to be in agreement that while it highlights certain aspects of the Western societies not adequately theorised in the Marxist and liberal traditions, it fails to grapple with the 'macro-structures' of capitalism, especially its global context. Its interpretation of revolutions and the historic role of the working class is like wise considered cynical and dogmatic although few will claim that the working class is a radically oppressed group in modern societies.
much less the revolutionary subject. Moreover, it is notable that post modernism’s
defence of the weak and the marginalised is not accompanied by a wholesome critique
of imperialism or coherent accounts of the problems facing the so called third world.
Thus, it may be legitimately asked whether the relevance of post modern discourse is
largely confined to the advanced industrial societies.

That, however, should not detract one from conceptualising the possible effects
of post modern culture on ‘other’ people in the context of globalisation. Likewise, it
would be dogmatic to dismiss all aspects of post modernism as flawed or deliberately
mystifying. Infact, Baudrillard is the one who has developed the logic of nihilism to its
conclusion. He may claim that where others have succumbed to panic, seeking refuge
in religion, aesthetics, academicism or ideological posturing, he has traversed the
dreaded path in the foot steps of Nietzsche. If the threat of nihilism is not just verbal
but real, then, could hermetic art works, putrid rituals of liberal restraint or shabby
consolations of ‘discourse ethics’ possibly measure up to the catastrophe? Baudrillard
could argue that he has taken the step that Adorno could not take. Afterall, in moments
of acute pessimism, Adorno’s depiction of reification becomes nothing short of
totalistic and catastrophic. Furthermore, Baudrillard could argue that Adorno failed to
snap out of the ascetics of immanent critique of commodification because he was too
much of a European to consider other, ‘savage’ modes of re-enchantment. Ultimately,
rejection of Adorno’s and Baudrillard’s positions would depend on a coherent
assessment of reification. Unfortunately, this question may be undecidable because
any judgement of reification would have to demonstrate whether and how it has been
able to escape the effects of reification. However infuriating it may be to Adorno’s and
Baudrillard’s critics, this point cannot be dismissed lightly.

As Mike Gane has suggested, interpreting Baudrillard according to
conventional protocols and empirical criteria might not be the most productive
approach to his work. In a certain sense, Baudrillard’s ruminations begin where
academic analysis ends and it is at the limits of this field that some his most
provocative insights emerge. Indeed, it would be appropriate to consider his thought-
poetry as a provocation to academic thought in an era which academic thought does not
claim to understand in any case. Nor would it be helpful to dismiss him as a
reactionary or an apologist of late capitalism and so on. To quote Mike Gane:

Baudrillard has sought to follow a subversive strategy against the
temptations of banal or sentimental opposition to the present system, a
revolutionary who has sought to find a line of continuation of
revolutionary possibilities after the collapse of the revolutionary
movement. In this he provides a measure for the extent to which all others
have been reconciled to 'the object system'. If his work is not dangerous,
then, it is nothing. A reading must be prepared for this. (Gane, 1991a,
p.8)

Needless to say, critical theory cannot afford to not 'read' Baudrillard's work.
CRITICAL THEORY TODAY: TOWARDS A NEW CONSTELLATION?
CRITICAL THEORY TODAY: TOWARDS A NEW CONSTELLATION?

Critical theory, broadly defined to encompass the emerging fields of cultural studies, post colonial studies, post modernism as well as the interdisciplinary project of the Frankfurt School, aims to carry out dialogue with the dominant streams of the Western intellectual tradition including Marxism, Liberalism and Conservatism. The most thought provoking contributions eschew overly rigid distinctions between different political-intellectual perspectives. Marxism, for instance, is increasingly seen to include substantial elements of liberalism as well as a degree of nostalgia for pre-capitalist communitarian solidarity, whereas post colonial approaches may combine a strong emancipatory focus with serious and constructive engagement with pre-colonial and contemporary traditions of the postcolonial societies. It would not be helpful to label these approaches as simply Marxist, nationalist or anti-modern, nor does their 'hybridity' imply evasion of political commitment per se.

Critical theory has been developing along two different though related avenues. One tendency is sceptical and philosophically oriented, marked by a degree of aloofness from concrete analyses and political engagements in its determination to avoid epistemological aporias and political compromises. This trend, which can be termed purist, retains unmistakably Euro-centric concerns with classical problems of epistemology, aesthetics and epochal transformations. Despite their overt rejection of metaphysics, even postmodernists have been amply smitten by the Nietzschean problematic of nihilism and fate of modernity to merit inclusion among the purveyors of grand theory or 'high' tradition of critical theory.
The other tendency is distinguished by its resolute critique of Eurocenterism, relative distance from meta-theoretical controversies of the Western tradition and by its valorisation of demotic resistance and the realm of everyday life. Its overriding concern is with the struggles of those groups, regions and forms of subjectivity that have been marginalised or inferiorised by the narratives celebrating the West's exclusive universality. By contrast with the high tradition of theory, the diverse but related projects comprising the latter tendency strive for more nuanced, contextual focus, reject moncausal explanations derived from timeless theoretical axioms and favour multidisciplinary modes of inquiry. They assume that theoretical tools forged in modernist and imperialist contexts cannot do justice to the complexity of the late postmodern sociality. Thoroughgoing transformation of traditional life-worlds and power structures, coupled with a fantastic mixture of people and cultures in the urban spaces of the brave new world, has rendered conventional boundaries and role-structures increasingly problematic. Thus the metaphysician's dream of a coherent, manageably differentiated totality which a suitably nuanced theory could rationally comprehend is doomed to futility. It is not feasible to divide the object of study into different sections which are then apportioned to distinct disciplines because the object of study has been discovered to possess infinite complexity; myriad dimensions that are indistinct, interpenetrating and labile. Furthermore, the very idea of a detached, global consciousness or theoretical perspective capable of totalising the chaotic proliferation of differences is widely seen to be a delusion, and a dangerous one at that.

As Frederic Jameson has noted, cultural studies movement tends to favour rain-bow coalitions across disciplines and marginalised groups, valorises 'mixed identities' and abjures 'essentialist' positions, whether articulated in support of nationalisms or in the context of discourses such as Orientalism that construct an unpolluted image of the West by negating others. In place of the Hegelian notion of

1 Jameson, Frederic. On "Cultural Studies", Social Text34, vol.11, writes that 'this particular space called Cultural Studies is not terribly receptive to unmixed identities as such, but seems on the
sublation which reeks of teleology and conquest, it is the notion of 'articulation' which is employed to denote the element of contingency, flexibility and reversibility in the constitution of subjects and ideological constellations out of different, often opposed ingredients. In his analysis of Thatcherism, for instance, Stuart Hall illustrates how that ideological configuration could bring together elements of conservatism and liberalism to beguile so many of its rational critics on the left. The Hegelian-Marxist notion of synthesis in which disparate elements are supposedly mastered, together with the rationalist myth that opposed ideological blocs are self-subsistent and mutually impermeable, precluded Thatcherism's critics from deciphering the complex work of articulation. In these post-modern times, when few political identities can be coherently deduced from material conditions, when identities are continuously revised in acts of consumption and through geographical and cultural dislocations, and when interpolation of 'alien' phenomena has become a permanent feature of metropolitan existence, purist theories cannot provide satisfactory explanations although they may provide illusory refuge to anxieties unleashed by the disruptive proliferation of differences. Since the ability to live with uncertainty and to withstand anxiety is something that the post modern subjectivity must cultivate, the idea of strategic and revisable negotiations across different ideological tendencies and subject positions may not be so outlandish after all. As Stuart Hall explains:

An articulation is...the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. (Hall, 1996a, pp.141-42)

contrary to welcome the celebration (but also the analysis) of the mixed, *per se*, of new kinds of structural complexity: p.26.
Thus, with its emphasis on strategies, everyday interaction and the irrepressible creativity of the will to live, demotic cultural theory hopes to escape the pessimism infecting the grander version in the wake of socialist debacles. It is based on the conviction that even after the debilitating reverses suffered by the dispossessed, human beings will not consent to being passive observers of their own subjugation. That they will continue to struggle and produce empowering ideologies, if only on a smaller scale and with concrete ends in sight. Stuart Hall reiterates that this should not be interpreted as an instance of pragmatic accommodation with post-modernist consumerism. Rather than expecting the ineluctable laws of historical development to sweep away all undesirable phenomena, emancipatory movements would do better to heed Gramsci's advice and engage with the specificities of different ideological terrains, indeed work through them towards pragmatically defined objectives. For instance, if religious vocabulary happens to be central in a given socio-cultural context, it would be unwise to ignore it just because religion is supposed to be an antiquated ideology waiting to be consumed by the secularising telos of modernity. Thus:

... in particular formations, where religion has become the valorized ideological domain, the domain into which all the different cultural strands are obliged to enter, no political movement in that society can become popular without negotiating the religious terrain. Social movements have to transform it, buy into it, inflect it, develop it, clarify it - but they must engage with it. You can't create a popular political movement in such social formations without getting into the religious question, because it is the arena in which this community has come to a certain kind of consciousness. (Hall, 1996a, p. 143)

Stuart Hall claims that revolution in communication technologies, ubiquity of popular culture and the centrality of consumerism are some of the features of the post-Fordist sociality that challenge the critical intellect to become far more vigilant and daring than before. Axioms of Liberal and Marxist systems will have to be subjected to closer scrutiny. It is easy to succumb to melancholia that the disappearance of 'Revolution' from the radical imaginary has unleashed among the Western intellectuals
but not among those alone. Thus, it may be tempting to avoid confrontation with a world which has betrayed dreams, but it has not ceased to change, both for the better and for the worse. To some extent, re-birth of faith in life, which is essential for a revitalised thought of the social, can only occur in the course of attentive living and sustained engagement with whatever ideologies happen to be hegemonic at a given moment.

Hall urges serious but critical engagement with post modernist thinking. Nevertheless, he rejects the claim that post-modernity represents definitive rupture with modernity or that it is something inexorable to which no effective resistance can be offered. He notes too that much of post modernist reflection remains unashamedly Euro-centric, as though the rest of the world either did not exist or was destined to follow the West obediently. He discerns a totalising, abstract streak in post modern formulations which fail to offer adequate explanations of the Western scene either:

Let's take the post modernist argument about the so-called collapse or implosion of the 'the real'. Three quarters of the human race have not yet entered the era of what we are pleased to call 'the real'. Furthermore, even within the West, ever since the development of modern mass media, and their introduction on a mass scale into cultural production, and their impact on the audiences for cultural products, we have witnessed the undermining of the absolutism of 'the real' of the great discourses of realism, and the familiar realist and rationalist guarantees, the dominance of certain types of representational form etc. (Hall, 1996a, p.133)

Unlike post modernists who espouse a shrill anti-Marxism, Hall admits that the Marxist problematic remains central to his work although he continues to articulate it with contemporary developments. Some critics, however, see difficulties in Hall's attempt to hold on to Marxism while seeking to appropriate seminal insights of post modernism. Jorge Larrain has argued that in taking as his point of departure the Althusserian re-formulation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Hall surrenders the negative, critical notion of ideology. Whereas the negative conception aimed to provide criteria whereby ideas and institutions undermining people's recognition of exploitative
forces could be criticised, the neutral version derived from Lenin and Gramsci abandons such focus by allocating distinct ideologies to each social group. These ideologies are seen to compete with each other for supremacy in a process that is difficult to subsume under a normative stand point:

In general, negative or critical conceptions of ideology refer to a kind of distorted thought, whatever the way in which we choose to understand such distortion. Neutral conceptions refer to political ideas, discourses and world-views which are articulated around some principles related to the interests of some social group, party or class. A negative concept of ideology is inherently capable of discriminating between adequate and inadequate ideas, it passes epistemological judgement on thought, whatever its class origin or the expressed intention of its supporters. An ideological idea is a distorted idea. The neutral concept of ideology does not, of itself, discriminate between adequate and inadequate ideas, it does not pass epistemological judgement on them but emphasises that through them human beings acquire consciousness of social reality and links those ideas to some class interests or to some articulating political principle. Thus one can speak of bourgeois ideology and proletarian ideology, liberal ideology and nationalist ideology without necessarily wanting to establish or prejudge their adequacy or truth. (Larrain, 1996, pp.53-54)

In what sense, then, could one consider the neutral conception of ideology critical or enlightening? Larrain explains that:

Within the neutral conception of ideology critical judgement can be passed on ideologies, but always from the perspective of a different ideology. Thus when Marxists in the Leninist tradition criticise bourgeois ideology they do it from the point of view of proletarian ideology and what they criticise is its bourgeois character, not its ideological character which their own Marxist doctrine shares. In this conception, ideology of itself does not entail any necessary distortion. For the neutral version the 'ideological' is the quality of any thought or idea that serves or articulates group or class interests, whatever they may be. For the negative version, on the contrary, the 'ideological' is the attribute of any thought or idea which distorts or inverts reality. (Larrain, 1996, p.54)

In Larrain's view, post modern approaches have tended to erode the critical, normative edge of Marxist theory of ideology to the detriment of radical social theory. While the perspectives inspired by Gramsci by way of Althusser have illuminated
certain aspects of cultural phenomena which were overlooked by the older theories of ideology, their limitations should be recognised. The neutral conception of ideology may offer useful insights into the form of ideologies and how they become effective, but it can tell us little about their 'truth-content' nor specify criteria whereby a particular ideology, let us say humanism, may be considered less baneful than fascism. Surely, it was not Gramsci's intention to obscure the distinction between Socialism and fascism while exploring the mechanics whereby the latter became hegemonic in specific historical conditions. It could not have been his intention to let the normative dimension evaporate from the fascinated stare at the achievements of fascist hegemony. Or, is it at bottom a contest between different wills to power, whether understood in terms of race, class, caste, nationality or gender? Must Socialism then be understood as the ideology of the working class which was enunciated in universalist terms to co-opt other groups, such as the peasantry and intellectuals, for strategic purposes? Larrain is confident that Gramsci's strategic analyses were underpinned by a clear understanding that Socialism is the desirable, indeed rational alternative for the majority of people:

The Leninist neutralisation of ideology within Marxism, later adopted by Lukacs and Gramsci, was carried out in a context where the trust in reason, the acceptance of universal standards and the belief in the possibility of reaching the truth were not challenged or doubted. (Larrain, 1996, p. 62)

So far as Larrain is concerned, post modernism, with its wholesale assault on reason and its promotion of discursive approach as the key to the study of contemporary societies is an obfuscatory force of global significance. Nevertheless, he is careful to distinguish Hall's more 'responsible' stance from that of Laclau and Mouffe, who are severely upbraided for carrying post modern conceits to extremes, plunging the distinctions between the social, the political, the economic and the cultural
in a diffuse notion of discursivity. What is ironic is that they do so with the aim of recovering the specificity of the political from structural determinism of 'orthodox' Marxism and to promote 'radical democracy'. Their project is considered to be mired in a politically disabling formalism which has been the hallmark of post-Althusserian thought. Hall, for his part, recognises affinities with the work of Laclau and Mouffe but is careful to register some disagreements with their wide-ranging model of discursivity. If Laclau and Mouffe liken the social processes to language, Hall wants to add the distinction that 'the social operates like a language'. This distinction is crucial for Hall because, 'while the metaphor of language is the best way of rethinking many fundamental questions, there's a kind of slippage from acknowledging its utility and power to saying that that's really the way it is' (Hall, 1996a, p.146). Laclau and Mouffe's more extreme position is a form of reductionism that results from their unsophisticated inversion of 'economism'. Hall explains that 'the fully discursive position is a reductionism upward, rather than a reductionism downward, as economism was. What seems to happen is that, in the reaction against a crude materialism, the metaphor of x operates like y is reduced to x=y' (Hall, 1996a, p.146).

Thus, discursive position runs the risk of 'losing its reference to material practice and historical conditions' (Hall, 1996a, p.147). While conceding that rigid distinctions of the type 'nature vs culture' are problematic, he nonetheless advises against the conflation of ideologies/discourses with material conditions because 'ideologies/cultural/discursive practices continue to exist within the determining lines of force of material relations' (Hall, 1996a, p.10).

Larrain believes that Hall's strategy of 'learning from the enemy', while understandable to a degree, should be complemented by negative conception of

---

2 Also, see Larrain (1996); Osborne (1991); Geras (1987; 1988); Mouzelis (1988). Osborne (1991) refers to the absence of 'institutional analysis' in Laclau and Mouffe's work which is overcompensated by an excessive enlargement of the concept of the political to make it coterminous with the social itself.' p.213. Hence, 'The specifically political, the moment of hegemony, appears only as a bare logical form (equivalence) in libertarian mimicry of the formalism of classical liberal thought.' p.219.
ideology lest it get stuck into descriptive mode and produce 'neutral' accounts which end up glorifying forces that ought to be resisted; a charge that, interestingly, Edward Said has levelled against Foucault's account of power as well. Larrain also cautions against the tendency to focus exclusively on ruptures and 'new' developments allegedly requiring novel conceptual tools. In many cases, the 'unprecedented' may be a reformulation, even revival of older perspectives and values. For instance, Thatcherism may be viewed as a return to more orthodox bourgeois values in a bid to attack the welfare state and supplant technocratic legitimation of capitalist accumulation with unabashed celebration of the market. Hence:

The construction of the welfare state after the war and the Keynesian policies of full employment seemed to go hand in hand with economic growth and were conditions very different from pre-war capitalism. The Thatcherite discourse breaks with this kind of interventionist, welfare, full-employment, rationalised capitalism and goes back to the supremacy of the market. So, the new ideological values can no longer be the idea of science, full employment and welfare. Now, once more, as in Marx's time, it is freedom, equality, property and self-interest. (Larrain, 1996, p.67)

But, Thatcherite ideology does not enact a simple return to orthodox liberal values because wide-ranging changes in patterns of accumulation and social conditions which have occurred in recent decades enable the authority of tradition to be invoked with renewed aggression:

Because, flexible accumulation, economic insecurity and the re-imposition of the market rules are bound to exacerbate contradictions and their manifestations such as unemployment, poverty, discrimination, criminality, national and regional division, new forms of violence, and so on, the ideology of freedom and equality is not enough. At times of insecurity and fragmentation the longing for stable values leads to a heightened emphasis on the authority of basic institutions... Hence, the new ideological forms which emphasize the sense of authority, hard work, law and order, family and tradition, Victorian values, patriotism: a strong nation which defeats the enemy within (trade unions) and the enemy without (Argentinians). These forms serve as devices to misunderstand and displace the real origin of those conflictive manifestations and to justify the way in which they are dealt with. (Larrain, 1996, p.68)
Clearly, Larrain interprets Thatcherism as a response to the altered conditions of accumulation which endeavours to protect increasingly violent operations of ‘free market’ by attacking resistant political forces and attributing social pathologies to scape-goats such as immigrants and trade unions. Consequently, it disseminates a paranoid, law and order mentality. If Thatcherism can still be understood to a considerable extent through the Marxist perspective, it is because the underlying mode of production is far from being superseded (Larrain, 1996, p.58). Thus, if the Gramscian concept of ideology illustrates the ‘successful hegemonic and articulatory qualities of Thatcherism’, the critical one of Marx, ‘underlines the reality of unfreedom and inequality it has created but tries to conceal’. Therefore, both are necessary aspects of the same complex phenomenon (Larrain, 1996, p.69).

One must point out that while Hall claims to recognise the significance of material factors, he nonetheless appears to privilege the nomadic trajectories of resistance, paying somewhat lesser attention to those aspects of enduring totalities or ‘traditions’ which may empower the subaltern. It seems that despite his dissatisfaction with certain post modernist orthodoxies, he continues to attribute greater significance to the more recognisably ‘constructed’ or de-constructible totalities. To take just one example, although he does not demonise religion in the manner of liberal and post modern critics, he continues to construe it as a problem or ‘challenge’ for the critic who is presumed to be secular. How else could the latter adopt a ‘strategic’ attitude towards ‘religion’? Doesn’t Hall’s theory then presuppose the cultural neutralisation or ‘hybridity’ of critics and other agents as the enabling condition of the free-floating, weightless and revisable character of their articulations? If so, his observations, which may be considered plausible in the context of Western societies would be problematic in many other locations where identities are rather more firmly attached to specific contexts and where ‘strategic’ action is not so neatly dissociable from the normative baggage. To complicate matters, religious and normative dimensions may not be easy to disentangle either, even though they are not identical.
While the retreat from grander, Promethean elaborations of Marxism may have become irreversible and the epistemological guarantees once offered by the project of ideology critique may have lapsed, the persistence of capitalist forms and processes and especially their global dissemination, stipulates a more cautious attitude towards certain insights of Marxism. The emphasis on local and strategic analyses; on the significance of language, conceptual models and patterns of identification, and a general mistrust of metaphysical and deterministic frameworks is something to be welcomed. However, absolutisation of the contingent and local does not promise to be a significant advance over grand theories. As noted by Hall himself, anti-metaphysical foundationalism re-introduces the aporias of metaphysical foundationalism and is yet to demonstrate its intrinsic relation to 'radical' political outcomes. This is not without implications for theories of resistance.

Cultural imperialism, Media and Resistance

Given the ubiquity of cultural industries and their rapid globalization, debates about cultural imperialism cannot afford to ignore the changing relationship between media, power and subject formation. The dominant perspectives in the debates about media and cultural imperialism are constituted by political economy, Althusserianism and the 'newer' approaches associated with postmodernism and Gramscian movement in Cultural Studies. While the newer approaches purport to question the functional and deterministic view of the 'passive' consumer presumably enshrined in the older paradigms, their critics argue that these analyses remain trapped in the abstract, Althusserian model of discursivity which prevents adequate conceptualisation of agency and its material context. Intimately linked with the question of agency is that of resistance because the capacity of 'recipients' to resist media codes is interpreted as a sign of (relative) autonomy. No wonder that the notion of resistance has become extremely contentious in the debates about the nature of cultural imperialism and the
ideological role of media, both within the Western societies and globally (Fiske, 1987; Mattelart, 1992).

However, even a cursory look at these debates makes it apparent that different discourses construe resistance in different ways, which makes a dialogue between them a somewhat difficult proposition. For instance, Marxists who are used to defining resistance and agency in grand, teleological terms are somewhat bewildered by the post-Althusserian usage which is far too discursive for their taste. Clearly, resistance at what may be termed micro and macro levels is be distinguished. Likewise, it would not be useful to lump together 'discursive resistance' and more recognisable forms of political struggle. To say that power calls for resistance as a matter of course or that even hegemonic processes entail resistance is to speak of a different order of resistance than that implied in the cases of more active, let us say, 'dangerous' activities such as anti-colonial struggles or protest rallies against dictatorships (Roach, 1997, p. 59).

