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IDEOLOGY AND CULTURAL THEORY

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Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London: New Left Books, 1976, pp. 191.

John Fekete, *The Critical Twilight: Explorations in the Ideology of Anglo-American Literary Theory from Eliot to McLuhan*, London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. xxviii, 300.

Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 217.

Literary criticism has always claimed a natural and spontaneous genesis as an academic discipline. I.A. Richards, the founder of modern critical methods, insisted that criticism was nothing but an exemplary reading of the literary text. Grounding itself in an activity as accessible and universal as reading, criticism virtually became a method without a methodology. Yet, as Terry Eagleton cogently remarks, out of the very absence of a self-conscious methodology in literary criticism emerges a tyranny of "literature": literacy, one of the most normal, widely diffused capabilities in advanced capitalist countries is transmuted into a privileged, esoteric act.¹ Literature becomes a mute presence dividing those who are able merely to read from the priestly interpreters who *read* the text. Thus, literature enshrouds itself in mystery, ambiguity and multiplicity: on the one side, it is open and accessible, on the other, remote and exclusive.

These contradictions deepened in the effort to develop a Marxist literary criticism. The traditional heritage — an idealist pseudo-Marxist criticism of the 1930's — had attempted to re-insert literature into a sociological matrix, to strip the veil of mystery from the text and reconsider it as a socio-economic product.² By contrast, the seminal achievement of post-war criticism, the "culture and society" tradition traced by Raymond Williams, delineated culture's romantic critique of an alienating and malevolent social milieu.

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Culture was, in Williams' trenchant phrase, "a court of human appeal" against the wholesale deformation and distortion of human capacities in advanced capitalist societies.³ In brief, Marxist literary criticism moved fitfully between two polarities: one tradition stressed the socio-economic character of literature and claimed to de-mystify its fetishized autonomy, a second tradition emphasized literature's fostering, development and expression of the unique human potential increasingly eclipsed in the administered universe of modern technological societies.

Furthermore, the difficulties of Anglo-American leftist literary critics were intensified by a persistent and deeply-rooted empiricist hostility to theory. Here the dominant institutionalized mode of literary criticism insisted on the luminous transparency of the text and rejected explicit theory as turgid, unnecessary and disruptive. At the same time, the theoretical complexity of European works — Georg Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel*, his *History and Class Consciousness*, Lucien Goldmann's *The Hidden God*, Walter Benjamin's innovative studies, Theodor Adorno's work on aesthetics, the playful explorations of Barthes' *Mythologies*, Jean Paul Sartre's *What is Literature*] — induced an awareness of methodological inferiority in Anglo-American critics. Against such a tradition their own theorizing seemed woefully inadequate. In this context one sector of the North American new left evolved a Marxist literary criticism with a definite orientation. Their attack on the hegemonic mode of literary criticism was intended to refute New Criticism's premise that the literary text was a self-contained linguistic object and to reject literature's claim to complete autonomy from social and historical processes. Literature, they argued, ought no longer to be regarded as the bearer of a privileged moment of truth. On the contrary, inscribed within it were the ideological assumptions of its socio-historical genesis.

A body of leftist literary criticism developed during the 1960's which assumed that ideological distortion was merely a form of mystification, a disguising of real, actual relations. Analyses were oriented towards an elucidation of the ideology in the *content* of the literary works. Not surprisingly, studies tended to isolate such phenomena as the anti-feminism of Alexander Pope's poetry, the elitism behind T.S. Eliot's cultural theory, the bankruptcy of the humanism in Matthew Arnold's notion of culture. Arnold's contention that culture provided a conflict-free realm which developed human capacities, for example, could be proven to be a veil concealing and ameliorating a society distorted by class conflict.⁴ To conceive ideology in this framework assumed primarily that it was situated in the false consciousness of the author and, secondarily, that it automatically re-appeared in the content of the literary work.