This distinction has become a contested issue for media theorists and researchers who seek to interpret audience responses in terms of passivity and resistance. One group of scholars tends to stress that different sets of consumers and media audiences interpret, even misinterpret the contents of films, soap-operas, popular music and advertisements in ways which are not necessarily determined or anticipated by the dominant codes or producers, so it is not appropriate to consider them passive victims of cultural imperialism. Furthermore, the multiplicity of contexts in which the messages are received ensure that contents of the media presentations are rarely appropriated in any homogeneous fashion by the audiences (Schelling, 1991, pp. 8-9; Tomlinson, 1991, p. 63). It is pointed out that even the supposedly unsophisticated consumers of cultural products 'read' them pragmatically in terms of their immediate concerns, dissonant memories and other symbolic resources drawn from marginalised traditions, which may be rural, working class or 'ethnic'. In so
doing, they gradually re-formulate their marginalised traditions, inscribing them within the mainstream. However, it is easy to over-state the subversive potential of these processes and the ensuing cultural hybridisation. The institutional sites and discursive strategies whereby hegemonic forms integrate marginal, oppositional and potentially disruptive tendencies can be quite efficient, although such integration can be neither complete nor irreversible. Furthermore, John Tomlinson has warned against the tendency to place media in the centre of cultural processes as the 'determining force' and to equate 'media domination' with 'cultural domination' (Tomlinson, 1991, p.58, p.63). This, he claims, is a simplistic view of social and cultural processes. As he puts it, 'People in modern societies are involved in all sorts of relationships and practices other than watching television, and to do justice to these it is necessary to "decentre" the media from the position that they have gained in some cultural theories' (Tomlinson, 1991, p.63).

Those on the other side of the debate refer to the enduring power of the Western media empires and claim that the majority of the third world's people are still on the receiving end of the West's economic and cultural supremacy, although this may assume different, even context-sensitive forms with capitalism becoming increasingly 'disorganised' and multinational. No amount of textual de-construction and interpretive resistance will be sufficient by itself to alter this situation. They often criticise the new wave of 'post modern' research in which minute instances of the consumers' de-constructive, pragmatic or aberrant reception of cultural products are highlighted, as though to 'rescue' consumers rendered passive by orthodox Marxists and the Frankfurt School (Mattelart, 1992). Others point out that 'post modern' research ends up condoning the dominant media interests and blocs of organised power that benefit from the proliferation of consumerist attitudes in the third world. Furthermore, it is alleged that the newer, discursive approaches are unable to account for the developments in the global political economy which may be re-structuring the contexts of reception in the third world quite significantly. In a recent book (1992), for
instance, Armad and Michele Mattelart have expressed some reservations about the newer perspectives which are arguably becoming hegemonic in the field although they acknowledge the need to refine the deterministic frameworks of Marxism and dependency theory.

It would be dogmatic indeed to ignore less orthodox forms of resistance and to elevate the definition of resistance so much that nothing short of armed uprisings and pre-revolutionary 'general strikes' could make the grade. But, it would be equally dogmatic to treat subtle, diffuse, less recognisable, 'micro forms' of resistance as paradigmatic by way of compensation and to marginalise 'conventional' variants, as though in obedience to some perverse avant-gardist fantasy, the conditions of existence have become so altered across the globe as to render the latter obsolete (Thompson, 1995, p. 9). Different forms of resistance are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although in any particular situation, certain forms of resistance may be more effective than others.

In his influential contribution to the 'social theory of media', John Thompson (1995) has sought to remedy the limitations of different approaches in a systematic framework which combines institutional analysis with hermeneutics and insights gained from media theorists such as Marshall Mc Luhan and Herald Innis. What is of relevance here is his critique of the cultural imperialism thesis. As Thompson notes, the cultural imperialism thesis was developed by scholars such as Herbert Schiller and Armand Mattelart with their focus on Latin America. Taking dependency theory as their point of departure, their concern has been to trace the cultural effects of American power after the Second World War on the third world in general and Latin America in particular. They argue, for instance, that given the inability of the third world nations to make substantial capital investments required to develop indigenous communications industries, they become inevitably dependent on the Western, mostly American, television programmes and films (Thompson, 1995, p. 166). Although these theorists
offer some penetrating insights, Thompson insists that their perspective offers a reductionist account whereby cultural processes are seen to express economic forces of an imperialist character, leaving little room for ambiguities in the messages or resistance on the part of the cultures being 'penetrated'. He claims that research on audience response provides no empirical support for the cultural imperialism thesis. Furthermore, theorists of cultural imperialism are alleged to be clinging to an antiquated, not to say mythical, conception of American power; a position which becomes especially problematic in the context of a multipolar world of disorganised capitalism where transnational enterprises without firm commitment to any particular nation or culture are the dominant players (Thompson, 1995, pp. 167-169).

Thompson's other major objection to the cultural imperialism thesis pertains to the notion that the third world's 'traditional' cultures were somehow pure and 'authentic' before their defilement by the Western media combines and consumerism. Taking his cue from a host of 'revisionist' social and cultural historians who suggest that most traditions are 'constructed' and incessantly 're-imagined', he insists that:

The traditions and cultural heritages of many so called Third World countries were shaped by a long and often brutal process of cultural conflict, a process through which many traditional practices were destroyed and some of the values and beliefs of external powers were imposed on indigenous populations. (Thompson, 1995, pp. 169-70)

Thompson is certainly right to question the crude assertions of cultural imperialism and the fallacious assumption that ownership structure, institutional context and point of origin could predetermine either the content of a programme in its entirety or the manner of its reception in different locations. He is also right to suggest the need for closer analysis of global power relations and structural and organisational changes in capitalism. However, he does not quite follow his own advice in some cases. For instance, he argues that the power of the West in general and America in particular has waned in the multi-polar world of today whose defining traits are alleged
to be the upsurge of nationalism and 'fundamentalism'. Furthermore, he accuses the proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis of underplaying the differences between the Western countries which are far from a homogeneous bloc. The global dispersal of transnational corporations, rise of the Pacific rim economies, massive Japanese investment in American communications and entertainment industries, are some of the reasons why transnational corporations are not to be viewed as representing American interests, let alone imperial designs of any kind.

To take up the last point first, it appears that Thompson has allowed the myth of globalization to obscure the reality and 'empirical evidence'. Few except the ultra 'realist' voices in America's foreign policy 'community' can take the thesis of America's decline seriously, either as an economic or military power. The American economy has been enjoying one of its most remarkable growth spurts in decades. The popular view that globalization is going to have a dramatic effect on American competitiveness and employment has also been demonstrated to be grossly exaggerated (Krugman, 1996). Similarly, the tendency to associate globalization with a dilution of Western economic power, either through a flood of first world investment in the third world or through dramatic increase in the activity of the first world transnationals in the third world to the detriment of the first, cannot stand critical

\[3\] Surveying economic conditions at the end of the year 1997, Walter Isaacson of Time magazine writes, 'The U.S. now enjoys what in many respects is the healthiest economy in its history, and probably that of any nation ever. More than 400,000 new jobs were created last month, bringing unemployment down to 4.6%, the lowest level in almost 25 years. Labor force participation has also improved: the proportion of working age people is the highest ever recorded. Wage stagnation seems to be ending: earnings have risen more than 4% in the past 12 months, which is the greatest gain in 20 years when adjusted for inflation. The Dow is at 7756, more than doubling in three years, and corporate profits are at their highest level ever. Yet inflation is negligible 2%, and even the dour Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan seems confident enough to keep interest rates low.' PP.24-25. 'The Passion of Andrew Grove', Time, Dec. 29, 1997 Jan. 5, 1998. Furthermore, the recent economic crisis in Asia raises questions about globalization being a neutral process which distributes costs and benefits more or less evenly across the world, without regard to cultural and political factors. As economy after 'tiger' economy flounders in Asia, the Wall Street and European bourses have resumed their ascent after a few hiccups. Meanwhile, the I.M.F. and the World Bank, which are portrayed in the media as saviours, rush in with their 'reform' packages demanding further 'openness' and deregulation. Needless to say, the price which the desperate governments must pay for these packages is one of allowing more or less unlimited access to foreign investors, who can then pick up choicest assets at a cut price in these cash starved economies. See Mark Atkinson, 'No bargains for Korea in this sale', Guardian Weekly, Jan. 11, 1998, p. 12.
examination. As Paul Hirst has noted in a recent study of globalization, 'the apparently huge sum of $100 billion invested in newly industrializing countries in 1993 represented just 3 per cent of investment in the industrialized triad countries. FDI thus does not alter the fact of a highly concentrated economy centred on the three main blocs' (Hirst, 1997, p.416). As to the multinational corporations' anarchistic betrayal of their homelands, the available evidence tells an entirely different story. Their sales and assets are still overwhelmingly skewed towards their base regions (Hirst, 1997, p.417).

To point to the diversity of the West and suggest that differences do exist between America and Europe is to trivialise the issue of cultural imperialism to such an extent that the argument of the well meaning scholar veers perilously close to apologia for imperialism. Differences certainly exist between America and Europe and between the American South and North- East for that matter, but the unfortunate fact remains that the bulk of the non-Western world was colonised by one or the other of these remarkably different people. One wonders how comforting it must have been for the victims of colonialism to be ruled by one Western power rather than another? Or, if it made a great deal of difference to the people of Iraq that the planes dropping bombs on their homes were British or French rather than American? Or if the relatives of those massacred in Bosnia and Rwanda could take some comfort from the fact that the British people were a little less indifferent to the scenes of horror which they daily watched on their televisions than the Americans, or if the Italian delegates to the 'talks' were a little less vacillating than others? The point is that no matter how thoroughly one may catalogue the differences between and within the Western countries, and no matter how painstakingly one may try to absolve the Western 'people' from the brutal acts of their governments, armies, experts and merchants, only the converted are likely to appreciate the brilliance of such maneuvers. In the eyes of the victims, the members of the imperialist bloc have yet to betray their kind for another. Of course, one appreciates the nature of academic activity and the virtue of making fine, empirically based distinctions which capture the 'complexity' and 'flux' of a bewildering state of
affairs, but surely, there are topics which demand that critical analysis venture beyond facts.

This brings me to the last point (the issues of cultural 'hybridity' and the outbreak of 'fundamentalism' shall be considered in the next chapter) which should clarify the preceding remarks about empiricism. In his refutation of the cultural imperialism thesis, John Thompson concludes that the thesis is 'outdated and empirically doubtful'. Moreover, it fails to consider that 'cultural phenomena are fundamentally hermeneutical processes in which individuals draw on the material and symbolic resources available to them, as well as on the interpretive assistance offered by those with whom they interact in their day to day lives' (Thompson, 1995, p.172). I will argue that there is a fundamental contradiction between this statement of method and the conclusions at which Thompson arrives. Furthermore, there is a serious problem with the empirical component of the refutation. Contrary to Thompson's assertion that empirical research casts doubt on 'cultural imperialism thesis', in one of the most authoritative studies on this issue, John Tomlinson states that 'empirical findings cannot actually refute the cultural imperialism argument, since problems of evidence ultimately defeat them' (Tomlinson, 1991, p.56; italics in the original). One wonders what is the empirical basis for Thompson's resounding judgement against the 'cultural imperialism thesis'.

In his scramble for empirical support for what has to be called his programmatic stance, Thompson appears to have forgotten his own insight that the problematic of cultural imperialism is hermeneutic (and historico-political) as much as it is empirical. No reflection on this issue can ignore the subjective, experiential dimension and hope to rise above trite academicism. If, inspite of all the 'objective' transformations and dispersals which are supposed to make the problematic of cultural imperialism obsolete in the view of 'neutral' observers, millions of

---

4 John Tomlinson's study is not discussed in Thompson's text, although there are two brief references to it in the notes. See Thompson, 1995, p.287 n.26, p.288 n.37.)
individuals in Asia, Africa and Latin America continue to attest to the influence of Western cultural forms, then, the methodology of refuting the 'cultural imperialism thesis' cannot be adequate. If, as Thompson has noted, 'cultural phenomena are hermeneutical processes in which individuals draw upon material and symbolic resources available to them', then why must he assume that memories of colonialism and other forms of imperialist violence will disappear overnight, leaving in their wake a more or less neutral consciousness, playfully appropriating 'constructed' traditions and performing interpretive heroics in front of television screens and in shopping malls? He is surely right to point out that Western products are not irresistible vehicles of a mega imperial will and that audiences do offer hermeneutic resistance to them. However, as Chen has pointed out, it is the hegemony of form more than content which carries 'traces of American life' to other places in an imperialist sense: TV culture, blue jeans, punk style or yuppie ways of life' (Chen, 1996, pp. 322-23). And, while the consumers resist the dominant 'citation' to some extent, Chen asks why 'the citation is American... not Nicaraguan.' He suggests therefore that the cultural imperialism thesis be 'transformed with an emphasis not only on the ideological but the simulation of ways of life, as a much more subtle form of articulation' (Chen, 1996, p. 323).

Furthermore, the other contexts mentioned by Thompson, those of every day interaction, have not entirely disappeared in 'traditional' societies. Despite Thompson's hermeneutical sensitivity, he fails to surmise that the perception of cultural domination has as much to do with conflicting imaginaries as with empirical and institutional factors. Hence, whereas the myth of globalization may replace the myth of revolution in the Western imaginary, the same process might be interpreted less enthusiastically in other places where global ventures are associated in the collective memory with imperialism and world wars. Thus, while the debate on media imperialism considers institutional, formal and structural factors, it does not pay sufficient attention to deeper, mythical horizons, nor does it attempt to theorise global implications of the West's
cultural crisis which Nietzsche and his followers have uncovered with such poignancy. Quite possibly, it is not the 'barbaric' outbreak of 'fundamentalism' and 'nationalism' in the rest of the world that threatens civilization which the West must defend heroically, but the prospect of social and cultural breakdown in the West. Incidentally, this is a line of inquiry from which a forward looking cultural theory liberated itself when it conquered the Frankfurt School's 'pessimism' with its 'joyful wisdom' and, it is not about to return to it in these 'thrilling' times.

However, as some 'radical' theorists are having to recognise, the individualised, fragmented, insecure consumers, cut off from the communal sources of vitality and identity do not constitute a threat to modernity, capitalism or whatever it is that perpetuates the state of injustice and unfulfillment in the world. The 'saturated self' which is overloaded by vocational engagements, emotional traumas and physical dislocations and which can barely keep track of what happens in its immediate context, cannot be expected to have genuine sympathy for 'other' selves. Still less could it be expected to have any 'commitment' those who do not share its fantasies and obsessions. This is not to say, of course, that the inhabitants of the West have lost the capacity to savour media spectacles designed to express their solidarity with the 'suffering humanity'. However, the current period of de-centering obviates the need for either a Grand Saviour or a Grand Inquisitor: every one is now entitled to their personal therapist. Maximum thrill and intensity is to be extracted from the multiplying and exploding selves even as they multiply and explode: every nuance and fluctuation of the invaluable symptoms is minutely analysed and savoured. Tending to the

---


6 Baudrillard (1994) has, of course, accused the West of exploiting misery of others after having exploited their material resources for centuries. The charitable crumbs thrown to the 'wretched of the earth' help to assuage the West's bad conscience. 'We must today denounce the moral and sentimental exploitation of that poverty - charity cannibalism being worse than oppressive violence. The extraction and humanitarian reprocessing of a destitution which has become the equivalent of oil deposits and gold mines. The extortion of the spectacle of poverty and, at the same time, of our charitable condescension: a worldwide appreciated surplus of fine sentiments and bad conscience.' P.66.
vicissitudes of narcissism remains a lucrative career even in the midst of acute global crises. This is not to say of course that the crises of meaning and identity are not real or are in any sense secondary to the more recognisably material developments. Quite the contrary. They are real indeed with real, global consequences which need to be carefully analysed. The problem may be posed in the following terms: At the present juncture, when the subject in the West may be experiencing a genuine crisis of identity, it may be more tempted than ever to seek foils against which to reconstruct and stabilise its sense of identity (Mestrovic, 1994).

In the aftermath of the Soviet debacle, the beleagured 'third world' and 'Islamic fundamentalism' appear to be replacing the old enemy in the eyes of Western governments, media and even some 'experts'. The panicked response to anomic developments in the Western societies develops all too quickly into cultural-philosophical lament about the declining state of the Western civilisation which is usually followed by rousing calls for the closing of ranks against barbarians, and for resolute immersion in the 'sources' of the Western tradition. Thus, radical intellectuals including Jurgen Habermas, Alain Tourraine and Cornelius Castoriadis and the perennially intransigent group of critical theorists who write in the journal Telos, to mention just a few examples, have been 'reconstructing' their theoretical frameworks as if the rest of the world has ceased to exist (Castoriadis, 1995; Tourraine, 1995; Telos, 1989-90). If they are to be believed, the beleagured 'West', which has been groaning under the weight of its excessive samaritanism must now be allowed to attend to its 'domestic' problems. The editorials of Telos now denounce affirmative action, multiculturalism, post-colonialism and other 'new class' orthodoxies with the same fervour as they did 'Big Business' and L. B. J. It is important therefore to examine the crisis of identity in the Euro-American region without reducing it to economic imperatives but also without overlooking its thoroughly material, global implications.
Could it be that critiques of universality, rationality and abstraction are becoming so vociferous in the West because the damage has been substantially done, and homogenisation rather than ecstatic play of truly different 'differences' is the dominant feature of the contemporary Western world? Frederic Jameson appears to think so. He maintains that 'sublimation' of particular group identities into the universal consumer that occurred in the context of American modernisation and which has been repeated to a greater or lesser degree in other locales should be viewed as a pre-condition of identity politics currently on the ascendant:

We therefore need to take into account the possibility that the various politics of Difference - the differences inherent in various politics of "group identity" - have been made possible by the tendential leveling of social identity generated by consumer society, and to entertain the hypothesis that a cultural politics of difference becomes itself feasible only when the great and forbidding categories of classical Otherness have been substantially weakened by "modernization" (so that current neoethnicities may be distinct from the classical kind as neoracism is from classical racism). (Jameson, 1993, p.37)

Thus, the desire to recognise and celebrate differences could be a symptom of the larger syndrome and not a sign of its overcoming or of some exciting postmodern breakthrough. In other words, the desire to flee the iron-cage of rationality needs to be distinguished from the claim that the iron-cage is being actually dismantled and postmodern subjectivities are becoming free from constraints.

Modernity, Post modernity and the Question of Metaphysics

It is perfectly legitimate, however, to disagree with the Weberian diagnosis of modernity's constraints and argue for the existence of substantive choices at individual and collective levels. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to examine the quality of arguments which are offered in support of alternative possibilities and to ask whether they are based primarily on the desire (perfectly understandable and legitimate) to deny the reality of the 'iron-cage' in order to survive within some of its niches as 'micro agents' without having to grapple with its fundamental, structural constraints. Or,
whether alternative visions based on sound understanding of the objective constraints are available. It would not be proper, likewise, to dismiss as elitist or intellectualist the shattering diagnoses of modernity that thinkers like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Weber, Adorno, Heidegger and others have been elaborating. If the term modernity names a condition in which beliefs, traditions and patterns of association that orientated human beings' thought and conduct for millennia become imperilled; in which inordinate strain is placed on consciousness to overcome every obstacle to rational organisation of life; in which human beings become increasingly oppressed by the very structures that were expected to liberate them; a condition, moreover, in which they are inundated with demonstrations of their finitude and expendability, and urged to shed every illusion and overcome every prejudice although there is, ultimately, no point to anything including life itself, then, modernity cannot be an easy condition to bear. It may be possible for some rare, spartan intellects to bear their 'fates' without the aid of seductive illusions or metaphysical consolations but, would it be reasonable to expect such exemplary asceticism from ordinary mortals?

Consequently, it would make sense to relax the taboo which post modernism imposes on metaphysical thinking as though it were something other-worldly and not a 'human, all too human' phenomenon (Desmond, 1995). Is it not the case that the so-called metaphysical thinking is related to existential needs and articulates with the more recognisably worldly phenomena to produce thoroughly worldly, political effects? Could there be a more dramatic illustration of this than Weber's analysis of the 'other worldly' protestant ethic engendering the aggressively material civilisation of Europe? As Adorno and Horkheimer sought to demonstrate years ago, attack on metaphysics and other 'mysterious', spiritual phenomena is a quintessential gesture of Enlightenment which, by destroying the notion of sacredness, contributes to the disenchantment of the world in which instrumental rationality must not allow anything to have intrinsic worth. While the Enlightenment's attack on religio-metaphysical views may have been justified by the intention to confront feudal-monarchical
tyrannies which resorted to theological modes of legitimation, it is safe to say that the meaning of that gesture has changed in modernity which enthroned Reason as the prodigiously resourceful tyrant. When the supposedly non-metaphysical, hands-on approach of instrumental rationality could only succeed in producing an abstract, commodified social-scape where almost everyone is robbed of spontaneity, ceaseless inquisition of metaphysics and religion by post modernists and neo-pragmatists seems a bit like flogging an extremely tired, almost dead and possibly wrong horse. Unless, of course, their intentions were to clear every possible obstacle, including mirages from the path of Enlightenment, which in the guise of practical reason, common sense and enlightened praxis hopes to be mistaken for a life-enhancing force.

This is not to say, of course, that rigid, time-less perspectives should not be scrutinised or that they may be allowed to determine political practice. The point is that dogmatic, one-sided construction (and denunciation) of 'metaphysics' as the other of the post modern condition in which more concrete attitudes, purged of all metaphysical residues, ought to prevail is a move that smacks of the much maligned binarism. One will not comprehend the ambiguity of metaphysics by dualistic manoeuvres and abstract negations. Even Nietzsche, who was arguably the most fearless investigator of life-denying attitudes would hesitate to set up a stark opposition between life and metaphysics. In a stunning revelation, he even conjectured that asceticism which is ostensibly a life-denying phenomenon could function in certain circumstances, as a defence mechanism activated by life against the threat of destruction. That ascetic, metaphysical attitude could even be the fundamental mutation that produced cultural beings that recognise themselves as human. He suspects that for the creature struggling to emerge from animal existence, the 'ascetic ideal' became the remedy for the potentially destructive absurdity of its altered state:

Apart from the ascetic ideal man, the human animal had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; 'why man at all?' - was a question without an answer: the will for man and earth was lacking; behind every great destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater "in
vain"! This is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was lacking that man was surrounded by a fearful void - he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was not suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, "why do I suffer?" (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 162)

Ascetic ideal saved mankind from nihilistic disintegration by 'interpreting' suffering, that is, by providing meaning to existence, even though it thereby infected man with yet another disease, namely guilt:

In the ascetic ideal, suffering was interpreted; the tremendous void seemed to have been filled; the door was closed to any kind of suicidal nihilism. This interpretation...brought fresh suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering; it placed all suffering under the perspective of guilt. (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 162)

The most striking thing about Nietzsche's examination of ascetic ideal is his recognition of the complex manner in which that ideal becomes intertwined with a multiplicity of forces in different epochs. As Nancy Love (1986) argues, in his concern to liberate creative energies from the spell of mystifying illusions, deadening abstractions and monstrous institutions such as the state, Nietzsche resembles Marx. Both men were, after all, fascinated by Feuerbach's critique of Christianity. But Nietzsche realises, perhaps more clearly than Marx himself, that if religion is the 'spirit of a world without spirit', then the dispossessed and the dispirited will not abandon it unless the world were to change for the better. Perhaps not even then. Doesn't he argue at length that the feeble race of 'last men' cannot do without religious, metaphysical and institutional crutches; in other words, sustained doses of asceticism which may falsify reality and help them to survive. The sado-masochistic 'little men', who have become accustomed to insecurity, spiritual impoverishment, sexual repression and mystification are not expected to 'cope' without narcotics, nation-states and great leaders, even after their obedience to the old-fashioned churches and ideologies has waned. With his characteristic brutality, Nietzsche declares that the
'herd' cannot possibly cherish the freedom made possible by the death of God. This event, which is a source of joy for the nobler, 'free spirits' strikes terror in the 'herd', prompting its members to search for even more desperate ways of fleeing their freedom and splendid uncertainty: more deadening and _fundamental_ tyrannies, more refined opiates, more enthralling spectacles, more stupefying feats of consumption:

... the slave wants the unconditional, he understands in the domain of morality too only the tyrannical, he loves as he hates, without nuance, into the depth of him, to the point of pain, to the point of sickness - the great hidden suffering he feels is enraged at the noble taste which seems to _deny_ suffering. (Nietzsche, 1990, pp.75-76)

In a comment that is not meant to be ironic, Nietzsche indicates that the influence of religion on the worker bees of civilisation has not been without certain benefits; something that should not cease to provoke thinking now that culture industries and spectator sports have established their hold on popular consciousness and several waves of democratisation have supposedly banished radical inequality from the modern world. Nietzsche’s point is that for those who lack the capacity to command themselves, religion can be a source of ‘education’ and uplift by imposing a certain amount of discipline over their desires, fears and resentments (Nietzsche, 1990, p.87). It may be recalled that the notion of ‘self-mastery’ is central to Nietzsche’s mature, affirmative account of subject formation.

Among other things, the foregoing discussion has aimed to demonstrate the limitations of mere formalistic repudiation of religion and metaphysics. The manner in which ideas and value-systems articulate with different and changing contexts is necessarily complex and requires careful analysis of the cultural and discursive as well as material dimensions although ‘discursive’ and ‘material’ need not be antagonistic categories. It is clear that Nietzsche’s work poses intriguing challenges to critical theory as well as to ‘critical’ and ‘affirmative’ Nietzscheans who purport to set up anti-Marxist and anti-modernist positions on the basis of certain Nietzschean insights.
To be more precise, if, as Nietzsche believes, the need for illusions is not likely to disappear in the foreseeable future, then the central propositions of the critical enterprise will have to be re-examined. Could one argue that some illusions are more acceptable than others and if so, who will be the judge and use what criteria to distinguish one type of illusion from the other? And, if the truth-content of symbolic elaborations including 'illusions' is less important than whether or not they enhance the life-feeling and morale of certain oppressed or marginal groups, should the sceptical protocols of ideology critique be revised? If, as Nietzsche argues, the 'will to truth' is itself the most pernicious mutation of Christian asceticism and is at bottom a life-denying force, should critical theory not try to grapple with that problem? And if so, what tools can it use other than those derived from the very same will to truth? Is critical theory a nihilistic enterprise as well, betrothed to life-denying impulses and ultimately 'ideological' from the Nietzschean viewpoint?

As Geoffrey Galt Harpham has argued, battle with asceticism has been a defining trait of the theoretical enterprise in the West. Thinker after thinker has sought to resist asceticism; however, power of asceticism has been invariably affirmed in the very attempt to resist it. The notion of révèrè which underpins theoretical endeavour in the post-metaphysical era suggests not only that asceticism is alive and well but that the very imperative to resist - pleasure, doxa, authority, closures, reconciliation, spell of words, images, positivity - and resistance to this resistance, is what makes critical theory possible (Harpham, 1987, pp. 268-69). Even Nietzsche, the arch-enemy of asceticism, was so overwhelmed by its demonic re-emergence at unexpected places and times that on a closer reading, his subtle campaign against asceticism appears to disintegrate in such obvious contradictions that one begins to doubt whether any thing at all has been achieved. All concepts that he deploys against the uncanny monster are gradually worn down and rendered incoherent, to be replaced by others: Dionysian affirmation, joyful wisdom, perspectivism, strength, discipline, will to power, finally eternal recurrence.
Although Nietzsche tries in *Genealogy* to imagine the nonascetic, he can only replicate it. This might cause dismay among those who have sought a guiding spirit in the attempt to place language and particularly textuality outside metaphysics and the "ascetic ideal." But Nietzsche, master and slave of his own critique, will not guide. (Harpham, 1987, p. 219).

And, 'Saint Foucault', who is infatuated with Nietzsche but who is also a 'disciple' of Kant the enlightener is no exception despite the libertarian halo in which his epigones have been trying to envelop him. Thus, the man who sought to liberate body from its imprisonment in soul is seen to promote 'ascetic practices precisely as means of securing a complex species of pleasure':

Nietzsche resisted the consolations of ideality, and Foucault the control and normalization of the subject; but as resistances, both gestures were implicated in a larger ascesis, at which they both eventually arrived. They arrived not despite their resistances but through them, as a reward for their own rigor. (Harpham, 1987, p. 235)

**Critical Theory at the Cross Roads: Between Affirmation and Negation?**

Even the most vigilant of critical theorists, namely Theodor Adorno, was not convinced that aporetic character of theory could be overcome without major transformations occurring in the world. As his exchanges with Walter Benjamin indicate, he subscribed to a notion of ideology as 'objective illusion' or spell which the commodified society casts on subjective consciousness. It is the 'bewitched totality', he argues, that holds individuals in its thrall even as it allows them occasional glimpses into the real sources of domination. Thus, theory cannot help being tainted by a 'life that does not live' if it is not to withdraw into idealistic or quietistic postures or surrender its critical edge to the positivistic acceptance of the established order. The intellectual who is committed to change must drink from the poisoned well and risk petrification, madness and even death. The relentlessness with which Adorno uncovers every trace of mortification in the 'vulgar bustle' that constitutes the facade of
'totally administered societies' should make it plain that his enterprise cannot avoid being ascetic, placing the theorist in a state of embattled exile from society. While the Nietzschean 'free spirits' can savour their exalted insights in Alpine tranquility while leaving the unwise and the down trodden to their own devices, Adorno does not permit that luxury to himself. Despite his quasi-Weberian, 'patrician' reserve, Adorno's 'melancholy science' is of a kind that hopes to awaken life to a vision of justice and fulfillment (not fulfillment without justice) rather than become a hand maiden to some Epicurian clique of geniuses. After all, he is adamant that no one, including the 'free-spirits' could escape the poisoned atmosphere of the dominated totality, although some individuals could somehow penetrate some of the illusions sometimes. Whether his adherence to this position after the crisis of Marxist epistemology pushes him closer to the Nietzschean idea of a spiritual aristocracy is something that cannot be resolved here. What it does indicate is that Adorno continues to see gaps and flaws in the system of domination even as he recognises its power to oppress and mystify. Perhaps that explains why he does not abandon critical, emancipatory stance in the face of reverses and why he refuses to join the chorus of irrationalists, hedonists, pragmatists, proceduralists and technophiles who increasingly attribute the crises of utopian movements to excessively ascetic, abstract and unworldly thinking upon which they were based. Nothing illustrates his desperate utopianism better than the following words from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

It is not the portrayal of reality as hell on earth but the slick challenge to break out of it that is suspect. If there is anyone today to whom we can pass the responsibility for the message, we bequeath it not to the 'masses,' and not to the individual (who is powerless), but to an imaginary witness—lest it perish with us. (p.256)

Adorno's later work has been a source of continual fascination and debate for those who are engaged in re-constructing critical theory in the face of monumental challenges represented by 'late' capitalism, globalisation, cultural conflicts, identity crises and the ascendancy of neo-liberal positions. Many regard his stance of
relentless negativity in the context of debilitating homogenisation of living conditions
and thought in the Western societies as a model of intellectual integrity and critical
rigour, especially when transcendental guarantees of knowledge, meaning and ethics
have become suspect. Others construe his negativity as a species of political
impotence. As one exasperated critic puts it:

Though constantly critical of power, Adorno’s negative dialectics
nonetheless raises the question of its own political irrelevance; for it does
not and cannot find a social agenda, espouse a righteous cause, or imply a
political program. Since it rejects as fundamentally totalitarian any positive
analysis of historical conditions that describes what is in terms of what
should be, negative dialectics logically excludes any analysis of what can
or must be done beyond critique. It criticises any and all forms of policy
in advance as primarily police work and excludes the possibility of any
policy emerging out of the knowledge it produces. (McHugh, 1993, pp. 139-40)

In his attempt to defend what many critics regard as untenable contradictions in
Adorno’s outlook, Lambert Zwidervaart has argued that Adorno’s approach is easy to
misunderstand because he was trying to come to grips with an extremely complicated
situation and was forced to adopt paradoxical forms of expression. One must not
forget that he had to live with the memory of Fascism on the one hand and confront the
decay of ‘really existing Socialism’ into Stalinism on the other. And, he was too clear
sighted to retreat like older Heidegger into the pristine mist of mythology or to endorse
with bad conscience the technocratic banality of post-war consumerism. No wonder
that Adorno’s ‘philosophy of history oscillates between reification and reconciliation in
order to undermine reification without supporting a premature reconciliation’
(Zwidervaart, 1991, p. 42). The complexity of the Frankfurt school’s critical theory can
be gauged from the fact that it has been able to avoid economic determinism and
‘political voluntarism’ without lapsing into ‘reactionary culturism’

Entwinement of negation and affirmation: the future of cultural theory?
In an intriguing discussion of Adorno’s and Heidegger’s relevance for cultural theory, Patrick McHugh has examined the status of illusion in Adorno’s work. He argues that the exemplary vigilance of Adorno’s work is premised on the expectation that illusions will never be entirely overcome. In other words, *Negative Dialectics* feeds on illusions just as the Enlightenment feeds on images of barbaric and exotic others. For Adorno, Heideggerian ontology turns out to be the prized foil:

Adorno re-establishes the authority of a dialectical context through a critique of the ontology that demonstrates its foundation in illusion. But he does not cognise the fact that neither the ontological need nor indeed illusion disappear as a result, as if it were simply a matter of superstitions collapsing in the face of scientific truth. Moreover, the persistence of the ontological need in the face of the knowledge that it is a need for illusion is a phenomenon negative dialectics presupposes but does not analyse, since it would constitute an ontological analysis, the analysis of its own hidden ontology. Adorno asserts that in his own thought the need for illusion operates only negatively, safely confined within a dialectical context. In fact, the melancholy science presupposes a positive ontological status for illusions as the data for its dialectical operations. Negative dialectics presupposes an ontology in which illusions arise out of the subject’s ontological need, for the denunciation of illusion is impossible without illusion. Elevating this denunciation to the status of the only real knowledge not only implies that illusions are real but seems to ensure that they will not disappear. According to negative dialectics, illusion is not only a logical necessity but a fundamental force in the constitution of reality. (McHugh, 1993, pp.141-42)

It is alleged that Adorno fails to engage with the specific conditions and discursive frame works in which illusions originate or examine the manner in which they articulate with different aspects of the social context. That he is accustomed to denounce illusions more or less indiscriminately. In a social situation where possibilities of qualitative change have been systematically eradicated, even the mechanisms of enlightenment and emancipation risk becoming transformed into their opposite, that is, into instruments of domination and mystification. In what may appear to be a perverse development, the anti-feudal struggle of the ascendant bourgeoisie culminated in a system of rational domination which recognises no limits, spares no truths and has on occasions threatened to degenerate into frenzy of pure destruction. Likewise, that monumental eruption of the oppressed, namely Russian revolution, which had promised nothing less than the liberation of all humanity from
the tyranny of capitalism, ended up producing monumental absurdities and imploded with an enigmatic whimper, as though it was an exhausted illusion after all!

At least for sometime, theory would do well to cultivate modesty and dwell upon the horrific events associated with the Promethian-Platonist ambitions of determining the form of reality on the basis of 'true' knowledge. Rather than pretending to know and represent the nature of things and beings, it may want to curb its prescriptive impulse and subsist in negative, critical modes. Indeed, theory cannot pretend to be free from the impulse to survive and to dominate; an impulse which saturates the history of civilisation but undergoes an intriguing metamorphosis in the course of modernity. With domination becoming generalised and rational, not to say refined, and subjective propensities being made to harmonise with objective constraints despite panicked and sentimental campaigns on the part of some disenchanted intellectuals to locate 'agency' in the nooks and crannies of thoroughly rationalised zones, theory must become hyper-reflexive to undermine its own conceits and temptations. One can say with a degree of confidence that Adorno's thought has travelled farthest in this direction without forgetting the world altogether.

' Avoid sentimental flight from things, into their supposedly dark and uncharted interior or a beyond' is what Adorno seems to be suggesting to critical intellectuals. No longer animated by utopian faith nor enlightened by a superior epistemology, critical theory must invent ways of recognising gaps and fractures in the smooth facade of total systems so that it can salvage traces of suffering which are dissolved in perfumes and narcotics. But, it must also register the desire to live, which somehow persists, in whatever twisted forms it can muster. To be sure, theory cannot afford to dissociate itself from the well-springs of being lest it become a deranged and contorted monument of impotent protest which can inform but not inspire. It is debatable, however, whether theory in the repentant mode will take that risk. Nevertheless, theory's own twists and turns, rhetorical smoke-screens, excesses, fractures, hesitations and
'strategic withdrawals' are meant to be redeemed by life even if by a life that fails to blossom into a Dionysian feast.

Adorno, for his part remains acutely suspicious of ecstatic formulations and graven images, as though it were his intention to adhere to the secularised form of the Jewish prohibition against pronouncing the name of God. In the absence of concrete alternatives, the present will be judged in the name of the absent utopia whose name is not to be mentioned. There is a readily intelligible rationale for this seemingly esoteric injunction: If positive formulations tend to become either dangerous myths or tasty morsels in the ubiquitous jaws of the 'consciousness industry' or if they become instances of 'artificial negativity' which end up sharpening the normalising vigilance of the dominant system, then, theory's negative, self-conscious posture becomes understandable. In an obliquely dialectical way, this strategy may still be aiming to produce concrete, political effects in a world where neither opposition nor withdrawal is guaranteed to produce the intended results. Perhaps realising that his project involves dangerous flirtation with opposites which necessitates flawless dialectical maneuvers, Adorno concedes in the introduction to the Negative Dialectics that his theory is exposed to all the dangers confronting intellectual endeavour in the context of late capitalism:

No theory today escapes the market place. Each one is offered as a possibility among competing opinions; all are put up for choice; all are swallowed. There are no blinders for thought to don against this, and the self-righteous conviction that my own theory is spared that fate will surely deteriorate into self-advertising. (Adorno, 1990, p.4)

But, as he goes on to add, 'neither need dialectic be muted by such rebuke, or by the concomitant charge of its superfluity.' (p.4) There is something in the subject, and the world, that wants it to go on, against all odds. Elsewhere, Adorno makes it clear that negative dialectics is not an ontology in the spirit of Heidegger's Being and Time, and if it is to be called an ontology, then, let it be called a negative ontology or 'ontology of
the wrong state of things.' (Adorno, 1990, p. 11) It is this 'wrong state' or delusory reality that inflicts unreality on living-beings so that dreams, hopes and even despair, along with critical thinking, are metamorphosed into illusions. Death itself, the transcendental horizon of the secular age and Existentialism's magnificently subversive trope, becomes unreal, loses its disruptive power, dies, so to speak, and is duly canalised into the spectacular fantasy which promises total pleasure to everyone, every second. As Adorno points out, death has been disenchanted in the world wars and death camps, with its mass production, so to speak, by rational, technological means. Finally, it signifies that 'nothing' which Macbeth had experienced in a moment of unadulterated despair, long before 'despair' was solemnised as a concept by academic philosophy.

Like many others, Patrick McHugh is of the opinion that Adorno's ceaseless unmasking of every illusion including the illusion that thought can ever be fully disenchanted imprisons him in the stand point of futile, tortured exile (McHugh, 1993, p. 141). He concludes that Adorno's 'impotent' thought cannot be used for constructive ends because even the outraged critique of illusions fails to engage with their contents, remaining abstract and formal, a species of contemplative thinking:

For Adorno... freedom can exist only in the negative dialectics of an enlightenment of the Enlightenment, in the knowledge that such enlightenment produces. Such knowledge, however, is purely negative, a knowledge of the mythic and repressive aspects of the Enlightenment rather than a knowledge of a nonmythic truth which could lead to non-repressive or less repressive society (McHugh, 1993, p. 140)

Contrasting Adorno's ontological evasions with Heidegger's ecstatic affirmations, McHugh suggests that both positions deserve serious attention despite the general impression of their mutual antagonism:

While both thinkers ground thought in its alienation, their contemplations of the significance of this alienation are likewise polarised. Heidegger ponders the possibilities and mysterious effects of what Adorno conceives in rigorously negative terms: a transcendent resting place for thought, its origin and telos, its home. Heidegger's thought is like a crusade toward
that homeland, while Adorno’s thought remains in the melancholic truth of exile. (McHugh, 1993, p. 123)

If cultural theory must learn from Adorno’s rigour, it cannot afford to be content with formal denunciation of illusions. Nor can Heidegger’s ecstatic ontology and dramatic political choices be dismissed as delusions or other-worldly phenomena. Moreover, this contrast highlights gaps in the Frankfurt School’s analysis of cultural forms and underscores its predominantly European outlook. A dramatic example would be the older generation’s neglect of nationalism possibly because nationalism was seen to be rooted in the same delusive compulsions as fascism. Even Habermas, who is determined to salvage the promise of critical theory from dialectical extremism and self-consuming negativity of Adorno has little to say about nationalism and developments beyond Europe’s borders. In fact, one cannot help wondering if the coherence of his sociological model has been purchased with a certain detachment from the chaos of the world; a luxury Adorno would never permit himself. Indeed, even the most esoteric of the latter’s pronouncements attempt to preserve a combative stance towards a world from which even simple pleasures have to be snatched as victories. That academicism figures almost as high on Adorno’s list of vices as the intellectualist lust for ‘praxis’ is hardly a mystery to those who are familiar with his quarrels with Popper, Heidegger and Lukács.

Recently, a number of scholars have sought to reconcile Adorno and Heidegger despite Adorno’s well known polemic against Heidegger and the latter’s enigmatic disregard of Adorno’s criticism. It may be pointed out that both undertook radical critiques of Western philosophy and were considerably troubled by the outbreak of pathological rationality in modernity. Both sought to connect their analyses of the Western tradition with concrete political programmes, both became disillusioned with

---

7To dismiss Heidegger’s thought as irrelevant for critical theory would not be helpful. As Timothy Mitchell’s brilliant work on Egypt’s colonisation illustrates, the capacity of the Heideggerian approach to illuminate modernity’s pathologies and inspire creative work across disciplinary boundaries cannot be ignored by critical or postcolonial theory. See Timothy Mitchell, Colonising Egypt, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
ambitious political projects towards the end of their dramatic careers, being more inclined to seek personal fulfillment in the aesthetic sphere, whose importance, however, they were wont to exaggerate. The following remarks by Fred Dallmayr provide a clear illustration of the reconciliatory trend:

By casting doubt on the foundational role of consciousness and by exposing the ambience of reason, Adorno was progressively catapulted beyond the confines of the Cartesian tradition; leaving behind the domain of 'subjectivity'... his thinking was bound to come into direct contact with Heidegger's arguments. (Dallmayr, 1987, p. 40)

Paradoxical disseminations

Fred Dallmayr claims that once Adorno's attack on Heidegger is understood to be the result of his misconception of the latter's notion of ontology, their positions become 'readily compatible and even complementary' (Dallmayr, 1987, p. 6). McHugh has suggested that although there may be similarities between their approaches, the urge towards hasty reconciliation should be curbed as indeed the urge to establish them as arch-enemies. He notes that the fault line between ontological and anti-foundational approaches is something that runs right through the maze of contemporary cultural-theoretical field although these positions compete, entwine and even metamorphose in unexpected ways. For instance, although Frederic Jameson situates his work in the neo-Marxist problematic delineated by the early generation of critical theorists, especially Adorno, yet his critique of post modernism's excessive negativity and nihilistic anti-founationalism often reverts to Marxist ontology and utopian faith more in line with the work of early Heidegger more than that of Adorno. Paradoxically, it is the post modernists who practice something like Adorno's uncompromising critique of ontological pretensions and system-building temptations. However, Jameson's Lacanian formulation of 'political unconscious' as the inexhaustible yet decipherable source of illusions is closer to Adorno's position than to Heidegger's affirmative one. Like Adorno, Jameson tends to interpret illusions in functional terms as something
which is necessary for the reproduction of capitalist domination and which radical critique must tirelessly expose as deceptive.