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However important this moment of criticism proved to be at a time when the terrain was shifting between a residual New Criticism and the more sophisticated emergent systems of Geoffrey Hartman's exhortation to move "beyond formalism", Northrop Frye's mythological structuralism or the phenomenological hermeneutics of J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man, it failed ultimately to come to terms with the complexity of the literary work. Why? In the first place, criticism directed merely at the content of the literary work risks the imposition of sociological criteria at the expense of the unique specificity of the entire intricate interplay of textual elements. Also, if ideology is taken to be false consciousness, then its genesis is located in the intention of the author and its de-mystification becomes a process of revealing authorial class-assumptions. In turn, such an orientation assumes a one-to-one relationship between ideology and its textual representation which collapses a whole series of mediations and dynamic processes into a frozen stasis. Finally, wider questions of methodology and organizing presuppositions all too often remain unexplored. By espousing a sociology of literature the literary left came dangerously close to reproducing the deterministic Marxism which it consciously sought to supersede.

Both John Fekete's *The Critical Twilight* and Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* represent efforts to break through this impasse, to raise questions of ideology and methodology on a theoretical plane, to move beyond the false problematic posed in a sociology of literature. Fekete's analysis is a theoretical critique of the roots of modern critical theory and, specifically, of three of its major practitioners, John Crowe Ransom, Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan. The theories of these three critics are moments in a process of integration whereby the contradictions between culture and civilisation which sustained the romantic critique of capitalism are progressively submerged into the one-dimensional unity of positivist rationality. This alarming phenomenon attains its zenith in the instrumental technologism of McLuhanist theory. In Fekete's words, "modern critical theory represents in part the assimilation, after a long period of tension, of romantic anti-capitalist 'culture' to reified capitalist 'civilization,' and the collapse of negativity into the positivity of neocapitalist rationality" (xxiii). Thus, the pluralist affirmation that contemporary literary theory expresses a vital rebirth of criticism beyond the formalism of Ransom's New Criticism is hollow: the later developments are merely the codification of formalist assumptions in an even more comprehensive scope.

The founding fathers of modern criticism, T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards, propagated a conceptual schema wherein the art object, and ultimately reality itself, were divested of any dynamic creative element to become objects for contemplative consumption. Ransom's protest against alienation in capitalist

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society, inscribed in his atavistic longing for the pre-capitalist agrarian society of the American *ante-bellum* south, generates a theoretical stance (designated by Fekete as "defensive reaction") which stabilizes a potential dialectic between two polarities. On the one side, literature is seen as a self-contained linguistic object, while on the other it becomes the crucially sustaining vehicle of subjective expression. This contradiction is never genuinely superseded in Ransom's criticism but is frozen within a literary theory which conceives art as the fusion of sensuous expression and conscious reflection. What is absent is any notion of diachronic process, and, specifically, any concept of the future or a "time which is not the perpetuation of the present" (24).

It is precisely this disjunction of the aesthetic realm from temporal process which opens up the possibility for Frye's mythological construct of an autonomous, neutral and self-sustaining verbal universe. Essentially, Frye's theory of archetypes is a de-historicization of aesthetic production: literature proceeds from other literature and any idea of transformative human activity is decisively precluded. With history banished from constitutive aesthetic activity, Frye's mythological structuralism normalizes the abnormal: "reification is admitted as a level of nature" (131). Instead of pushing beyond the formalism of Ransom's New Criticism, Frye eliminates its residual contradictions by hypostatizing aesthetics into a self-constituting realm. Although he would still insist that culture retains its ethical efficacy in society, his methodological assumptions imprison the aesthetic object in a self-perpetuating autonomy.