Gabriele Schwab has argued that in Jameson’s ambitious program of articulating the psychological with the political, the former is subordinated to the latter so that texts are seen to embody unconscious ‘political’ fantasies (Schwab, 1993, p.90). Schwab characterises this move as an inversion of psychoanalysis which restores the primacy of the conventional Marxist politics to the detriment of other forms based on concerns for gender and sexuality (Schwab, 1993, p.91). Instead of perpetuating the logic of ‘substitution’, the challenge would be to develop:

...a system of interpreting sexual symbolism in relation to the social and the political that is connective and interactive instead of substitutive. Such a system would have to conceive of the dynamic between desire and ideology in terms different from Jameson’s. Ideology would then comprise not only conscious belief systems and collectively shared tacit knowledge but also unconscious ideologies based upon the repression of desires that fall under a cultural taboo. In case such unconscious ideologies are expressed as ‘political fantasies’, an analysis of the political unconscious must investigate the modes of textual operation that transform the unconscious into a literary translation of a political fantasy. (Schwab, 1993, p.98)

It is suggested that Jameson does not engage sufficiently with the specific ways in which illusions are enunciated, grounding them in the commodified structures of late capitalism rather mechanistically. Even as this brief discussion indicates, cultural theory need not deploy ontological and anti-foundational positions in abstract confrontation or reject one or the other aprioristically, rather it must think through their tense interrelation to illuminate the socio-historical contexts in which concrete articulations materialise. It would be hard to disagree with Patrick McHugh when he concludes his inquiry into this complex problem:

\footnote{See Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989. He argues that we are currently in a transitional nonsynchronous social situation in which we live in many worlds at once, and thus need a multiplicity of viewpoints to make sense out of various domains of our social experience. In these circumstances, 'No one theoretical perspective will always be illuminating, and no one political strategy can always work to solve the problems we face.' PP. 141 142.}
If not exactly a dialogue, whatever one calls this movement between the ecstasy of Heidegger's flirtation with fascism and the melancholy of Adorno's political exile, recapitulated in recent debates as the movement between the blind, euphoric post modern affirmation of difference and Jameson's sobering, disquieting reassertion of a dialectical whole, cultural critics cannot hope for some objective rule that regulates this movement like a thermostat that reversed direction when the risks get too hot. Rather, cultural critics would do better to understand the historical context of the conflicting impulses and imperatives that delimit their effort to change the world. (McHugh, 1993, pp. 148-49)

One could perhaps add that ultimately, both Adorno and Heidegger strive to envision a way of thinking that is not weighed down by the impulse to dominate and survive. However, they follow different routes and, as many observers have noted, possibly despair in the face of worldly obstacles.

Thinking of the world

It is possible to argue, following Edward Said, that interpretive practice is appropriately conceived as a movement from texts to the world; a careful yet insistent opening up of texts towards the world. As Said has pointed out, to overlook the traces of worldly conflicts in texts and to remove them to some hermetically sealed realm could actually vitiate the richness of texts. That said, it is not easy to engage with the worldliness of texts and to sustain the awareness that the world within the texts is ineluctably connected to the world outside. All too often, one yields to orthodoxies. They are indeed powerful, even pleasurable and profitable compulsions whether or not one is prepared to recognise them. Said has observed that critiques of hegemonic culture and established systems of domination run the risk of becoming systematic, dogmatic affairs themselves:

...the contemporary critical consciousness stands between the temptations represented by the formidable and related powers engaging critical attention. One is the culture to which critics are bound filiatively (by birth, nationality, profession) the other is a method or system acquired affiliatively, by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation. (Said, 1991, pp. 24-25)
His ideal of interpretive practice is 'secular criticism'. This approach to criticism avoids reified and dogmatic 'perspectives', whether culturist, vulgar materialist or deconstructive:

For the critic, the challenge of this secular world is that it is not reducible to an explanatory or originating theory, much less to a collection of cultural generalities. There are instead a small number of perhaps unexpected characteristics of worldliness that play a role in making sense of textual experience, among them filiation and affiliation, the body and the senses of sight and hearing, repetition, and the sheer heterogeneity of detail. (Said, 1991, p.27)

It is with obvious disappointment that Said reflects on the developments in 'radical' theory, his prime concern being theory's progressive dis-engagement from the world and the alacrity with which theorists scramble for familiar positions when confronted by unsettling realities-cultural and political. He notes that Marxist criticism in America is primarily an academic enterprise, which, in the absence of 'progressive' social forces is content to re-cycle sterile methodological edicts and perpetuate defensive affiliations. One observes splendid efflorescence of 'radical' rhetoric in what are supposed to be leftist critical journals but political implications of this criticism remain unclear, remarkably 'indecidable' (Said, 1991, p.192). Technical brilliance of some individuals notwithstanding, leftist criticism has on the whole acquiesced to its alienation from the sites of political contestation (Said, 1991, pp.172-73). Unfortunately, dogmatic or craven sublimation of power relations and worldly conflicts can degenerate into an academic sport with its distinct set of rules, prime fixtures, cheer-leaders and fan-clubs, not to mention bumper-stickers.

Said's devastating indictment of 'radical' critics is not meant to naturalise the status quo or strengthen conservative agendas. His quarrel is not with the need for radical stances and analytical rigour, but with those intellectuals whose intransigent stance towards the world has shrunk into self referential, tragico-comic posture of textual radicalism. Through sheer clumsiness and complacency, they have not only undermined the rigour and vibrancy of critical practice but, in the process, they may
have surrendered the public arena to conservative forces. If the overall situation of criticism, especially in America, has become so depressing, then the very notion of academic excellence or neutral scholarship should be re-examined lest it become a shelter for those who are disenchanted with both culturist and systemic positions. As it is, 'academicism' should not be viewed in isolation from the configuration of broader social-political forces. It should not be viewed as some third, middle of the road, benign or enlightened alternative to culturist and systemic positions.

Despite the prevailing meta-theoretical taboos regarding totalisation, there may still be some merit in regarding the totality of the Western societies in terms of hegemonic cultural-political patterns and asking how these are maintained in relation to a demonised or exoticised outside. This may allow one to view rational, modernist positions as well as the supposedly irrational, post modernist ones as two phases of the West's global mastery which is re-produced through intricate cultural strategies and myriad networks of power which may not be entirely accessible to formalistic and rigorously empirical approaches. Thus, viewed in the broader context of inter-cultural relations of power, critical academicism and its valorisation of textual strategies may have little to do with either demotic radicalism or benign neutrality, which are often claimed on its behalf.

As it is now practiced and as I treat it, criticism is an academic thing, located for the most part faraway from the questions that trouble the reader of a daily newspaper. Up to a certain point this is as it should be. But we have reached the stage at which specialisation and professionalisation, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature - the most focused and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture - into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals and critics have in fact built. Instead, contemporary criticism is an institution for publicly affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant cultural elite, and for privately setting loose the unrestrained interpretation of a universe defined in advance as the endless misreading of a misrepresentation. The result has been the regulated, not to say calculated, irrelevance of criticism, except as an adornment to what the power of modern industrial society transact. (Said, 1991, p. 26)
How is the critic, then, to preserve his critical sense? When even radical disavowals of the ideology of humanism and sophisticated deployment of advanced methodologies can become tautologous and forgetful of concrete situations. Thinking of 'innovative' methodologies, Said fears that:

...as their practitioners lose touch with the resistance and heterogeneity of civil society, they risk becoming wall-to-wall discourses, blithely predetermining what they discuss, heedlessly converting everything into evidence for the efficacy of the method, carelessly ignoring the circumstances out of which all theory, system and method ultimately arise. (Said, 1991, p. 26)

Exasperated by the stubborn particularism of culturalist positions as well as by the tendency of systematic perspectives to liquidate critical distinctions which are indispensable for political judgement, Said has in his Reith Lectures celebrated Adorno’s relentless negativity and tortured exile from homelands and alliances as a model for intellectual activity. Contrary to those who dismiss Adorno’s approach as ‘impotent’ and esoteric, Said rightly insists that the notion of ‘engagement’ should not encourage the intellectual to surrender his critical stance in the name of a ‘cause’ no matter how sacred. The notion of engaged intellectual entails a responsibility which is not the same as that which pertains to a party functionary or manual labourer. Said, like Adorno, highlights the irreducible difference between theory and praxis. As the history of Marxism shows rather depressingly, the submission of theory to praxis or the construal of theoretical practice as an exalted form of praxis, is liable to generate theoretical monstrosities and ‘real’ disasters. This is not to say, of course, that intellectual activity is not worldly. Following Gramsci, he insists that intellectual activity in the best sense is worldly and political and, it takes place in the public sphere. However, it does not comprise passive surrender to the world nor blind imitation of its immediacy and chaos. For Said and Adorno, any intellectual activity worth its name is an engagement with the world in a critical mode which presupposes ‘critical’ distance between the intellectual and the world. It could even be argued that it is the critical
attitude which makes intellectual activity genuinely worldly, for mere imitation of the
world would amount to quasi-religious absorption by it. In other words, it would be
idolatry. And, unconscious idolatry in a secular world has, more often than not,
produced outcomes that the world would rather forget if it could.

Said’s reflections on worldliness, civil society and publicness; his insistence
that the space of public discourse and ideological contestation is irreducibly political,
and his concern that this arena is disappearing as a consequence of statist and
commercial imperatives, has definitive resonances with the work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt’s thought, notwithstanding its limitations, is seen by some to contain resources
which may be drawn upon to rejuvenate political reflection in the aftermath of socialist
reverses. While it shares some elements of the Frankfurt School’s diagnosis of
modernity, in other ways it complements the former’s somewhat reductionist account
of the political. In fact, one of the the attractions of Edward Said’s work is that it
combines Adorno’s analysis of totalitarian developments in modernity which threaten
to liquidate the relative autonomy of the cultural sphere and drive public intellectuals
into de-politicised zones—academia, government, commercial service or outright
silence of a privatized existence—with an insistence that rejuvenation of public arena is

---

It has been pointed out that Jurgen Habermas’ pioneering work on ‘public sphere’ was in part inspired
by Hannah Arendt’s reflections. The interest in the notion of civil society increased dramatically in the
wake of events in the Eastern Europe. In the eyes of many observers, the movement against the
Communist regimes originated in the interstices of the totalitarian political systems which had
liquidated all traces of dissent from the ‘mainstream’ political arenas. The gerns of freedom, resistance
and solidarity were seen to have the potential to generate a democratic civil society in the aftermath of
Communism. Interestingly, after the collapse of Communism there, the ‘anti political’ valorisation of
civil society was to become increasingly articulated with the neo liberal celebration of market ‘freedom’
and crass individualism. See Zbignie Rau, ‘Some Thoughts on Civil society in Eastern Europe and
the Lockean Contractarian Approach’, Political Studies Vol. 35, 1991; Ana Maria Sandi, ‘Restoring
1992. For theoretical elaboration of the notion of civil society, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato,
Civil Society and Political Theory Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1992; Andrew Arato, ‘Revolution,
Civil Society and Democracy’, Telos no. 50, Winter 1981 82; John Keane, Democracy and Civil
London, Verso, 1988; Norberto Bobbio, Which Socialism?, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota
1991; Sheldon Wolin, ‘Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism’, Social Research Vol. 57,
no. 1, Spring 1990.
necessary if catastrophic developments are to be avoided—themes dear to Gramsci and Arendt. This tension, between a recognition of capitalism's 'objective' compulsions and faith in the creative force of action (even if pertains to fragile, imperilled subjects) as it occurs in the 'public arena' or the 'sphere of catharsis' is what drives a thinking that might point a way out of the present impasse. The disappearance of this tension in the more exuberant varieties of postmodern and post-metaphysical thinking may be a liability rather than an asset.

Arendt, like Adorno, reflects upon the modern catastrophes—world wars, failed revolutions, mass slaughter of Jews and gypsies in the heart of 'civilization', technological enslavement of all, imperialism—and wonders what meaning they have for the 'survivors'. As in Adorno, the crisis of subjectivity and the problem of devastated tradition loom large in her thought. As mentioned above, where she differs from Adorno is in her conception of the political as a distinct sphere whose absorption in the social, whether in the post-communist mode envisaged by Lenin or in the fascist abolition of the political institutions, is something to be dreaded. In her thinking, the political, being the realm of freedom is carefully delimited from the social which is the realm of necessity; of 'domestic' management and 'vulgar' calculation of economic interests (Arendt, 1958, p.12). The political represents the inter-subjective dimension proper; the arena of inspired oratory where political identities are forged and the meaning of communal existence created. In Arendtian framework, the political proper enshrines the capacity for action, for 'initiation', for making new. The most debilitating aspect of tyrannies is the closure of the political spaces which reduces citizens to private individuals who become 'rational' and passive overtime. Totalitarianism, a modern phenomenon, goes a step further in that it seeks control of the private sphere as well.

Drawing upon Nietzsche and Heidegger, Arendt traces the erosion of the political to the mutation in Greek thinking whereby 'making' is exalted over 'doing'
and 'action'. The emphasis on contemplation and 'making' reigns supreme in modernity, with 'Man' being defined as *Cogito* and *homo faber*. However, modernity does not signify the triumph of human will as the capacity for free, creative action; rather, it enthrones technocratic-instrumental interpretation of the world. Even modern revolutions which start as great eruptions of freedom degenerate into drab affairs of bureaucratic planning and management, diluting the political through its indiscriminate expansion. Eventually, the realm of freedom is overwhelmed by that of necessity as the imperative to fulfill the basic needs of 'many' spawns administrative Leviathans which repudiate the very notion of freedom as an ideology. Associated with these developments is the rise of systematic, holistic explanations which reduce the specificity and autonomy of the political to sociological 'factors'. This immanentist, 'substantialist', rational perspective, by absolutising the social and disregarding the ambiguities, tensions and gaps that constitute the political and are a source of its renewal, has contributed to the emasculation of political imagination in modernity.\(^{10}\)

Arendt traces the genesis of totalitarianism to the crisis of values exploding into nihilism following the decay of tradition in the West. However, it would be naive to assume that a straightforward 'return' to tradition is a possibility in the wake of upheavals associated with modernity. In a certain sense, then, the break with tradition is definitive. However, an insecure, passive, privatized subject, disengaged from the world and lacking resources for creative action, continues to hanker after transcendental guarantees from the past, thus, perpetuating its bondage to rational,

\(^{10}\)An analogous concern with limits and moderation which nonetheless eschews conservatism and ethical compromises, is evident in the work of Albert Camus, particularly *The Rebel*. Somewhat like Arendt, Camus notes that successful revolutions tend to develop an absolutist logic which aims to remake everything including human nature, eventually betraying the rebellious impulse in which they originate. ‘Man is nothing, according to the revolution, if he does not obtain from history, willingly or unwillingly, unanimous approval. At this exact point, the limit is exceeded, rebellion is first betrayed and then logically assassinated for it has never affirmed in its purest form anything but the existence of a limit and the divided existence that we represent: it is not originally the total negation of all existence.’ PP. 219 220. In other words, neither History is to be absolutised (Marx) nor Nature (Nietzsche). For an illuminating comparison of Arendt and Camus, see Jeffery Isaac, *Arendt. Camus. and Modern Rebellion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992.
moribund forms and aggravating the crisis of modernity. The crisis is aggravated because nostalgic and compulsively futuristic attitudes are ultimately escapist and cannot possibly offer creative solutions to contemporary problems. Like Adorno (and unlike postmodernists), she does not believe that the lure of tradition, especially one that has decayed, could be overcome by denial or that it disappears automatically. The 'subterranean' presence of a tradition becomes all the more significant with its conscious and programmatic denial on the part of subjects. And, moribund forms keep turning up in different guises that could be mistaken for the 'new' if their noncontemporaneity and deadness were not recognised. Indeed, it is the extent to which the exhaustion of a tradition remains 'unthought' that it persists as a myth (a sterile myth), undermining genuine thinking, judgement and action. And, it is because the 'unthought' has become established as the invisible ground of modern (non) thinking that this thinking finds it so difficult to confront the old and create the new. Thus, Arendt proposes a deconstructive engagement with the Western tradition to clarify the manner in which the autonomy and distinctiveness of the political has been occluded by sociological determinism (immanentist holism) in modernity.

There are a number of factors which account for critical theory's neglect of Arendt's thought. There is first of all the fact of her close association with Heidegger, even though her appropriation of Heidegger's thought is far from uncritical.¹¹ Then, there is a sense in which her reflections on the autonomy of the political and her celebration of action ignore the normative dimension, giving rise to the suspicions that her position has some similarities with Carl Schmitt's 'Concept of the Political' and with his infamous decisionism. While it would be imprudent to disregard these objections, with her unremitting stress on the intersubjective dimension and 'publicness' she is able to question the atavistic strand of Carl Schmitt's work in which

¹¹ For a thoughtful account of Arendt's political theory which clarifies her relation to Heidegger, see Dana Villa, Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.
the distinction between 'friend' and 'enemy' is absolutised and is declared to be the foundation of the political proper. Furthermore, while Schmitt's account valorises statism and order and it could lend support to Hitler's Reich, the anarchistic, Luxemburgian elements in Arendt militate against such appropriations. That her account lacks a proper understanding of the contemporary political processes and changing forms of capitalism and is somewhat nostalgic, may be a more serious objection.  

Nevertheless, at a time when political discourse is threatened with irrelevance by a neutralising, functionalist grand narrative announcing the end of all conflict, it would be necessary to stress that the question of freedom cannot be reduced to social engineering and economic management, and that it is irreducibly political. Indeed, her call for the rejuvenation of the political sphere is something which retains a broad salience in a global context dominated by neo-liberalism and technocratic 'governance'.

However, the political and cultural implications of projecting critical theory as a global emancipatory force are complex given that the Western culture, including its theoretical component, has enjoyed hegemonic status for such a long time. Thus, Western meditations on modernity may not have the same significance in non-Western locations even if one were to concede that engagement with Western forms is becoming unavoidable for non-Western people. For many of these people, the appeal

---

12 Barry Hindess, 'The Greeks Had a Word for It. The Polis as a Political Metaphor', Thesis Eleven no. 40, 1995, has underlined the ambiguity of the term 'political' as it has been used by various thinkers over the years, noting the problematic character of distinctions which are often made between 'the political' and 'politics' on the one hand and between 'the political' and 'non political' on the other. While recognising that such distinctions aim to delimit a sphere of 'freely chosen' association from the more mundane, administrative aspects (governance), he argues that it would be very difficult to think of a 'non political' sphere, strictly speaking. Such accounts slide towards nostalgia in their yearning for a 'pure' political realm in the midst of modernity's rationalised frameworks of governance. Furthermore, idealisation of Greek political forms could lead to other societies being dismissed as pre- or non political. PP. 120 124. The Greek metaphor of Polis he suggests, is at the root of much of confusion about what politics ought to be or ought not to be. This metaphor implies that there may be politics without politics. Hence, 'The utopian view of the benefits of politicization and the anti political desire to purge society of the corrupting influence of politics have their origin in the same underlying metaphor.' P. 130. Similarly, Michael Hardt (1995) has argued that the notion of civil society is of limited use in illuminating advanced capitalist societies which are marked by far reaching changes that have, in a certain sense, devoured the vitality of the civil society as traditionally conceived. The 'society of discipline', he claims, has given way to the 'society of control', so that even if one were to consider civil society politically desirable .... the social conditions necessary for civil society no longer exist.' PP. 38 39.
of modernity is inseparable from the threat of identity crises and the 'iron-cage' of economic management. Thus, their response to modernity and the West is fraught with contradictory emotions. The situation in the post colonial societies is further complicated by their experience of Western domination. These are some of the questions to be discussed in the next chapter.
POST - COLONIAL QUESTIONS : GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE AND METHOD
CHAPTER 6

POST-COLONIAL QUESTIONS: GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE AND METHOD

This chapter surveys the field of postcolonial studies, focusing on the debate about modernity's relationship to imperialism. Within such a characterisation the question of difference becomes paramount as postcolonial discourse seeks to rupture the tyranny of Eurocentric perspectives which have defined colonial subjectivity. The questions which are central to such a discussion involve not only the literary aspects of colonial domination but the very terms of colonial discourse, entwined as they are with the practices of colonial domination on the one hand and the precepts of the enlightenment on the other. Significantly, postcolonial approaches have highlighted the potential of resistance which has been marginalised within the totalising discourses arising out of the Enlightenment. The chapter considers the emancipatory potential of postcolonial theory and investigates its relationship to post-structuralism and post-modernism, highlighting the manner in which this relationship could be both enabling and disabling for the project of cultural de-colonisation.

Edward Said's ground breaking study of Orientalism's capacity to structure the West's understanding of others as ontologically distinct, lesser beings, has questioned the idea that accumulation of knowledge is a benign, value-free activity, especially in cross-cultural situations where there are massive disparities of power between the knower and the known. Humanities and social sciences which tend to view themselves as the benevolent disseminators of enlightenment and sublimity are therefore having to withstand the assault of audacious genealogists who attempt to uncover knowledge's subterranean links with the structures and processes of domination. One can debate the extent to which this tendency has provoked genuine
self - scrutiny in different disciplines, but it is safe to say that the questions raised in the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

To be sure, it is not just developments internal to the intellectual sphere which have prompted reconsideration of methodological and thematic orthodoxies in a range of disciplines. Other, more pressing imperatives emanating from the socio - political arenas have also been forcing the academic world to examine its complacency and pretense of detachment. For example, the intensity of anti - colonial movements, having unleashed the subversive potential of what were hitherto regarded as passive objects of observation and governance could not but problematise the veridical status of the imperial common sense. Moreover, the divide between the rich and the poor, powerful and powerless, 'civilised' and 'barbarian' has not disappeared despite the supposedly universal, democratising telos of capitalist development and European civilisation. This has prompted further scrutiny of the liberal and structural - functionalist approaches premised on evolutionism. Also, multifarious pathologies inherent in the rationally constructed and managed world are becoming increasingly transparent, with the spectre of nuclear holocaust giving way to that of ecological collapse. These factors, coupled with the world wide crisis of national form and modernist frameworks of political legitimation, have necessitated serious examination of modernity and the foundational precepts of social sciences.

Other factors include the memory of fascism and the suspicion that not only was Europe's liberal culture unable to prevent that monstrous development but that excesses of rationality and the denial of cultural identity may have actually contributed to it. Then, there is the mass slaughter of the world wars and the fact that the torch bearers of the rational civilization were the most efficient players in that arena. There is also the present crisis of socialism of course; an ideology which had
aimed to curtail the brutal and wasteful aspects of capitalism and preserve its rational
kernel. To the critics of the modernist project, failures of socialism in Russia and East
Europe constitute the definitive proof that the Enlightenment's dream of subjecting
nature and humanity to centralised, rational control is liable to generate pathologies
on a monumental scale. It is no surprise, then, that the quest for 'alternative'
frameworks is well and truly underway. Without denying the significance of the
larger developments as outlined, this chapter limits itself to clarifying some of the
cultural and theoretical implications of what may be termed the crisis of 'grand
narratives'.

The Postcolonial Space

Arguably the most productive and radical extension of Edward Said's research
programme has been occurring in the relatively young but resolutely oppositional
theoretical formation known as post-colonial studies. At once critical, polemical,
rigorous and unintimidated by disciplinary taboos, the nomadic scholars of
postcoloniality excel at dismantling orthodoxies and provoking fresh thinking on
issues that are marginalised or even ignored by the more established disciplines.
Heeding Said's advice in *Culture and Imperialism*, many of them strive to understand
the local without ignoring or absolutising the significance of regional, national and
global levels. By and large, they are sceptical of the grand narratives which anchor
the drive for meaning and fulfillment, whether these are narratives celebrating
modernity, progress, nationalism or cultural authenticity. Thus, they undertake
relentless de-construction of theoretical positions and sites of political contestation
where coalescence of culture/knowledge and power may have generated static, self-
perpetuating, exclusionary and hegemonic blocs. Even as they question the totalising
and reductionist tendencies of Marxist scholarship, postcolonial theorists are not
prepared to dispense with the political, emancipatory concerns.
The work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha has, for instance, sought to explore complex patterns of domination and resistance in the colonial and postcolonial societies. Abjuring reductionist epistemologies as well as sentimental anti-colonialism, it has highlighted the ambivalence inherent in the responses of the colonisers and the colonised to the contradictory, excessive, not to say traumatic but also erotic character of the colonial situation. Thus, stark antagonism between the coloniser and the colonised that an earlier generation of radical scholars enunciated as the quintessential form of the colonial relationship has been giving way in the recent scholarship to intricate explorations of cultural ambiguities, strategic accommodations and uncanny intertwine of desires which constitute identities in the colonial, and indeed, postcolonial situations.¹

Cultural and political issues that were suppressed in the struggles for national liberation have been returning to haunt the postcolonial societies with a ferocity that is impossible to ignore. Material injustices and cultural violence perpetrated by the dominant groups and revolutionary 'van-guards' upon minorities, women and other vulnerable groups such as the peasantry can no longer be justified with cryptic allusions to the day of collective deliverance or inevitable economic take-offs. By the same token, structural constraints of a global order which continues to thwart the postcolonial subjects' desire for autonomy, prosperity and expression can scarcely be legitimated with the grand narrative of globalisation. This is not to deny that the quasi-sacred institution of the nation-state which has long been the locus of authority in

¹Thus, Sara Suleri elaborates the modified agenda of postcolonial criticism as follows: 'To study the rhetoric of the British Raj in both its colonial and postcolonial manifestations is therefore to attempt to break down the incipient schizophrenia of a critical discourse that seeks to represent domination and subordination as though the two were mutually exclusive terms. Rather than examine a binary rigidity between those terms—which is an inherently Eurocentric strategy—this critical field would be better served if it sought to break down the fixity of the dividing lines between domination and subordination, and if it further questioned the psychic disempowerment signified by colonial encounter.' Sara Suleri, The Rhetoric of English India, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992 p.4.
the postcolonial societies is being challenged from a variety of sources, most notably by the juggernaut of globalisation. Steady flows of migrants, 'guest workers' and refugees across the national borders also cause leakages in what Wole Soyinkia has termed 'nationl capsules'. Most importantly, the ineptness, dishonesty and downright cruelty of the ruling cliques in a large number of postcolonial societies has eroded their legitimacy to speak on behalf of the 'people'. Yet many others regard the nation-state as the last bastion of resistance against the homogenising onslaught of global rationality and newer forms of imperialism. These, in brief, are some of the challenges confronting postcolonial theorists.

Postcolonial theorists do not claim to undertake their work from any pre-formed critical space; rather, they readily concede that the struggle to constitute such a space would have to be an ongoing battle. It may indeed be argued, following Walter Benjamin, that no permanent, secure home for engaged critique could ever be constructed in an unjust, conflict-ridden world. Gyan Prakash's recent elaboration of postcolonial criticism's relatively modest aims is perhaps meant to dispel the impression that it wants to seize the mantle of Marxism just because it refuses to idolise the present dispensation represented by the 'New World Order'. Prakash makes it clear though, that in these circumstances, postcolonial criticism would have

---

2See for instance the special issue of *Political Studies* devoted to the crisis of the nation state, volume XLII, 1994.

3See Leo Panitch. *Globalisation and the State*, in R. Miliband and L. Panitch, eds., *The Socialist Register* 1994, p.87. 'It is necessary to try to orient strategic discussion towards the transformation of the state rather than towards transcending the state or trying to fashion a progressive competitive state.' See also Manfred Bienefeld. 'Capitalism and the Nation State in the Dog days of the Twentieth Century', in the same volume. Bienefeld offers a singularly bleak view of globalisation and looks to the 'secular, territorial nation state' to provide a measure of resistance to the imperialist barbarism being unleashed upon the poor countries by globalisation. PP.95-97. For a critique of J.M.F. and the World Bank's neo-liberal orientation and severity of the structural adjustment programs, see Manfred Bienefeld. 'The New World Order: echoes of a new imperialism'. *Third World Quarterly* vol. 15, no. 1 March 1994, pp 31-48. Samir Amin has proposed that underdeveloped countries might consider 'de-linking' themselves from an imperialist and racist world system, in Samir Amin, *Delinking: Towards a polycentric world*, London, Zed Books, 1990. and Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*. London, Zed books, 1989. For a critique of Amin's position, see Jan Nederveen Pieterson, 'Delinking or Globalisation?' *Economic and Political Weekly* January 29, 1994, pp.239-42.
to undertake imminent, de-constructive critique of the hegemonic discourses rather than subject these to an entirely different, authentic perspective:

Based on the belief that we do not have the option of saying no to the determinate conditions of history - capitalist modernity, discourses of liberty, citizenship, individual rights, nation-state - postcolonial criticism attempts to identify in the displaced historical functioning of these discourses the basis for other articulations. (Prakash, 1996, p.201)

**Postcolonial Contestations: Differing Epistemologies**

A number of critics have questioned not only the validity of particular insights being offered by the post colonial approaches but are sceptical of the project as a whole. From the standpoint of traditional humanities and social sciences, post colonial enterprise stands condemned for practising eclecticism under the guise of interdisciplinarity; for rejecting notions of truth, aesthetic worth, universality and person - hood under the influence of post - modernist scepticism; for exacerbrating particularistic biases and legitimating minority positions and for exploiting the tolerance and humane guilt of the majority communities which the partisans of multiculturalism and postcoloniality are said to construct as the repositories of prejudice. There is also the tendency to associate post colonialism with counter - cultural and 'irrational' forces which are alleged to have caused grievous harm to the institution of university and instigated scandalous de-valuation the Western tradition ( Bloom, 1988). Postcolonialism and other varieties of (academic) 'left-Nietzscheanism' are seen to breed a generation of inept students who dispense with analytical rigour and classical scholarly virtues in the name of political commitment and personal expression. Thus, Robert Hughes asserts that :

when the 1960s animus against elitism entered American education, it brought in its train an enormous and cynical tolerance of student ignorance, rationalised as a regard for "personal expression" and "self-esteem". Untrained in logical analysis, ill-equipped to develop and construct formal arguments about issues, unused to mining texts for deposits of factual
material, the students fell back to the only position they could truly call their own: what they felt about things. (Hughes, 1994, p. 59).

Critics of postcolonialism and multiculturalism are not confined to the ranks of what may be termed white, right - wing, pro - establishment forces. Even some radical scholars question post colonial critics' ambition to marry theory with emancipatory practice. Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik believe that post colonial theory is too closely associated with post - structuralist and post - modernist casts of thinking to be able to escape the charge of de - politicisation which Marxists level against the latter. Dirlik claims that post colonialism detracts from a clear understanding of the capitalist system as a global phenomenon when it foregrounds cultural issues although it subjects these to an abstract and generalised power analysis which is far from illuminating (Dirlik, 1994, pp. 346-347). Thus, relentless critiques of Eurocentrism which highlight it as a form of ethnocentrism fail to explain why 'this particular ethnocentrism was able to define modern global history and itself as the universal aspiration and end of that history' (Dirlik, 1994, p. 34). He concludes that only an adequately materialistic account of power relations and not formal accounts of European epistemological-cultural hegemony could provide the requisite explanation.

For instance, Anne McClintock questions the term 'postcolonialism' for homogenising different cultures from a panoptic, teleological perspective which obfuscates the persistence of imperialist structures. She also notes the tendency in the discourse of postcolonialism to de - historicise and de - politicise the oppositional forces. See Anne McClintock. The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post colonialism', Social Text, nos. 31/32, 1992, pp. 84-98. Somewhat similar questions are raised about the term 'Post Colonial' by Ella Shohat in her Notes on the 'Post Colonial', Social Text, nos. 31/32, 1992, pp. 99-113. She argues that the term is more acceptable in the de - radicalised U.S. academe than the more confrontational 'neo colonial' and resonates rather nicely with other post terms such as postmodernism and post structuralism. The term is, however, both too general and not inclusive enough to enable visualisation of strategic linkages between specific cultural and political movements in an essentially neo colonial world. As a signifier of a new historical epoch, the term 'post colonial': when compared with neo colonialism, comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power relations, it lacks a political content which can account for the eighties and nineties style U.S. militaristic involvements in Grenada, Panama, and Kuwait, Iraq, and for the symbiotic links between U.S. political and economic interests and those of local elites.' p.105.

Dirlik puts it quite bluntly: 'postcoloniality is designed to avoid making sense of the current crisis and, in the process to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries.' p.353. Arif Dirlik, 'The Post colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', Critical Inquiry Winter 1994, vol.20, no.2.
David Washbrook and Rosalind O'Hanlon advance similar arguments against Gyan Prakash in a debate which unfolds on the theoretical terrain of Indian historiography. Washbrook and O'Hanlon question Prakash's post-foundational approach to Indian history because of its alleged political and epistemological agnosticism. The post-foundational approach, they fear, is unable to specify either the grounds of its own validity or the desirability of its political objectives (Washbrook and O'Hanlon, 1992, p.141). In response to Prakash's charge that Marxist historians of India, like other adepts of the Enlightenment, impose alien categories on a recalcitrant reality, they argue that historians cannot possibly avoid the use of conceptual tools since the material of history is hardly ever pre-constituted. But they reiterate that Marxist categories can account for cultural differences and resistance; disavowal of the structures of capitalism should not therefore be a prerequisite for 'marginal histories of multiple and heterogeneous identities' (Washbrook and O'Hanlon, 1992, p. 147). Capitalism, they explain, does indeed constitute a system but one that is 'inherently conflictual and changeful, incapable of realising or of stabilising itself' (Washbrook and O'Hanlon, 1992, p. 149). On the other hand, post modernism as a methodology could be quite totalising, especially when it attempts to broach material factors or tackle rival theoretical positions. Most problems of post colonial approaches are attributed to their uncritical appropriation of the post-structuralist methodology and their mimetic entanglement with debates about the politics of representation taking place in the Western universities (Washbrook and O'Hanlon, 1992, pp. 141-142). How can the violence of capitalist

---

6Richard Harland has also noted deconstruction's tendency to treat its opponents' arguments abstractly and to become self referential. 'Herein lies the danger of deconstruction: the danger of never really taking in an opponent's argument at all. Getting round behind an opponent's assertions may serve to produce a critique, but it may also serve as a means of avoiding confrontation. Deconstruction can become a tactic for infallible victory without risks. Why bother to grasp an alien perspective, why struggle to step into someone else's shoes, when language itself can always be made to pass a verdict in one's favour? By limiting other people to the old meanings of their single words, the deconstructor can avoid ever having to learn anything new.' Richard Harland, *Beyond Superstructuralism* London, Routledge, 1993, p. 221.
structures be resisted if their reality is not acknowledged, indeed understood in the first place? It appears that for Washbrook and O’Hanlon, systematic understanding of capitalism on the part of agents constitutes a crucial element of popular resistance in post colonial societies such as India; an issue that is liable to be contested by some post colonial theorists to whom rationalised dispositions signify incorporation by hegemonic discourses of imperial-national modernity. Moreover, Prakash is seen to embrace the post-structuralists’ devaluation of experience and agency, whereas:

some conception of experience and agency are absolutely required by the dispossessed’s call for a politics of contest: it is not clear how dispersed effects of power relations can at the same time be an agent whose experience and reflection form the basis of a striving for change. (Washbrook and O’Hanlon, 1992, pp. 152-153).

In responding to O’Hanlon and Washbrook’s criticism, Prakash delineates the epistemological and political concerns of the post colonial approach with sufficient clarity. He questions the Western political - economists’ and historians’ unreflexive deployment of the category of capitalism to frame and undergird their analyses of non-European societies, arguing that such a perspective necessarily homogenises other social formations by assuming a rather simplistic relationship between capitalism and difference (Prakash, 1992a, p. 169). This move, he goes on to note, exemplifies the epistemic violence of Europe’s grand theories: colonial difference becomes a derivative of capitalist development and the triumphant march of History. However, critical scholarship cannot be content with recording and admiring the victories of capitalist modernity:

Critical history cannot simply document the process by which capitalism becomes dominant, for that amounts to repeating the history we seek to displace; instead, criticism must reveal the difference that capitalism either represents as the particular form of its universal existence or sketches only in relation to itself. (Prakash, 1992a p. 175.).
Thus, O'Hanlon and Washbrook's proposal that structures of domination be conceived as a totality named capitalism would not only homogenise the differences but it would render all but invisible the 'ambivalence and alterity present in the constitution of capitalism as a foundational theme' (Prakash, 1992a, p. 176). With the privileging of the structural and teleological explanations, it becomes extremely difficult to thematise the specificity of colonialism. Hence, an intriguing outcome of the revisionist historiographers' benevolent reformulations has been to place the responsibility of colonialism on the logic of capitalist development which is now seen to have indigenous roots. This prompts Prakash to ask:

How did this logic make the English East India Company the ruler? If the configuration of class forces produced indigenous agents for India's colonisation, why was it that these remained just that - collaborators? How did the universalistic logic of capital discriminate between turning power over to the English company and making the natives into the ruled? (Prakash, 1992a, p. 177).

Nevertheless, despite the compulsion towards purity and universality which inhabits foundational accounts of capitalist development in non-European locales, the excess and heterogeneity of the colonial world cannot be fully mastered by the self-referential narratives:

Even the most insistent claim for the foundational status of capitalism cannot do without the supplementarity of the particularistic. Instead of pursuing the logic of supplementary to split the originating presence of capitalism and rather than exploring the cohabitation of capital with race and culture, O'Hanlon and Washbrook wish to retain the pure presence of capital. How and why this logic of capital distinguishes between brown and white people in the latter's favour gets tucked away from our sight, and colonialism - the violent institution of a set of racial, political, epistemic, and economic systems - becomes an unfortunate episode in the narrative of mode-of-production. (Prakash, 1992a, p. 177)

Instead of pure, homogenising frameworks claiming imperiously to master and represent the totality of India's being using categories derived from the West but deemed neutral, Prakash advocates a flexible, 'impure' approach which abjures the
subject position of the omniscient observer - one who is unencumbered by temporal-spatial, not to say cultural constraints. The post colonial intellectual cannot pretend to be an unaffiliated, universal consciousness embarked upon the task of producing timeless knowledge for the perusal of other such beings. Parting company with Said's recent celebration of the humanist intellectual, Parakash draws upon Homi Bhabha's account of ambivalence to elaborate an eclectic but critical approach to post colonial issues. It is not a question of rejecting Marxism *tout court* or denying the reality of capitalism under the spell of some sinister Nietzschean compulsion. What is important for Prakash is to specify the limits of explanatory models which continue to obliterate the very beings of those who are meant to be understood, enlightened and liberated. Most importantly, it is a matter of clearing some space in which the latter may recognise the forces and strategies that have sought to erase the traces of their presence from their own histories. If the post colonial subjects are not entirely free, they cannot be entirely devoid of agency either, however fragile this may be or however difficult to theorise:

If the West sentenced the otherness of the conquered to History, to recognise that project now as the work of a universal logic which used and produced difference without compromising its sovereignty is to repeat that act of incarceration. This leaves no room for the otherness and resistance that was not determined by the Western conquest and denies that anti-colonial nationalism and subaltern struggles while being constituted by dominant structures, could slip beyond and come back to haunt the conditions of their own constitution. If the conflicts, contradictions and ambivalence in colonial history cannot be said to have upset their founding source in some universality, then the difference of postcoloniality, its critical edge, cannot even be postulated. (Prakash, 1992b, p.14)

Thus, in order for the crucial task of cultural decolonisation to ensue, it would be important to uncover Eurocentric foundations of the modernist, emancipatory ideologies such as Marxism and nationalism which, while opposing the depredations of colonialism, often did so in the name of Reason and Progress. At the same time, post colonial criticism must be wary of the avant-gardist delusion, namely, that it has produced definitive theoretical conceptions by transcending assorted fallacies of the
past. Post colonial critiques cannot pretend to be free from the effects of imperialism. In order to be effective, they must remain intensely combative, vigilant enterprises and acknowledge the disruptive and formative energy of colonialism. Hence:

Criticism formed in this process of discourses of domination occupies a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of Western domination but in a tangential relation to it. This is what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between, hybrid position of practice and negotiation (Prakash, 1992b, p.8)

The challenge, it seems, would be to acknowledge that a degree of coercion, conflict and misrecognition is intrinsic to the formation of colonial and post colonial subjects without necessarily undervaluing the struggles for agency and comprehension carried out from within the structures that appear to perpetuate domination. Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to assume that the structures of domination are somehow immune to qualitative change or that subjective dispositions are entirely determined by systematic factors, whether conceived in Marxist or Foucauldian terms. As a general thesis, structural determination could be as misleading as sentimental or teleological guarantees of absolute autonomy sought by naively idealistic or voluntaristic approaches.

It is somewhat ironic that Marxists' polemic against the notion of transcendental subjectivity and 'contemplative standpoint' has been pushed to its logical conclusion by the post-structuralists and post-modernists with the result that Marxists are having to defend elements of 'bourgeois' subjectivity. But whereas Marxists tend to derive the subject from material structures and followers of Foucault and Derrida view it as an effect of power, discourse or texts, some post-Marxists draw upon the work of Gramsci to stress the importance of conflictual processes in the formation of oppositional subjects. They argue that the outcome of such processes is seldom predetermined. The theorists of the postcolonial societies of the third-world must distinguish between the debunking of the Cartesian subject that is
evident in the Western theoretical debates and the notion of subjectivity per se. Furthermore, since the dispositions of the colonised cannot be conflated with those of the colonisers, the implications of employing the abstract, epistemologically loaded category of 'subject' to denote the complexities of post colonial identity deserve careful analysis.

Homi Bhabha: Mimicry and Resistance

Prakash draws upon Bhabha's influential re-formulation of the colonial encounter that addresses the shortcomings of the 'conflictual' model associated with Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. According to Madhava Prasad, the older, 'Manichean' model of colonial encounters assumes 'continued existence of the primary antagonism at the heart of the colonial relation, between coloniser and colonised', ontologises the 'primary colonial antagonism' so that it remains virtually unaffected by global political-economic transformations, and subscribes to a 'repressive hypothesis of culture'; lastly, it construes global dynamics as essentially inter-national relations involving pre-formed, self-subsistent cultural entities (Prasad, 1992, pp. 87-88).

The conflictual model is said to privilege the Hegelian-Marxist paradigm so that 'radical' transformation of the colonial situation could only occur through reconquest of the colonised territory by the alienated class-subject cum anti-colonial masses. Every trace of the colonial mindset is thereby expected to disappear from post colonial societies in the wake of a radical break with the legacy of dehumanisation. With the collapse of the Soviet experiment and degeneration of nationalist projects in a number of post colonial societies, some scholars regard the idea of total, revolutionary transformation as being excessively abstract, fearing that the notion of heroic, redemptive subject of revolution that becomes a law unto itself
is liable to perpetuate the cycle of domination in newer, possibly more distressing forms. Post-structuralists are particularly sceptical of the notion of an originally unified subject that is destined to regain its 'species being' at the end of capitalist domination. For them, subject formation is not a cumulative, teleological process involving orderly development of a pre-given essence; rather it entails complex, intertwined and necessarily conflictual processes encompassing dominant frameworks of knowledge - power and various significatory complexes. The attempts of the subject to achieve full self-presence and transparency are thwarted by the very nature of the representational structures which enact perpetual deferral of meaning and authoritative identification so that whatever 'subject effects' may arise as a result of arbitrary closures remain subject to further dispersal. Even the dominant discourses cannot fully master their cracks and ambivalence to produce flawless constructions in which the transcendental subject (of imperialism?) may recognise itself in pristine unity and splendour. It is only by overlooking the fissures and uncertainties of a discourse that was anchored in an imperialist intention which could only ever remain anxious and fractured in the face of internal and external difference that someone like Said could invest *Orientalism* with extraordinary coherence and power.

The contradictory desires and aporias investing the discourse of imperialist enlightenment become eminently decipherable in the course of its deployment in the colonial locations. Not surprisingly, the colonial subject which this discourse aims to produce in the compliant mode continually eludes its grasp. As Bhabha elaborates, in occupying two places at once...The depersonalised, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable subject, quite literally, difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects' (Quoted in Young, 1990, p. 143). Riddled as it is with narcissism and voyeurism, the colonial discourse, notwithstanding the power that it brings to bear upon the targets of
surveillance and representation, can never consummate its mastery of the object. In the words of Robert Young:

Colonial discourse does not merely represent the other, therefore, so much as simultaneously project and disavow its difference, a contradictory structure articulated according to fetishism’s irreconcilable logic. Its mastery is always asserted but is always slipping, ceaselessly displaced, never complete. (Young, 1990, p.143)

Bhabha differs from Foucault to the extent that he discerns the limits of objectifying discourses and frameworks of administrative power (Young, 1990, p.144). Bhabha is at pains to remind us that colonial subjects do not necessarily appropriate the colonial discourse in accordance with the colonisers’ intentions; they inevitably misappropriate it, partly through misunderstanding and partly through playful and parodic mimicry, thereby frustrating and de-centering the disciplinary intentions in unexpected ways. White *sahibs* might ridicule the pathetic *babu* as he tried to imitate their mannerisms and accents, yet the *babu* would also disturb his superiors for some reason. They could not quite place his identity or guage his intentions with certainty. Hence, the English stereotype of the *babu* as a de-racinated, devious, enigmatic creature who does not cease to cultivate hybridity even as it torments him. As Young explains:

Mimicry at once enables power and produces the loss of agency. If control slips away from the coloniser, the requirement of mimicry means that the colonised, while complicit in the process, remains the unwitting and unconscious agent of menace – with a resulting paranoia on the part of the coloniser as he tries to guess the native’s sinister intentions. (Young, 1990, p.147-148)

Hence, mimicry becomes something like an ‘agency without a subject’, a curious form of resistance that both enables the establishment of power and disrupts its flow, albeit unconsciously (Young, 1990, p. 148). But since mimicry does not entail opposition to the colonial power in the name of another, transcendental principle, it is more
appropriately conceived as a form of immanent critique; a strategy of resistance at the level of every day interaction which nibbles away at the subjective core of authority. According to Bhabha, the effects of colonial power give rise to hybrid forms of expression which enable the secretion of repressed knowledges and practices into the dominant discourse. This troubles colonial authority. Bhabha’s account suggests that hybridity fosters modes of resistance which elude the normalising forces and have indirect, subtle but far from negligible impact on the cultural processes which impinge on subject-formation. Furthermore, Bhabha implies that since post colonial subjects relate to colonial discourses in oblique, and haphazard manner, they are able to evade many of the oppressive features of these discourses. Thus, they could, in principle, develop cultures that are more tolerant of differences, less hysterical about obliterating every trace of the colonial legacy. By dis-enchanting the lure of the West in homeopathic mode, that is, by consuming its cultural forms in distracted, ironic modes, post colonial hybridity could well de-center the West, releasing postcolonial subjects from the curse of reactive anti-Westernism and concomitant sterility.