The third moment in the eclipse of the critical dimension is the complete dissolution of any tension between culture and civilisation within McLuhanist theory. The residual ambivalence between subjective expression and autonomous formalism in Ransom's formulations is absorbed into McLuhan's notion of a world which is at once a socio-biological unity and a self-constituting, technologically rationalized universe. McLuhan's universe occludes the contradictions of earlier theories by eradicating in a technological monad any distinction between subject and object. For instance, Eliot's dissociation of sensibility, born in the disjunction of head and heart, of rational thought and sensuous experience, initiated by the printing press, is overcome, McLuhan claims, by the vibrant immediacy of the electronic media. In this sense McLuhanist theory illustrates the final closure of culture's interrogation of society with the result that his artist merely "perpetuates the fetishized appearance of society and offers ways to identify with them" (179). The upshot is the disastrous reduction of the aesthetic realm to the crude facticity of lived experience in modern technological societies.

The cornerstone of Fekete's argument is its identification of these three theories as a process of reification in which the critical facets of cultural theory are increasingly eclipsed. If the Hegelian spirit can be taken as the pinnacle of

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the romantic impulse, then critical theory has returned to a pre-Hegelian moment. Hegel's critique of Schelling's religious mysticism can be reinvoked against McLuhan: his technological universe is "a night in which all cows are black".

If *The Critical Twilight* locates Anglo-American critical theory on a darkling plain, Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* discovers the possibility of a new theoretical perspective in French literary criticism. The intention of *Criticism and Ideology* is a rigorous materialist theory of ideology for literary criticism and much of Eagleton's inspiration derives from a figure on the periphery of French structuralism, Pierre Macherey, whose *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* is a sustained attempt to displace mimetic and subjective explanations of ideology.⁵ In Macherey's terms, ideology inheres in the literary text, but not in the sense of a veil over the real. Rather, the very effort by the text to write *ideology* turns against itself leaving the text splintered and contorted by the contradictions of its own production. In Eagleton's description, "the literary text, far from constituting some unified plenitude of meaning, bears inscribed within it the marks of some determinate absences which twist its very significations into conflict and contradiction" (89). Thus, ideology is not merely a reflection of a wider socio-historical context but a production, a structuring and destructuring process in which ideology and text are mutually constitutive.

Such a formulation, Eagleton emphasizes, radically re-orientates the role of the literary critic. The function of criticism can no longer remain the smooth transmission of text to reader, leaving the text intact, but instead becomes a further process of production. Criticism must "install itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to theorise it — to explain the ideological necessity of those 'not-saids' which constitute the very principle of its identity" (89). Criticism must not regard the text as a self-sufficient unity: its task is to articulate and re-thematize the *absences*, the hollowed elisions which fissure the text. Here Eagleton's theory can be seen as an effort to displace some deeply entrenched assumptions of English literary criticism. For one thing, his argument overturns the notion, canonized by Richards, Leavis and American New Criticism, that the critic elucidates the text without transforming or altering its formal integrity. For another, his emphasis on the production of ideology is intended to challenge the concept of a unified, autonomous, creative human subject as the matrix and locus of the literary work.

Having turned towards France for his inspiration it is no accident that Eagleton begins *Criticism and Ideology* with an extended attack on the most important figure in British Marxist literary criticism, Raymond Williams. According to Eagleton, Williams' populist humanism has locked his criticism into an impasse which left it powerless to transcend the idealist epistemology,

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the organicist aesthetics and the labourist politics of British socialism. He goes on to point out that when Williams began to write in the late 1940's he found himself in a vacuum: the determinist literary Marxism of Caudwell and the 1930's left appeared sterile and inadequate in the face of the practical criticism of Leavis and his *Scrutiny* group. That Williams re-invented the dissenting tradition of culturalist social criticism from the romantics, to Arnold, Mill, Ruskin, Carlyle, through D.H. Lawrence and Orwell, is a measure of the need to re-establish a critical community in the sphere of cultural studies. In addition, both *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* carried an insistent affirmation of the strong sustaining values in working-class communities and in the lived experience of common people. Yet, in Eagleton's terms, Williams' dualistic orientation towards an idealist intellectual tradition and the cultural values in "a whole way of life" inevitably led to a romantic populism which blocked the development of a genuine Marxist position.