While many scholars have admired Bhabha’s deconstructive recovery of the modes of resistance which, though inherent in the colonial encounter were overlooked by the ‘Manichean’ paradigm, others have highlighted its inadequacies. Typically, Bhabha’s use of post-structuralist and deconstructive strategies invite criticisms to the effect that an approach which identifies the discursive terrain as the pre-eminent site of colonial encounter would distract from the more damaging effects of colonialism which concerned someone like Fanon. Hence, Benita Parry questions the ability of the discursive approach to deal with the more overtly political and institutional aspects of the colonial and post colonial situations:

...the significant differences in the critical practices of Spivak and Bhabha are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related in curiosity about the enabling socio economic and political institutions and other forms of social
praxes. Furthermore, because their theses admit of no point outside discourse from which opposition can be engendered, the project is concerned to place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge. (Parry, 1987, p.43)

Thus, what Bhabha articulates as resistance could well be interpreted as a mode of collaboration with the colonial power; one that promotes deviousness and passivity and continues to pre-suppose the commanding presence of the imperial factor instead of striving to imagine a time and place of its absence. Consequently, uncharitable critics could accuse Bhabha of trying to sanitise what was essentially a violent situation and, to make a virtue of the *babu*’s abject compliance with colonial rules. As Michael Adas has pointed out, while it is important to explore other forms of resistance than those stipulated by the confrontational model, it would be misleading and even dangerous to ‘romanticise’ these ‘alternative’ forms:

...the efficacy of everyday resistance and avoidance protest ought not to be overestimated. Though they may win temporary respite from oppressive demands or give those who resort to them a sense of being able to strike back at their exploiters, however feebly, in the long term they serve to perpetuate the systems of domination in which they are employed. They make the insufferable endureable, and channel into subterfuge and symbolic reprisal indignation and hostility that might otherwise be directed towards modes of protest which have the potential to force fundamental transformations in the relationships between subordinate and superordinate groups. (Adas, 1992, p.301)

Moreover, overall assessment of hybridity as a mode of cultural exchange which fosters non-coercive attitudes and problematises violent dichotomies should be examined, as much as possible, in particular contexts. In a recent analysis, Rumi Sakomoto has questioned the validity of Bhabha’s thesis in the context of Japan’s engagement with Western modernity. This account examines the discourse of early Meiji period which registered the threat of Western imperialism to Japan and
proposed various strategies of resistance. Interestingly, one of the leading intellectuals of the period, Fukuzawa Yukichi, argued that Japan must develop a hybrid identity incorporating certain modern elements if it wanted to keep Western imperialism at bay. Fukuzawa suggested that healthier elements of the West; its 'spirit', be extracted while rejecting the morbid ones. Thus, in order to escape the fate of others that had succumbed to the West's colonising thrust, Japan's response to the West was required to be pragmatic. However, contrary to Bhabha's 'naive and optimistic' assertion, this impure identity proceeded to construct the rest of Asia as inferior by way of contrast. Since Bhabha's gaze is fixed on the 'primary dichotomy of the West versus non-West' it fails to note that other dichotomy (Sakamoto, 1996, p. 114). Sakamoto demonstrates that, 'Fukuzawa's discursive strategy, while resisting Western domination, undermined the potentially liberating moment of hybridity by creating another inferior identity, Asia' (Sakamoto, 1996, p. 114). Likewise, Annie Coombs has stressed the need for more nuanced, contextualised accounts which complicate the dominant conception of hybridity centred on others' encounter with the West (Coombes, 1994, p. 111).

A related objection is that since Spivak and Bhabha offer a formalistic, textual interpretation of the colonial domination and resistance, they overlook the more stark and oppositional, even heroic forms of resistance, of which India's history alone would provide innumerable examples. So, despite his sympathetic reading of Bhabha's post structuralist innovations, Robert Young is prompted to raise fundamental questions about the political implications of Bhabha's project:

Is Bhabha describing a forgotten moment of historical resistance, or does that resistance remain inarticulate until the interpreter comes a hundred and seventy years later to 'read between the lines' and rewrite history? And precisely what reality can such a reading between the lines hope to change? Is it a question of locating previously undetected moments of pre-nationalist subaltern resistance that can now be produced and charted by the critic? Certainly, Bhabha's stress on reading seems to imply as much? (Young, 1990, p. 149)
Theorising Resistance: Dialectic or Difference

By contrast, Benita Parry and Abdul R. Jan Mohammed want to ground post-colonial resistance in moments of revulsion and de-familiarisation which emerge in the midst of anti-imperialist struggle. They seek to redeem the experience of heterogeneity which the colonised derive from images of pre-colonial existence and from the utopian desire for a harmonious, emancipated sociality. Presenting her transcendental alternative to Bhabha's de-constructive strategy, Parry writes that:

The labour of producing a counter discourse displacing imperialism's dominative system of knowledge rests with those engaged in developing a critique from outside its cultural hegemony and in furthering a contest begun by anti-colonial movements. Theorists of colonial discourse will need to pursue the connection between imperialism's material aggression and its epistemic violence, and disclose the relationship between its ideological address to the colonial world and the imperialist culture of the metropolitan powers. (Parry, 1987, p.55)

Parry's Fanonian perspective stipulates rejection of imperialism's 'signifying system' even if it had been the available medium in the early phase of de-colonisation. She is somewhat baffled by Bhabha's and Spivak's acute sensitivity to the pitfalls of nativism, wondering if such a determined quest for political and theoretical purity will not be disabbling for the colonised. Some form of nativism or nationalism is necessitated by imperialism's brutal negation of the colonised selves; thus, the latter's desire for alternative sources of cultural empowerment ought to be perfectly understandable. Parry's attention to the anti-imperialist potential of pre-colonial and anti-colonial traditions is, of course, complemented by her evocation of the Benjaminian motif of visionary gaze. This motif symbolises creative transformation of 'received constructions'. Consequently, anti-colonial nationalism does not have to be interpreted as a static, defensive ideology which is inherently resistant to creative re-formulation. Fanon clearly understood that in order to fulfill
their promise, post-colonial nationalisms would have to develop new accents, become confident and offer differentiated responses to internal and external developments. Otherwise, they would degenerate into grotesque caricatures of imperialist and feudal tyrannies.

However, while Parry’s messianism boldly uncovers the political dilemmas of theoreticism, one wonders if it can grapple with the complex and perpetually mutating forms of cultural imperialism, especially its contemporary phase. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* point out that Parry underestimates the extent to which cultural forms have become hybrid; a process encompassing theoretical production no less than literary texts. The desire to reject European theory, while understandable, does not guarantee that an uncontaminated, native version would be forthcoming:

…it is arguable that to move towards a genuine affirmation of multiple forms of native ‘difference’, we must recognise that this hybridity will inevitably continue. This is a prerequisite of a radical appropriation which can achieve a genuinely transformative and interventionist criticism of contemporary post-colonial reality. Even the most intense desire for de-colonisation must be aware that syncretism is the condition within which post-colonial societies operate, and accepting this does not, in any simple sense, involve hiding the role culture plays in the continuing neo-colonial hegemonic formation of the day-to-day experience of those societies. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p.180).

Likewise, Madhava Prasad takes issue with Parry’s voluntaristic reading of Fanon. She questions in particular the tendency to overstate the subaltern’s ability to counter dominant discourses by speaking in his or her own voice. Prasad defends Spivak against the charge that her formulations in ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ inflict silence and passivity on the colonised woman. Prasad argues that Parry has misunderstood the notion of ‘counter discourse’ as it was employed by Spivak, thereby confusing the subaltern’s inability to produce ‘counter discourse’ with her inability to speak:
A counter-discourse... functions as a challenge to 'imperialism's authorised system of knowledge' only through the commensurating practice of a critical reading. It is no denigration of the oppressed to say that while everyone is capable of protecting their dignity and resisting challenges to their traditional positions of authority/responsibility, the knowledge derived from such traditional positions does not constitute a counter-discourse, one that involves a reading of the sources of power, means of control and techniques of administration and ideological interpellation at the command of the colonising power. It is in this sense that the subaltern 'cannot speak'. (Prasad, 1992, p. 81)

The irrepressible question, of course, is: Must the subaltern produce counter discourse, that is, speak the language of domination? Could she ever hope to master the discourse of mastery whose very structures must validate her subjugation as something natural; indeed, as a pre-condition for orderly hierarchies? Would the subaltern's participation in the discourse of 'universal truths' not facilitate the erasure of her identity, incorporating her in the dominant system of representation on latter's terms? On the other hand, one may ask if the transition from subalternity to subjecthood necessarily entails subaltern's integration into the nexus of cultural imperialism? Could her presence in the hegemonic discourse as a trace of minimally sublimated nature produce disruptive effects? Is the subaltern better off being silent, being savage, being on the outside? Or is it the case, as Michel Foucault noted, that the discourse of modernity continually discovers/produces otherness in order to regenerate its transformative impulses so that marginality, once marked as such, becomes a succulent prey of rational, normalising processes and epistemologies? Just as the experience of madness was submerged in the discourses that sought to understand its divine or monstrous, but nonetheless mysterious essence, the suspicion arises that the discourses about marginality and subalternity may be involved in erasing existential referents and any subversive valencies which may have been associated with such conditions. That the invocation of marginality becomes a moment in the production of treatises which are meant to demonstrate the
power of the latest theoretical innovations and, which offer hardly any succour to the flesh and blood subaltern. Thus, a sceptic might ask why deliverance from the West's cultural hegemony is sought primarily in the resources of the West, albeit in 'alternative', 'oppositional' or 'deconstructive' modes.

Asha Varadharajan fears that excessive solicitousness towards the allegedly inscrutable subaltern which may be discerned in the work of repentant anthropologists and some 'native informants' may become an excuse for evading the responsibility for history's violence and more importantly, political commitment. Thus, instead of polluting the colonised subaltern with his Western gaze, the critic often decides to subject himself and his intrusive epistemology to interminable scrutiny (Varadharajan, xvi, 1995). However, this noble and self-denying regimen of reflexivity is not necessarily free from narcissistic and even imperialist elements:

Critical restraint could constitute itself as yet another colonizing gesture. It is often noticed that the critic who refrains from speaking on behalf of those whom she can never "know" presumes that, having spoken, she would have said it all and that the other will be moved neither to challenge nor to supplement her. In other words, her humility has all the trappings of gracious and patronizing self-effacement that still reserves the right to grant the other 'permission to narrate' her (hi)story. (Varadharajan, 1995 xvi-xvii)

Even Spivak, who has demonstrated such scrupulousness in deciphering the multiple layers of silence in which the subaltern woman of colonial India was draped and who has so vigorously exposed the aporias of imperial feminism's emancipatory pretensions and patronising rhetoric, does not fully recognise the subaltern's capacity to engage with and learn from her experience. Spivak is understandably reluctant to bestow a kind of epistemological privilege on the experience of oppression and inadvertently to valorise the oppressive system. She is also aware of liberalism's quasi-religious invocation of subjective freedom so that even the most powerless can be made responsible for their fates and, if possible, transformed into 'autonomous' and individualised units of consumption. Thus, her depiction of the colonised
subaltern’s violated state is, if anything, a sobering corrective to the intellectualist exuberance which erects monumental facades on subaltern’s incorruptible capacities. It is in this spirit that she expresses her reservations about the notion of subaltern’s purity which persists to some extent in the otherwise scrupulous work of the Subaltern Studies collective, although it is clear that the authenticity in question is of a demotic sort and should not be confused with the aristocratic pronouncements of Existentialists. 7 All the same, ‘I cannot entirely endorse’, writes Spivak, ‘this insistence on determinate vigour and full autonomy, for practical historiographic exigencies will not allow such endorsements to privilege subaltern consciousness’ (Spivak, 1994, p. 79). 

Her scruples are to a large extent derived from her appreciation of Jacques Derrida’s epistemological meditations. Accordingly, she would not have any truck with the pre- or ‘post-representationational positivism’ that is oblivious to discursive constraints attendant on subject formation as if a pure self or space prior to or beyond language were conceivable, as though nostalgia for lost origins and wishful dreams of a transparent sociality could sustain radical politics in the present age. Hence her tantalising conclusion, which reiterates the colonial discourse’s effacement of the

---

7 While the Subaltern Studies collective has challenged the colonialist, national and elite centred models of history, many critics believe that in its zeal to give voice to the marginalised groups, it has fostered dogmas of its own. See Michael Adas (1992): ‘Much of the work of the subalternists raises important questions about the predominant view of the passive South Asian peasant. But in countering one myth, the subalternists are in danger of creating another, that violence and confrontation were the dominant modes of response by exploited subordinate groups in South Asia.’ P 296. Other surveys of the Subaltern Studies group include C. A. Bayly (1988); Rosalind O’Hanlon (1988) and Ayesha Jalal (1996). Jalal has made some important points in her critique of the subalternists. She argues, for instance, that their secularist bias and meta-theoretical fixation on a dualistic epistemology prevented them from broaching the subject of Indias partition and the birth of Pakistan (pp. 688 85). By romanticising anti rational and anti statist positions, their accounts get mired in abstract schemas which are unable to explain, let alone criticise, the more odious episodes of ‘subalternist’ violence, especially those associated with the partition (pp. 688 689). Farzana Shaikh’s work has also sought to address the secularist bias in the historiography of ‘muslim separatism and partition, see her Community and Consensus in Islam. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989. Aamir Mufti has demonstrated that even Jawaharlal Nehru’s liberal, secularist discourse constructs muslims and their leaders as backward, recalcitrant, irrational and, of course, ‘communist because they insist on a separate identity, and state, for India’s muslims. See Aamir Mufti, ’ Secularism and Minority : Elements of a Critique’, Social Text 45, Vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 75 96. However, shortcomings of the Subaltern Studies group’s bold attempts to challenge established paradigms do not necessarily vindicate the methodological and thematic stasis of ‘South Asian Studies’.
subaltern while placing the burden of responsibility on intellectuals: 'The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with "woman" as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish' (Spivak, 1994, p.104).

Identity and Resistance

But, how is one to understand the nature of that responsibility? If there is no communicable dimension to the experience of subalternity, no discernible marks of disfigurement which the intellectual may attempt to recover, then, what is to determine the quality or even political valencies of the intellectuals' representations? Furthermore, if empathy could only impose hegemonic discourses on the powerless subaltern despite the 'purity' of the scholarly intention, then, how is one to conceive a viable connection between theory and 'demotic resistance'? Spivak urges the female intellectual to unlearn her privilege (although that may be an impossible task) and dispense with the arrogant wish that she could ever express the 'truth' of subaltern: This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figures of the colonized' (Spivak, 1994, p.91).

There is undeniable merit in her suggestion that the post colonial intellectual resist the temptation to appropriate the subject-position of colonialism's victim. Reacting against subjectivist and positivist excesses which wreaked havoc upon the objects of knowledge during the West's domination of both knowledge and the world, Spivak wants to dilute, if not 'render hysterical' (in the Derridean sense) the subject's monumental craving for the object. She intends to reach that elusive goal by means of deconstructions and 'auto-critiques' that are hoped to liberate the structures of knowledge from subjective intentions. And since power is intricately linked with
knowledge in the Foucauldian and Derridean frameworks, it is presumed that a
subject lacking command of knowledge would not be able to establish violent and
appropriative relationships with objects. That is a debatable assumption. Even if it
were granted that knowledge and power form effective constellations, does it
necessarily follow that these are geared towards dominating the subaltern? Would it
be too preposterous to imagine resistant constellations of knowledge-power,
involving and possibly even empowering the subaltern? Would it be even more
preposterous to imagine 'other' constellations, blissfully or naively forgetful of
colonial discourse, neither erasing nor mythologising the 'subaltern' but recognising
him (or her) as part of a world? And why, one may ask, is the burden of critique
placed so heavily on the producers of knowledge rather than on the practitioners of
power? Even if one were to acknowledge, for the sake of argument, the validity of
Spivak's diagnosis, one would have to ask if her prescription is adequate. She seems
both too wishful and not ambitious enough. It is not clear whether de-constructive
scrutiny of the subjective pole alone could foster liberation of the object, although
Spivak may well respond that 'liberation' of the subaltern woman is precisely what
imperial discourse proposed and it is therefore a problematic notion. But, would she
be justified in denying subaltern the desire for liberation because the notion of
liberation has been polluted by its use in the colonial discourse? Would she not be
guilty of trying to protect the fragile and passive subaltern and deny certain of her
desires; the very thing that she finds distasteful in colonial discourse? On the other
hand, what could she be protecting or even preserving (in its effacement?) if the critic
cannot have access to anything besides discursive forms which are said to exclude
the subaltern in any case? To put it somewhat crudely, is there only one type of
knowledge and representation, namely that which dominates in conjunction with
power? Moreover, what compels critique to labour in the immanent, de-constructive
mode without ever slipping into the affirmative? No wonder that some scholars have
expressed their concerns about the political implications of Spivak's de-constructive
strategy:
The prospects for counter hegemonic ideological production seem bleak indeed if the discovery that the colonized have no history within the context of colonial production is matched by the contention that they cannot know and speak for themselves. The postcolonial critic, in Spivak’s terms, seems confined to contesting the production of the colonial subject within Western discourse. (Vardharajan, 1995, p.95)

Although Spivak wants to reject the notion of subaltern’s authenticity and to problematise oppressive and obsolete dichotomies, she comes perilously close to positing an unbridgeable gulf between subject and object (Suleri,1992, pp.12-13; Kennedy, 1996, p.354). Consequently, she is forced to invoke the noumenal authenticity of the subaltern since its ‘Otherness is privileged as the anti - West or the West’s limit - text, as the vanishing point of the intelligibility of the discourse of imperialism.’ Thus, ‘the very strategy that enables her to indicate the ruthless effacement of subaltern history and consciousness leads her to privilege that absence and that silence’ (Vardharajan, 1995, p.96). It is argued that Spivak’s move short - circuits the dialectic between subject and object which Adorno could enact with such finesse to illuminate contradictory and seemingly intractable problematics (Vardharajan, 1995, pp.84-85). In contrast to Adorno, Spivak appears to have rather too firm a belief in the object’s evasiveness and not enough faith in its plenitude and resistant capacities. In Varadharajan’s judgement, it is Spivak’s fidelity to deconstruction and postmodernism that ‘does her in’ because post modernist dissolution of the Cartesian subject stipulates that the object reciprocate with nothing less than voluntary self - effacement:

The demise of the Cartesian subject seems at first to elicit the potential of its object, its self - effacement a necessary prelude to the emergence of a visible and voluble object. Within the discursive domain of postmodernism, which identifies and exacerbates the displacement of the subject, a problem immediately presents itself. The very process that exposes the illusory mastery of the subject forecloses upon the resistance of the object. If the subject is always already discontinuous with itself and its identity only a necessary illusion, is the power exerted in the fiction of identity and mastery equally illusory? If the subject was never
whole and undivided, was the object never powerless, traduced and excluded? Whom shall the object hold accountable for its suffering? (Varadharajan, 1995, p.20)

A number of scholars in India have taken issue with Spivak's approach to 'Indian realities'. What they find particularly distorting is her determination to establish the universal validity of her method, which, being an esoteric blend of deconstruction and Marxism is liable to 'de-familiarise' the objects of study almost to the point of obliterating their specificity. The political significance of these 'interventions' is also interrogated, with Indian scholars complaining that these tend to stay well clear of the more pressing, contemporary issues. While the rigour and innovativeness of de-constructive approaches have the potential to make significant contributions to the post colonial projects, there is clearly some concern that denunciations of 'vulgar' Marxism may have become too 'sophisticated' and formalistic in their turn. At a deeper level, these critiques seem to be probing the abstract, universalist and homogenising notion of post colonial intellectuality which, it is feared, authorises cross-border raids of nomadic intellectuals in search of cultural booty. To illustrate this point, one may refer to Darshan Perusek's article which contests Spivak's interpretation of the Bengali writer Maheshwati's story 'Draupadi'. This story, which Spivak has translated in English, depicts an Indian counter-insurgency unit's gruesome treatment of Dopadi, a peasant woman from Naxalbari region of Bengal where a peasant uprising took place in 1967 (Perusek, 1994, p.244). Perusek considers Spivak's interpretation astonishing in that it renders the 'blood and gore of history' into 'a ghostly abstraction' to celebrate the magical power of deconstruction (Perusek, 1994, p.244; p.247). The implication is that even for the post colonial denizens of the Western academy, 'pleasures of the text' take precedence over the need to engage with the world, partly because the distinction between the text and the world is considered to have been de-constructed. Perusek is tempted to dismiss this position as 'frightful nonsense' because:
Post colonial realities, for the majority of people who inhabit these regions of the world, are harsh and brutal. No amount of textualising these realities can conjure them away. Landlords, the police, soldiers exist; guns exist, bullets exist; poverty exists, hunger exists, and violent death, as does slow death by malnutrition and starvation. It is not good to dwell so much on language as if it were a thing in itself and not something in which we seek and find our own being and that of our fellow humans. In these parts of the world, the word still has some work to do: to testify, to make sense of a reality that is often so grotesque and murderous. Here discourse is not an academic exercise. (Perusek, 1994, p.249)

While it is understandable that some Indian scholars would question the wisdom of subjecting Indian realities to an abstract, Western interpretive paradigm, it would be equally problematic to set up a rigid dichotomy between 'purely' Indian and 'Westernised' standpoints. Even scholars born, bred and based in India, so to speak, are not immune to the Western influence. As one critic put it, 'The dependence upon the West' is 'reflected in Indian intellectuals' derivative categories and protocols of thought, as well as in their search for validation and endorsement from the intellectual centers of the West' (Rajan, 1997, p.610). In a certain sense, the brightest stars of the scholarly and literary firmament still rise in the West (Jaggi, 1997). Notwithstanding the temptation to resolve this 'problem' in favour of either 'cosmopolitan' theory or 'Indian' practice, or to de-construct the opposition (an equally enticing proposition), I would argue that both 'solutions' are to be resisted. If neither 'national' nor diasporic position can be absolutised, nor can they be abolished. Indeed, there is a case to be made for recognising the specificity of the diasporic position: its irreducible hybridity, which resists assimilation to the metropole or the place of origin. Perhaps that explains to some extent the uneasiness and resentment which diasporic intellectuals arouse in both locations. Even the category of 'cosmopolitan' with its connotations of unbelonging and neutrality cannot do full justice to the complexity of the diasporic (postcolonial) habitus, despite the fact that diasporic 'interventions' often problematise both Eurocentrism and essentialist nationalism. As Samir Dayal has suggested, diasporic interventions have an important role to play as sympathetic critiques of developments in the 'third world'.
(Dayal, 1996, p. 133). This 'internal' criticism should perhaps be juxtaposed with the - at best neutral and at worst cynical - approach of the Western 'experts'.

The Paradox of Liberation and Development

The ideology of modernisation that empowers technocratic and bureaucratic cadres to extract constructive labour from the masses by taming their irrationality through discipline is supposed to eliminate the regressive tendencies in due course. History itself and at a deeper epistemological level, Nature, is supposed to guarantee the truth of that ideology. The 'modernising' post colonial elites can therefore be said to perpetuate the dominance of European paradigm of instrumental rationality under the guise of national development from above. Liberal-national, populist or socialist frameworks may be employed to legitimise the establishment of bureaucratic regimes of governance whose promise of formal liberties and prosperity disguises more encompassing forms of enslavement and corruption being instituted. Leaders of independent nations, managers of national economies, but also intellectuals who were determined to embody the conscience of their nations have, on the whole, failed to liberate their imagination from the colonialist frameworks. In India, Nehruvian modernisers, fully aware of Gandhi's potential to 'deliver' the masses to their programme, were prepared to tolerate his idiosyncratic, anti-modern, liminal personna. Prakash astutely observes that Gandhi:

offered a moderinst agenda that could both accomodate and appropriate the anti-capitalist and anti-Enlightenment politics of the peasantry. For Indian nationalists, the beauty of the Gandhian intervention lay in the fact that it could deliver the popular forces without ceding them the initiative. (Prakash, 1996, p. 195)

---

Even Marxist intellectuals who aspired to understand and represent the people in their 'concreteness' could only incarcerate them in the tangled web of structural explanations and abstract formulas. Their 'hermeneutic of suspicion' would register the details of everyday reality, but only to bury them in cumbersome explanations that were believed to be more concrete and holistic, not to say scientific. There did not appear to be a way of conceiving human agency other than as alienated or in the process of consummation through proletarian revolution. Culture was something to be fought and overcome, especially if it pertained to the peasant and 'Asiatic' modes of production. The real, authentic culture was only to be created by the proletariat, after it had rid the world of exploitation and closed the blood-stained book of history.

Critics such as Ashis Nandy draw upon the tradition of Gandhi and Tagore to assert the claims of culture against ideology; what's more, they retain the notion of spirituality in their reflections on cultural and political issues, thereby subverting the conventional polarity of 'progressive' and 'conservative' which continues to haunt the Western debates. Nandy endeavours to rescue the notions of culture and spirituality from the totalising ideological interpretations fashioned by the sociologists of modernisation as well as critical theorists sympathetic to the Frankfurt School and French post-structuralism. Moreover, he wants to reinscribe those notions in an account of post-colonial sociality that does not shy away from political and economic realities. Nandy seeks to illuminate traditional patterns of interaction and reverence in a move that is also meant to underline the compulsiveness and ideological sclerosis of the modernist thinking. This type of thinking tends to schematise the complexity of cultural worlds. Through its de-contextualising operations, it sets up dualities between the related intellectual tendencies, rendering them abstract and totalising (Nandy, 1983). Once de-contextualised, the antagonistic discourses, desires
and utopias may embark upon relentless dialectical combat among themselves without relinquishing the search for 'imaginary homelands'.

Thus, the intrusion of Western rationality in the guise of modernist ideology transformed the patchwork of differences and ambiguities constituting India into an ideological battleground (Nandy, 1995, p. 55). By disrupting traditional patterns of association and learning and by denigrating enduring normative orientations, this ideology plunged the modernising sections of the population into an identity crisis which could not be resolved through the acquisition of Western knowledge and culture (Nandy, 1995, p. 59). Furthermore, anti-colonial nationalism subjected the bulk of the population, leading more or less traditional lives in the villages, to the whims and obsessions of Macaulay's brown nabobs who muttered modernist mantras all the more loudly the more restless and unsure they became about the fate of their 'projects'. In Nandy's view, the West's dominance will not diminish so long as the post-colonial societies continue to denigrate their souls in the obsessive quest for economic prosperity.

Notwithstanding the glib 'demonstrations' by social theorists and historians of the constructedness of traditions, it may still be worthwhile to engage with whatever is left of the indigenous traditions. The quest for meaning which modernity unleashes through its assault on religious and metaphysical systems cannot be satisfied by resources immanent to critical reason and when access to traditional sources of meaning and enchantment is blocked, the repressed urges may erupt in conflagrations that cannot be trusted to spare the citadels of reason. Thus, critical theory can resist serious engagement with the question of religion only at the risk of becoming a cliché ridden enterprise, which is content to wrap itself in radical banners. By treating religion as an other-worldly affair better dealt with by specialists, it demonstrates its fidelity to the Orientalist assumptions of the Marxist and sociological traditions from which it took its early bearings. Indeed, even as he
admires the work of the 'young' historians of the subaltern studies group in which imperialist and nationalist interpretations are subverted, he insists that they are still altogether too respectful of the rationalist categories such as 'that of history' (Nandy, 1995, pp.52-53).

Unlike the West, where memory has been textualised in the form of historical narratives and where past is an uncertain, dangerous territory to be 'conquered', some 'abistorical' cultures actually encourage forgetting and silence. The quintessentially modern thirst for systematic, scientific accounts of the past, he argues, is related to the massive dislocations and cultural violence produced by modernity-industrialisation, urbanisation, mass migrations, imperialism, world wars (Nandy, 1995, p.55). The withering sense of loss and bewilderment demanded 'authoritative' accounts of the past; thus myths, fables and 'unvarifiable' stories were de-valued and marginalised as misleading. Nandy for his part has few qualms about dissolving history into myth to subvert the modernist myth underlying 'history'. Like many others, he has serious reservations about the capacity of this calcified myth to contribute anything worthwhile to the world.

It is too easy to assume that the Western trajectory of modernisation is destined to repeat itself with minor variations in every region and sector of the 'world-system' thanks to some such notion as Parsonian 'pattern variables' or globalisation; that disenchantment of the religious world-views and hegemonic unfolding of rational processes is all but inevitable. Clearly, such intellectual narcotics would comfort those who are not prepared to face difficult questions. Indeed, if rationalisation and globalisation are believed to unfold according to stipulated rules, then there would be no great need to explore the possibility that genuinely oppositional movements embodying different principles could arise at some point. And, if such oppositional tendencies were to emerge, they could easily
be accused of exploiting retrograde, resentful, irrational and ultimately vestigial sentiments of vulnerable people.

Nandy questions the tendency to subsume all cultures and people under the oppressive canopy of globalisation. He insists that in order to de-colonise themselves and to re-imagine their difference from the overarching frameworks shaped in the West, non-European people will have to enact a deeper engagement with their own being than that authorised by the West's epistemological supremacy and modernist obsessions of their own elites; thanks to whom local traditions of learning were allowed to decline (Nandy, 1995, p.44). Nandy's account may be charged with a certain idealisation of the 'simple folk' and tradition, but it would be unfair to dismiss it as a species of nostalgia. As Christopher Lasch has pointed out, nostalgia, by reifying past, precludes active relationship with it, tending to conjure up myths which de-value the present instead of enriching it. Fixation on the past is of course the flip-side of the 'progressive' idolisation of future. Both attitudes prevent engagement with the ambiguities and challenges of the present and are ultimately devoid of hope. Indeed, futurism and anti-modernist nostalgia are mythical responses to the erosion of living memory: to the debilitating sentiment that an irremediable break has occurred between past and present, old and new. In an attempt to distinguish nostalgia from living memory that enriches and regenerates, Lasch writes:

Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irrevocably lost and for that reason timeless and unchanging. Strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection. Memory too may idealize the past, but not in order to condemn the present. It draws hope and comfort from the past in order to enrich the present and to face what comes with good cheer. It sees past, present, and future as continuous. (Lasch, 1991, p.83)
According to Nandy, it is modernity’s ‘historical’ consciousness, underwritten by a mythical craving for certitude, that divests past of its ambiguities and constructs rigid, ‘true’ narratives. As the violence associated with Babri Masjid affair has demonstrated, in places like India where past, far from being accessible through a straight, well lit highway has been more of a sacred territory towards which innumerable, intertwining, broken trails would grope without ever promising a safe or uninterrupted journey, the hegemony of historical consciousness can produce devastating results: ‘In a civilization where there are many pasts, encompassing many bitter memories and animosities, to absolutize them with the help of the European concept of history is to attack the organizing principles of the civilization’ (Nandy, 1995, p. 65). Although Nandy’s reflections resonate with the concerns of postcolonial theory, his espousal of Gandhian non-violence scarcely constitutes a credible response to imperialism. Nevertheless, he offers a courageous anti-dote to the avant-gardist infatuation with theoretical radicalism. As Shiraz Dossa observes:

Nandy drives hard his central point that in the interests of sheer survival, Asia (and the third world generally) has to set limits to cultural and political globalism, it needs the necessary distance to reinvent Asian politics and Asian life, and no less importantly, to reconstruct an independent Asian mind. (Dossa, 1992, pp. 199-200)

**Postmodernism and Postcolonialism**

Does the rise of postmodernism in the West offer non-Western cultures the opportunity to reflect upon their prolonged subjugation to logocentric frameworks and imagine ways of regenerating themselves? The question of postcolonial theory’s relationship to poststructuralism and post modernism is one that continues to provoke intense debates. Clearly, such notable figures as Homi Bhabha, Gyan Prakash and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak owe substantial debts to Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. There are aspects of post structuralist and postmodernist critiques of the
Enlightenment project and Europe's violent appropriation of others, which these theorists understandably regard as liberating. They also recognise methodological advantages of the immanentist, de-constructive approaches over older, transcendental ones which sought metaphysical guarantees of Truth and favoured thoroughgoing transformation of whole societies and cultures. The older, modernist paradigms are widely believed to be deficient in their treatment of the problematic of representation. Thus, many post colonial theorists tend to foreground the cultural dimension of colonial domination by disarticulating it from an economistic and globalised narrative of imperialism which in turn was grounded in a naturalistic and totalising account of capitalist modernity.

While some of these theorists have not thematised the implications of de-constructive and post-structuralist methodology for the project of cultural, epistemological and indeed political de-colonisation, others have sought to address this problem at greater length. Robert Young, for instance, places postmodernism and postcolonialism in the dissonant moment of European consciousness; when the latter is having to reflect upon the nature of its involvement in the imperialist project and to confront the challenge of decolonising itself (Young, 1990, p. 119). In this moment of crisis, European culture is revealed to be one culture among others and not the universal, paradigmatic one which others are condemned to revere (Young, 1990, p.119). Thanks to this state of disorientation, radical interrogation of Europe's hegemony from within becomes a possibility. In Young's account, post modernism and post colonialism turn out to be complements, being articulations of the same moment. It becomes apparent in his critique of Said that Young is reluctant to allow heterogeneous critical space to the (non-European) postcolonial intellectual, thereby assimilating the discrepant valencies of post colonial critiques in a globalised perspective which cannot but remain Eurocentric (Young, 1990, p.132). Once a post colonial intellectual has developed some understanding of the Euro-American theoretical discourse and secured a position in a metropolitan university, he/she is
presumed to have lost his/her innocence. Consequently, such an intellectual is not to attach any great significance to the non-European aspects of his/her experience nor insist on examining the Western discourses from a position of marginality. Paradoxically, Young’s account seems to neutralise the traces of the very alterity whose disruptive effects are said to imbue the postmodern condition with its characteristic ambience.

It is not surprising, then, that some commentators have aimed to highlight postcolonial theory’s subservient relationship to post modernism. It has even been suggested that postcolonial theory could win academic legitimacy only due to post modernism’s influence in the Western universities and that ‘metropolitan’ postcolonials, including the ones with peripheral roots, essentially write for the Western audiences (Bahri.1995.p.68, 58). The agenda of postcolonial theory is therefore said to be heavily shaped by post modern, first-world concerns, somewhat like the manner in which an earlier generation of the third world’s radical intelligentsia would situate its research programmes within Marxist parameters. In the current phase of flexible accumulation and strategic management of impoverished regions, the suspicion grows that the West continues to appropriate the rest’s cultural resources in an ironic, playful, self-deprecating manner which is not to be confused with absence of domination or genuine disavowal of cultural superiority on the part of the Western people. 9 Besides, with no one to challenge its supremacy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West could do with a bit of relaxation on the cultural front.

9 Bernard Mc Grane, Beyond Anthropology, London, Penguin, 1991, has argued that the recent upsurge of cultural benevolence in the Western academy indicates that the West’s ‘encounter’ with non-European ways of being occurs at even more trivial levels now. ‘The emergence of the concept of “culture” has made possible the democratization of difference (perhaps, in one sense, “culture” is the radical democratization of difference). The twentieth century concept of “culture” has rescued the non-European other from the depths of the past or pre history and reinserted him in the present. He is, once again, contemporary with us.’ P.114. Moreover, ‘As the resource of “progress” authorised the transformation of “different” into the “primitive”, so the resource of anthropological “culture” authorises the transformation of “difference” into “relativity”. We may mark here a paradoxical re domestication and annihilation of difference, for if all cultures are democratically relative, then in this respect, none are different.’ PP. 117 118.
Indeed, this could be construed as the cultural component of the 'peace dividend'. However, this apparently benign strategy has some disturbing implications for those construed as 'others'. Commenting on the present state of art and culture in Australia, Ian McLean warns that, 'Despite the postmodern critique of modernism, the inherently racist paradigms of modernism still linger in our institutions' (McLean, 1997,p.16). This is probably the case in most Western countries. 

However one interprets this situation, the strategies of cultural appropriation do appear to have become more refined under the impetus of post modernism. To give an example, cultural products from the third world which confirm the Western intelligentsia's preconceptions are duly subjected to interpretive codes which underscore the simpler, 'hybrid' or exotic character of these products\(^\text{10}\). Thus, 'neo-traditional' art-works from Africa reflecting the tastes of the Westernised elites, and English-language fiction produced by a small number of Westernised Indians, win instant recognition in the Western academe as the canonical expressions of African art and Indian literature respectively (Bahri, 1995,p.71). Such a state of affairs has prompted Anthony Appiah to characterise post coloniality as: 

...the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer: their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa (Appiah, 1991,p. 348). 

\(^{10}\)See Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991. In this age of global interdependence and management, no geographical area is allowed to remain unabsorbed and unintegrated. Third World texts will be tamed, with the hegemony of the First World conferring the needed authority. Should a particular sample happen to be intransigent, it can always be rejected as an inferior product. The principle of canonicity never fails. The experience of reading a foreign text is nearly always transformed into an act of self reaffirmation. P. 10.
Appiah's comments are probably too severe, in that they reduce a great many intellectuals to the unenviable position of imperialism's agents, nevertheless, this issue deserves serious attention. As it is, he is not the only one to underscore the persistence of Western hegemony in critical and aesthetic practices which claim to be oppositional and different, not to say radical. Others have also complained about the 'cosmopolitan' post colonials' tendency to generalise their personal concerns and developments specific to the Western intellectual milieu into a global condition. It has been pointed out that far more challenging work is being produced in the former colonies than that which is typically annointed as 'radical' but, it is liable to be ignored by the metropolitan set if it partakes of non-metropolitan languages or fails to validate the prevalent interpretive models. The suppression of these literatures', writes Bahri, and the recruitment of metropolitan imports from the ranks of erstwhile colonies - intrinsically sanctioned and approved by their British education - in the name of affirmative hiring should be matters of greater concern than they seem to be (Bahri, 1995.p.71).

Likewise, Kumkum Sangari protests the ubiquity of post modern and post structuralist concerns in the field of postcolonial studies:

Postmodern skepticism is the complex product of a historical conjuncture and is constructed as both symptom and critique of the contemporary economic and social formation of the West. But postmodernism does have a tendency to universalise its epistemological preoccupations in a tendency that appears even in the work of critics of radical political persuasion. On the one hand, the world contracts into the West, a Eurocentric perspective... is brought to bear upon "Third World" cultural products; a "specialised" skepticism is carried everywhere as cultural paraphernalia and epistemological apparatus, as a way of seeing, and the post-modern problematic becomes the frame through which the cultural products of the rest of the world are seen. On the other hand, the West expands into the world; late capitalism muffles the globe and homogenises (or threatens to) all cultural production (Sangari,1995.p.145)
The crisis of meaning which has supposedly plunged the West in nihilism after the demise of grand narratives cannot be said to infect everyone in the West to the same degree. But to extend that spell to the rest of the world is indeed a totalising gesture which may be interpreted as an attempt to prevent others from seeking comfort and inspiration from their grand narratives, whether religious or ideological. This is somewhat surprising, given that more sophisticated analyses of nihilism present it as a debilitating condition which is caused in part by scepticism. The 'great blood-sucker, spider scepticism' is how Nietzsche described it (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 139). If it is a question of averting more disturbing consequences of nihilism in a situation where few moderist ideologies, including rationalism and secularism, have been able to retain their potency or demonstrate their intrinsic connection with 'progressive' political outcomes, then what could be the grounds for disparaging those ideologies which may still offer the prospect of meaning and stable identities to some people? Or, must everyone in the world experience the radical disenchantment and spiritual devastation in the name of some twisted and masochistic notion of modernist 'unmasking' which is no longer confident of its own worth or emancipatory potential?

'There is no necessary or obvious connection', observes Sangari 'between the decentering of unitary discourses...and an international radicalism' (Sangari, 1995, p. 146). A generalised critique of the centred subject does not amount to a critique of colonialism because subject formation under different regimes of colonialism was historically varied (Sangari, 1995, p. 146).

Theoretical de-legitimation of the social sciences is occurring at a time when multinational corporations and disciplinary agencies such as the multilateral and national bureaucracies are deploying positivist methods and technological means of control with impunity. One effect of such a critique could be to disempower oppositional intellectuals and movements that require tools of social science to understand normalising processes and changing forms of capitalist accumulation. Thus, Aijaz Ahmad has asserted that post colonial approach is too abstract and
general to be of much analytical significance for oppositional projects. He complains that post colonial perspectives typically place a large number of societies under one category on the grounds that these societies had been subject to colonial rule at one point or another, or even because they colonised others. The complexity of individual histories and cultures is violently resolved into pre-colonial and post-colonial phases. Thus, historical development spanning many centuries is often consigned to the relatively insignificant pre-colonial phase, whereas events following colonisation receive disproportionate attention. In many cases, would it not be more appropriate to compare a so-called post-colonial society with one that was never colonised? For instance, comparing Pakistan with Turkey might be more rewarding than say comparing Pakistan with Australia, given the pre-colonial Islamic heritage that the former two happen to share. (Ahmad, 1995, p.26). Ahmad goes on to elaborate that:

The colonial form was by no means the only form of dominance of European capital, nor did it function in the same way in different parts of the globe, so that as we now look back, it seems more appropriate to think of the many genealogies of this dominance than to speak of an undifferentiated 'post coloniality'. This plea for historical specificity must be distinguished, however, from the kind of infinite regress of heterogeneity which is the fashion these days. (Ahmad, 1995, pp.26-27)

Ahmad favours Marxist analysis with its emphasis on the centrality of class forces and imperialism's economic stranglehold. Like Dirlik and Appiah, he is wary of the more ecstatic and mobile political-theoretical trajectories of diasporic intellectuals:

It is only when the Angel of History casts its glance back at Asian and African societies from its location in Europe and North America, or when it flies across the skies of the world on the wings of postmodern travel and telecommunication, that those societies look like so many variants of a postcolonial sameness. (Ahmad, 1995, p.28)

It is debatable, however, whether Ahmad could provide a more nuanced account of the specificities of post colonial societies since he continues to exemplify 'a certain
leftist monumentality that has no patience with alliance or populist politics, practiced in, say, South Africa today' (San Juan Jr., 1995, p.94).

Somewhat like Ahmad, Revathi Krishnaswamy points out that although discourses of post coloniality aim to foreground 'migrancy' and 'hybridity', they tend to do so in aesthetic modes which attenuate the potentially subversive references to suffering and dislocation. Perhaps, a distinction is in order between the relatively comfortable exile of the Westernised, skilled postcolonials and other conditions which are more alienating and embattled. 'Has the mythology of migrancy', she asks, 'provided a productive site for postcolonial resistance or has it willy-nilly become complicit with hegemonic postmodern theorizations of power and identity' (Krishnaswamy, 1995, p. 127-28). She vigorously questions certain post colonial theorists' discursive levelling of the painful experiences of cultural dislocation and identity crises. 'Difference', she writes, 'is reduced to equivalence, interchangability, syncretism, and diversity, while a levelling subversive subalternity is indiscriminately attributed to any and all.' (Krishnaswamy, 1995, p.129). One is tempted to ask whether it is post colonial theorists who are guilty of the various post modern sins or whether they are responding in intense and even creative manner to a transformed epochal scenario whose effects can no longer be confined to any particular region? It is a suggestion with which she is likely to disagree, given that she represents the post-colonial intellectual as a curiously post-ideological, deracinated creature; narcissistic, unaffiliated and consumed by boundless opportunism:

No longer disempowered by cultural schizophrenia or confined within collectivities such as race, class, or nation, the nomadic post colonial intellectual is said to 'write back' to the empire in the name of all displaced and dispossessed peoples, denouncing both colonialism and nationalism as equally coercive constructs. (Krishnaswamy, 1995, p. 125)

According to E. San Juan Jr., the problematic of post colonial theorists continues to be delineated by 'bourgeois humanism' which allows them to avoid
harsher aspects of reality, and so, they remain comfortably ensconced in abstract, globalising intellectualism. However, the prominence of this sophisticated, overtly political but in effect de-politicising perspective cannot be dissociated from the more disturbing features of the global political-economic landscape. 'The rise of post colonial textualism', he argues, is symptomatic of the attenuation of 'Third World' resistance in the 1980s' (San Juan, 1995, p. 103). When considered against the backdrop of a situation in which the third world has been abandoned to the dictates of the I.M.F., the World Bank and multinational corporations and when the colonisers of the day before are determined to exclude the 'barbarians' from the citadels of Western culture, post colonial theory's intellectualism is scarcely distinguishable from escapism (San Juan, 1995, p. 100, 104). 'In this life and death agon for millions', he writes, 'the literary conceits of undecidability and indeterminacy offer neither catharsis nor denouements, only mock-heroic distractions' (San Juan, 1995, p. 100). The author suggests that post colonial intellectuals should moderate their theoretical exuberance and explore new forms of universality that are not monadic, static or hostile to differences (San Juan, 1995, p. 105). They should strive to preserve some notion of active solidarity of the oppressed across racial and territorial divides in an age of rampant cynicism, psychic fragmentation and ruthlessly policed zones (p. 112).

Edward Said, who may be regarded with some justification as a founding figure of the post colonial discourse, has increasingly distanced himself from postmodernism and its derivatives on the ground that they encourage disengagement from the world. What the postmodernists' dramatic pronouncements and cosmic gestures coceal, in his view, is the fact that these theorists have become indifferent to the distressing aspects of the contemporary situation which calls for urgent political intervention. He is saddened by the fact that some of the leading intellectuals of our time, who supported anti-colonial movements a few decades ago, have turned their back on history, oppositional practices and the rest of the world, to indulge in
problem solving and game playing. Not surprisingly, 'one began to hear and read how futile it was to support revolutions, how barbaric were the new regimes that came to power' (Said, 1993, pp.29-30). While postmodernists have managed to refine narcissistic detachment into epistemological virtues after dispensing with the grand narratives, Said is in favour of celebrating the grand narratives of 'emancipation and enlightenment' especially in the third world. Moreover, postmodernist disenchantment with large political projects and global developments tends to be projected on a global scale so that in some strange, almost comic way, even the relatively poor countries are seen to be undergoing postmodernisation at break neck pace. This trend upsets Said. To illustrate his point, he refers to the case of Egypt which is 'literally falling apart' under the weight of a large and rapidly growing population but where intellectuals are either obsessed with Islam or postmodernism.

If Said has emerged as an aggressive modernist recently, it would be useful to distinguish his modernism from the variety that delights in flaunting its Western plumage. It may even be argued that Said's is a modernism with multiple inflections, although it is debatable whether it can still be called 'interstitial', hybrid or oppositional. One could argue that he has chosen to celebrate modernist positions because the Western avant-garde has been abandoning, with a dexterity that is as remarkable as it is disturbing, even the stance of ethical responsibility towards others and retreating behind the ramparts of Euro-America.

Said is careful to distinguish post colonial theory from post modernism. The former, he argues is not entirely sceptical towards the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment, plus it has been developing incisive critiques of Eurocentrism and patriarchy. Also, in contrast to postmodernism's apolitical detachment, postcolonial theory is marked by an intensity of political engagement which results from its greater concern with the crisis-ridden third world. He believes
that some of the finest work in postcolonial theory attempts to grapple with issues of local and regional significance but from universalist, emancipatory perspectives (Said, 1995, p. 350). While his brief and scattered comments are on the whole appreciative of the work being carried out under the rubric of post colonial theory, they also point to possible dangers. Echoing Masao Miyoshi and Arif Dirlik, he wonders if, 'the interest of western academics in subjects such as multiculturalism and "post-coloniality" can in fact be a cultural and intellectual retreat from the new realities of global power' (Said, 1995, p.349). Thus, he warns against any hasty rejection of political-economic analysis by cultural theorists because global realities demand an astute, non-reductive combination of structural and cultural perspectives.

Postcolonialism: Embattled Discursivities and Identity

As post colonial studies become academically respectable, internal critiques increase in sophistication. There have emerged voices expressing concern over the hegemonic status which the agendas of South Asian theorists supposedly enjoy in the field to the detriment of other voices and regions. It has been suggested that creole writings and literatures of settler colonies receive considerably less attention than the 'purely' colonial, native voices even though post colonial approaches typically extract indigenous texts from colonial contexts using de-constructive strategies that de-familiarise conventional frameworks of reference. And, that 'hybridity' seems to engage post colonial critical practices far more readily than oppositional elements. As Alison Donnel puts it:

In current post colonial scholarship nearly all critical attention remains focused on those writers and works that show an obvious disengagement from colonial culture, either through a geographical distance (writings of exile and migration being particularly popular) or through a historical one. Writings that are distanced from colonialism in this way often offer models of identity formation and aesthetic innovation that can be
identified as emerging either 'after' or 'outside' colonial paradigms. In other words, they are more comfortably 'post' than they are colonial (Donnel, 1995, p. 102).

Martina Michel, on the other hand, celebrates what Alison Donnel regards as a possible shortcoming of the post-colonial approach, namely its tendency to interpret texts in modes that transcend or at least problematise their contexts of genesis. Privileging of the national or regional contexts, she believes, would result in the kind of compartmentalisation which the post-colonial approach, beginning with Said's work, set out to question (Martin, 1995, p. 85-86). She wonders if the expatriate and exiled authors should be barred from speaking about their places of origin. Is it not the kind of spatial and cultural determinism which imperialism in its heyday would enunciate as a policy? Furthermore:

Such arguments assume that the location of a writer determines his/her outlook. They presuppose that identities are tied to space, and that a pure and authentic standpoint can be developed, only if one remains rooted firmly within the territory of one's origin. (Martin, 1995, p. 87).

It is precisely when the West's domination threatens to saturate the globe with its technocratic and consumerist agendas in blatant disregard of national boundaries and cultural differences that aggressive narratives of exclusive identities and racism re-emerge in the West. It may be argued that these discourses and practices function to protect the West from the de-stabilising consequences of its global investments. They make it difficult for the Western people to embrace the effects of de-centering and cultural hybridisation in ways that may involve disavowal of chauvinism. Moreover, the appearance of defensive, anti-modernist discourses in parts of the third world presents the forces of imperialist globalisation with instances of 'artificial negativity' or pseudo-opposition, which are gratefully seized upon by the 'master strategists' to legitimise the intensity of normalising blitzkrieg.
Martina Martin insists that post colonial project 'does not deny the existence of boundaries and differences. On the contrary, it sets out to investigate the formation, function and effects of territorial demarcations' (Martin, 1995, p. 93). Martin seems to favour what Said has termed 'contrapuntual' approach to interpretation. This involves juxtaposition of 'discrepant experiences' and redeployment of texts in broader contexts to render visible intertwined layers of power relations and ideologies which elude orthodox strategies of interpretation, especially those which absolutise authorial intention or hold overly circumscribed definitions of cultural and territorial contexts. Said believes that the 'contrapuntual' approach has distinct advantages over the conventional ones:

Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. We may thus consider imperialism as a process occurring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of the empire itself. The important point.... is how the national British, French, American cultures maintained hegemony over the peripheries. How within them was consent gained and continuously consolidated for the distant rule of native peoples and territories? (Said, 1993, p.59)

Said's analyses have deciphered the structuring presence of 'imperial vision' even in texts that were presumed to embody purer traits of the European aesthetic. They have attempted to inscribe the presence of the colonised in the heart of metropolitan culture, a space from which dominant modes of interpretation have always sought to banish them. Accordingly, Martina Michel reiterates that 'post colonial studies need to resist fixing post colonial literature to any particular terrain and, instead, to set out to analyse how these literatures acquire meaning in interaction with a variety of contested territories' (Michael, 1995, p.94).

While the meta-theoretical concerns of the post colonial studies may be said to revolve around the colonial discourse theory and an unfinished critical project
whose aim it has been to scrutinise the foundations of the Western humanities institution, it remains an intensely contested, even chaotic enterprise. Not surprisingly, two broad tendencies, which may be termed Marxist/critical humanist and deconstructionist, appear to be vying for the hegemonic position. While this contestation over methodological and ideological agendas is a source of fertility, in extreme forms it can effect pre-mature closures, polarise dialectical formations and pre-empt adversarial reflection. Stephen Slemon proposes therefore that 'post-colonial studies...needs to become more tolerant of methodological difference, at least when that difference is articulated towards emancipatory anti-colonial ends' (Slemon, 1995, p.51). Only by resisting 'intolerant calls for homogeneity' could it cultivate greater sensitivity towards myriad forms of colonial domination and anti-colonial resistance. Furthermore, post colonial theory needs to become more local in emphasis and decrease its reliance on metropolitan theoretical authorities, otherwise, it might degenerate into 'academic glass bead game'. He concludes with the warning that, 'wherever a globalised theory of the colonial might lead us, we need to remember that resistance to colonial power always finds material presence at the level of the local' (Slemon, 1995, p.52).

Without necessarily lapsing into sceptical dogmas or anti-theoretical decisionism, post-colonial theorists need to be aware that their agendas could be over-determined by the twists and turns of the metropolitan debates. General references to 'hybridisation' and 'globalization' should not be allowed to legitimise the imposition of Western theoretical agendas on post colonial formations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Several critics have voiced their concern over the tendency to conflate post colonialism with post modernism and the associated tendency to regard post colonialism as a derivative of post modernism (Dayal, 1996, p.113). Such trends are correctly seen to perpetuate Europe's epistemological hegemony over oppositional developments which strive to affirm the relative autonomy of post-colonial politics and culture. While it may be true that post colonial projects
appropriate in part the critical space opened in the Western intellectual terrain by the
general scepticism regarding the Enlightenment project, there is no gainsaying the
fact that many of these projects draw their political elan from an earlier moment of
anti-colonial radicalism, and from crises that beset large parts of the post-colonial
world. However, it would be unfair to demand, as some critics do, that post colonial
theory provide definitive answers to the problems of the societies in question. In
order to do so, it would have to inflate itself into a 'grand theory' along the lines of
Marxism or Structuralism. It may be argued that careful analysis of existing solutions
and rigorous formulation of new questions are far from insignificant contributions,
especially when we know that 'authoritative' answers of the past which sought to
impose a quasi theological ban on new questions proved to be so disastrous.

Having said that, the question does remain of the diasporic post-colonials'
infatuation with the post structuralist and post modern vocabulary. Hence, a sceptic
might think that if liberal and Marxist universalisms considered the world a vast
laboratory which was expected to demonstrate the truth of propositions generated in a
particular, that is, European context, now a specifically Euro-American desire to
prove the untruth of those earlier propositions is expected to be fulfilled by the same
world. This world of passive others, whether conceived as the magical source of
manageable differences or a mobile hierarchy of modes of production; as a text that
casts 'empirico-transcendental' illusions or a more or less integrated world-system, is
expected to prove the validity of whatever model happens to authorise the hegemonic
definitions in a given period. Pliable others can have the verdict of passivity
reviewed or revoked by the court of metropolitan discourse alone, lest they be
accused of 'regressing' to pre-representational, savage states. In other words, the
desire to escape or oppose the West's cultural hegemony is liable to be considered
unsophisticated, not to say illegitimate, if it is not expressed in the authorised idiom.
Only authorised radicals performing tantalising feats of discursive subversion can
declare oppositional politics 'crude', futile and in any case impossible. Such
strictures, enunciated in the course of excruciatingly detailed meditations on the ubiquitousness of the dominant discursive formations, are quickly inflated into emblems of intellectual rigour. Thus, de-colonisation turns out to be an infinitely delayed, impossible task but one that is to be tirelessly pursued, somewhat like textual de-construction. Likewise, imperial violence is seen to infect the very pores of colonial and post-colonial literatures including the texts in non-metropolitan languages which fail to impress the naked eye with any significant effect of imperial presence. Such obsession with the power of the colonial discourse has prompted some critics to recall the excesses of the 'dominant ideology thesis'.

On the one hand, it is becoming clear that the humanist and dialectical approaches were in many ways deterministic and naively optimistic in their assessment of 'human nature' and 'objective tendencies', being unable on the whole to appreciate the complexity of the cultural and discursive contexts of 'struggle'. On the other hand, the discursive approach tends to misinterpret the necessarily incomplete and violent character of colonial subjugation as a form of normative integration allegedly secured through the ideological effects of colonial discourse. However, one must concede that such generalisations could be misleading because colonial domination encompassed a variety of arrangements in different contexts, with ideological and dominative modes often co-existing and reinforcing each other. Colonial discourse did indeed play an important role in certain arenas; colonial systems of education being the most notable example but not the only one. Other examples include the plethora of legal and administrative codes affecting the colonial subjects' daily lives and those classificatory instruments of governance which sought

---

11 Thus, having examined Homi Bhabha's interpretation of colonial encounters, Neil Lazarus (1994) concludes: 'Bhabha seems to me to overstate dramatically the ideological and cultural effects of colonialism, mistaking dominance for hegemony.' P. 217.
to grapple with the enormous complexity of India's castes, tribes, religions, customs etc. 12

But, having said that, it does appear that while the efforts of Bhabha and Spivak may have refined the overly deterministic and totalising conception of the imperial encounter, they nonetheless remain abstract and textualist in their emphasis, paying insufficient attention to the indigenous sources of cultural empowerment and political agency. Nicholas Thomas is among those who hope that post colonial approach would start to pay greater attention to non-metropolitan languages and popular culture, and to cultivate a more overtly material and political focus on forms of every day practice. Indeed, excessive preoccupation with the documents of imperial history may become counter-productive if it hinders engagement with the challenges of the present and the future. It is suspected that post colonial theory has yet to offer fruitful insights into the 'normal' politics of the post colonial societies where the authoritarian state, constitutional issues and 'mainstream' political parties continue to figure prominently in the public discourse (Ahuwalia, 1997). Similarly, Bill Ashcroft et al, stress in their concise survey of the recent theoretical debates in the post colonial field that:

the real contest (agon) post-colonial studies seeks to address is that between the conflicting participants in the imperial process and their residual legatees, not between contemporary schools of theory. The real concern of this oppositional subject are in danger of being reduced to merely another location in the academic institutionalised landscape, yet another mere invasive 'mapping' of the subdued and subjugated post colonial world. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995, p.11)

The persistence in the post-colonial theoretical field of anti-foundationalist resistance to conceptualising large political and economic structures may have something to do with the fact that post colonial theory emerged in an anti-economistic

---

12 For an examination of the intriguing ways in which Orientalism and various colonial fields of knowledge were entwined in the Indian context, see Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, eds., Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives On South Asia, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
theoretical climate of the New Left and post modernism. Furthermore, post colonial field has been most fully developed by literary scholars, who have been reluctant to make the break across disciplinary (even post-disciplinary) boundaries required to advance the argument' (Hall, 1996c, p.258). Like Said, Stuart Hall maintains that post colonial theorists must overcome their prejudice against systematic reflection on material factors if they want their interventions in the cultural-political field to have more than a polemical effect.

The work of Said and other figures associated with post colonial approach has performed the salutary function of rescuing the discussion of colonialism's cultural violence and political ramifications from the global, neutralising determinism of liberal and Marxist scholarship. Thanks to their efforts, empire is no longer the marginal issue which it was even in the oeuvres of such metropolitan radicals as Raymond Williams and Theodor Adorno. In the light of post colonial critique, what can no longer be denied is the singular failure of the metropolitan left to come to terms with its Eurocentric outlook and develop adequate understanding of colonialism which happened to be such a dramatic aspect of Europe's history. Gyan Prakash illustrates this problem with his characteristic eloquence:

> every internationalist project was forced to negotiate the interstitial space between capital and race, every expression of universal sisterhood or working - class solidarity had to confront the heterogeneity of the metropolitan subalterns. More frequently than not, such universalist expressions were unable to radically reconfigure the relationship between empire and the nation; they proceeded no further than imperial feminism, produced no larger project of revolutionary transformation than 'socialism in one country.' (Prakash, 1996, 195)

Critical theory in general and post colonial theory in particular has underscored the importance of cultural patterns and frameworks of enunciation which functionalist and positivist methodologies could not adequately register. While an idealistically inclined hermeneutics could interpret them, it would do so at too great a remove from the political realities. Even the supposedly neutral concepts of social science are now
seen to reinforce the power and cultural prestige of the West, especially when they are deployed in non-European settings. Similarly, the canonical texts of the so-called Western civilisation are seen to elevate a particular conception of high tradition as 'The Tradition' which places other traditions in subordinate positions, even silencing some. Thus, Western representations of the colonised are minutely interrogated and non-Western contributions to the Western traditions are highlighted. Discursive formations, theoretical paradigms and long standing cultural stereotypes are considered to embody power as such. It is convincingly argued that constitution of subjects through linguistic and disciplinary media is something to be studied in its own right rather than treated as a minor facet of political-economic or historical analyses. Thus, a major contribution of post modernism and post colonial theory has been their questioning of the totalising essentialism which even Marxist critiques of idealism failed to overcome and which sociological tradition continues to disseminate in various guises.

However, it would not be correct to say that post colonial theorists have overcome the totalising impulse. The most dramatic example is, of course, Edward Said's 'monolithic' notion of Orientalism which is said to dominate a more or less unified 'colonial world' in a relatively conventional model of conflict. Even Said's recent work, which questions cultural nationalisms from a liberal standpoint and appears to valorise hybridity and border-crossings is not without its totalising moments. Proceeding from the truism that all cultures in the contemporary world are hybrid, Said overlooks the disturbing question that if uneven power relations persistently deny agency and viable identities to so many people in the post colonial world, these people are not likely to be thrilled by the suggestion that all identities are hybrid and therefore everyone must join the carnival of difference? As Bart Moore-Gilbert puts it, there is the danger of a failure to see the condition of hybridity as disguising a system of hierarchies - organised in the field of global politics around the dominance of the U.S.; in the field of intellectual and creative work by the culture.
industries of the West' (Moore- Gilbert, 1994, p. 565). Likewise, Shohat urges a
careful, nuanced approach to the issue of hybridity:

Negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the
violence of neo-colonialism is crucial if hybridity is not to become a
figure for the consecration of hegemony. As a descriptive catch - all
term, "hybridity" per se fails to discriminate between the diverse
modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized
self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry,
and creative transcendence. (Shohat, 1992, 110)

Arguably, the most serious problems of Said's analysis of Western culture originate
in his 'attempt to construct a totalising master narrative whereby empire is the
determining key to Western culture' (Moore- Gilbert, p. 568). Thus, Said is seen to
reduce a whole complex of cultural problematics to a single cause' (Moore-
Gilbert, 1994, p. 568). Instead of pure, totalising conceptions reflecting transcendental
vision of the detached consciousness, there is need for more situated, 'contaminated
critiques'. However, 'contamination' is not to be fetishised and turned it into a
'stoppoint' with which to deconstruct every sign of totality regardless of the
political exigencies involved. For instance, it is one thing to criticise racist
stereotypes and assertions of cultural purity in the West, another to deny the victims
of colonialism the opportunity to reconstruct alternative bases of political and
cultural empowerment. In many cases, nationalist and religious movements mobilise
resistance against neo-colonial domination and consumerism and to dismiss them all
in an enlightened gesture of repugnance would be to perpetuate some of the oldest
Orientalist prejudices. In his scrupulous reflection on the question of essentialism,
Nicholas Thomas notes that mechanically de-constructive procedures generally fail
to understand the:

uses that essentialist discourses may have for people whose projects
involve mobilisation rather than analysis. Said might be able to argue
that nativism as a political programme or government ideology has
been largely pernicious, but nativist consciousness cannot be deemed undesirable merely because it is a historical and uncritically reproduces colonialist stereotypes. The main problem is not that this imposes academic (and arguably ethnocentric) standards on non-academic and non-Western representations, but that it paradoxically essentialises nativism by taking its politics to be historically uniform' (Thomas.1994.p.188)

This is an important point, given that the tendency in the postcolonial theory has been to juxtapose universalism with either minimally differentiated, coercively maintained ensembles or with utterly undecipherable, brute singularities. Thus, despite shrill dismissals of universalism as inherently dominiatory, fear of nativism refuses to disappear from post-colonial theory. Consequently, nativism continues to be branded as unsophisticated, static, undifferentiated and anti-Western, whether 'nativism' in question is Maori, Navajo or Santal. To quote Shohat again:

Post-colonial theory's celebration of hybridity risks an anti-essentialist condescension toward those communities obliged by circumstances to assert, for their very survival, a lost and even irretrievable past. In such cases, the assertion of culture prior to conquest forms part of the fight against continuing forms of annihilation. (Shohat,1992.p.110)

As Thomas points out, it is not necessarily the case that postcolonial cultures in their entirety are stamped by recognisably colonial or postcolonial preoccupations. However, 'If the time and consciousness of whole societies cannot be characterized as postcolonial, then particular critiques, images and narratives can be' (Thomas,1994.p.195). That, in my opinion, is fair characterisation of the postcolonial scene since it successfully negotiates the pitfalls of totalising impositions as well as particularistic reactions. More importantly, it does not foreclose the possibility of interaction between different elements of the postcolonial situation or obscure the need for more contextual studies of specific developments in different societies.

Postcolonial theorists can take comfort from the fact that other perspectives which have sought to offer encompassing conceptualisation of cultural and political
dynamics stand more or less discredited at present and an awareness is growing across disciplines that rigid methodological positions and narrow outlooks are not going to be useful in understanding the unprecedented changes occurring at global and local levels. It is possible that with its emphasis on cultural and theoretical hybridity, reflexivity and border crossings, postcolonial theory prefigures the future of theory in the next millennium.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
Bibliography


Adorno, Theodor. 1975. 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', New German Critique, no.6, Fall.


Adorno, Theodor. 1978c. 'Culture and Administration', Telos 37, Fall.


Dayal, Samir. 1996. 'Post-colonialism's Possibilities: Subcontinental Diasporic Intervention', *Cultural Critique*, no.33, Spring, pp.113-150.


Habermas, Jurgen. 1979. 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism', New German Critique, no. 17, Spring.


Jaggi, Maya. 1997. 'Stars are in the West', Guardian Weekly, August 28.


Jameson, Frederic. 1984. 'Post modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', New Left Review 146, July-August.


Lowenthal, Leo. 1991. 'Address upon Accepting the Theodor W. Adorno Prize', *New German Critique*, no. 54, Fall.


McHugh, Patrick. 1993. 'Ecstasy and Exile: Cultural Theory between Heidegger and Adorno', *Cultural Critique*, Fall.


Mishra, Vijay and Hodge, Bob, 'What is Post(-)colonialism?', *Textual Practice* Vol. 5, No. 3.


Morley, David. 1996. 'EurAm, modernity, reason and alterity: or, postmodernism, the highest stage of cultural imperialism?', in *Stuart Hall* London, Routledge.


O' Kane, John. 1984. 'Marxism, Deconstruction and Ideology: Notes Toward an Articulation', *New German Critique*, no. 33, Fall.


Piccone, Paul. 1972. 'Dialectic and Materialism in Lukacs,' Telos 1, Spring.


Prakash, Gyan. 1992 b. 'Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography', *Social Text* Vol.10, no.2&3, pp.8 -19.


Stephanson, Anders. 1988b. 'Interview with Cornel West', in Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon?*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.


Telos Staff. 1989-90. 'Does Critical Theory have a Future? The Elizabethtown Telos Conference', *Telos* no. 82, Winter.