Eagleton's critique of Williams is designed as a persuasive starting point to underscore the necessity of a rigorous scientific theory of ideology. At times, however, his analysis of Williams would seem to contradict his own stated assumptions. There is a distinctly idealistic tenor to Eagleton's methodological posture which argues, first, that Williams embodied the contradictions of the left at a certain conjuncture, and then proceeds to insist that he ought to have transcended that position. If Williams was the incarnation of specific contradictions in the British socio-cultural context, than such a complex must form the pressuring limits to his development. Moreover, Eagleton's critique gives a one-dimensional character to Williams' commitment to a populist humanism. Certainly Williams forcefully asserted the existential humanity of ordinary people in the face of a crude version of Marxism which saw them as manipulated wage slaves. Even so, an equal awareness of the distortion of human capacities, of alienation, is a tension which fractures his writings during the 1950's and 1960's.

The argument I am making can best be outlined with reference to Williams' novels. Like virtually every other commentator, Eagleton has used Williams' two novels, *Border Country* and *Second Generation*, as footnotes to his critical writings, as attempts to provide a phenomenology of the working-class community. In reality almost the reverse is true. If the novels chronicle the lived experience of working people, then the existential world they reveal is one in which desire is truncated and distorted, in which human capacities can only be actualized at great cost and only with considerable diminution. Recently Williams commented that Harry Price in *Border Country* was not simply an idealized figure of his father but the splintered half of a denser, more problematic character, Morgan Rosser.⁶ The two figures are scarred emblems of alienation: Rosser's restless aspirations are completely thwarted in the process of

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their actualization; Price's absorbed fulfillment is purchased with the suppression of deeply-felt longing. Similarly in *Second Generation* the figures of the working-class research student, Peter Owen, and the middle-aged established academic, Robert Lane, are fractured halves of one mutilated individual. The question here is not the aesthetic success of Williams' technique; obviously its insertion into a predominantly naturalist novel form vitiates much of its force. Rather, the point is that his novels represent a more negative assessment of lived experience in advanced capitalist society than some of his critical writings would suggest. Far from being mere phenomenological explications of his criticism they form a fissure, a contradiction in terms of his early work.

The texture of Williams' more recent books, *The Country and the City* and *Modern Tragedy*, has moved beyond populism to a more defined political stance. Clearly, the appearance of *Marxism and Literature* stands as a decisive stage in his development: since the English Marxist tradition had left Williams bereft of even a vocabulary to analyze aesthetic works, his latest book is his first engagement with the traditions of European theorizing. Moreover, his attempt is no mere dissemination of European theory but an intervention which reconstitutes many of his own earlier formulations. If his recent *Keywords* was a vocabulary of cultural studies' terminology, *Marxism and Literature* is an exploration of its critical concepts.

It should be observed that *Marxism and Literature* recapitulates Williams' earlier work on several levels. Initially, he challenges what he would call the "received tradition" in Marxist aesthetics, the notion that aesthetic phenomena occupy a secondary superstructural position to the definitive economic base. The pivotal issue, according to Williams, is not merely the determinism in such a model but "the reproduction, in an altered form, of the separation of 'culture' from material social life, which had been the dominant tendency in idealist cultural thought" (19). From this perspective, Marxist theory in its reductionist form parodies the conceptual impasse of idealist aesthetics. Williams argues that the point of departure towards a more adequate conceptual methodology must be a sense of language as a material social form which is neither a reflection nor an expression of reality or consciousness: "what we have, rather, is a grouping of this reality through language, which as practical consciousness is saturated by and saturates all social activity, including productive activity" (37). Language is not to be understood as frozen materiality but as an ongoing process of constitution, de-constitution and re-constitution.

Crucial to Williams' re-alignment of cultural theorizing is its relationship to the Gramscian notion of hegemony with the focus on the entire process of lived experience. In his words, "hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level

of 'ideology', nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as 'manipulation' or 'indoctrination'. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world." (110) The shift implied for cultural studies is a re-definition of culture as "the basic processes of the [social] formation itself and, further, related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of 'social' and 'economic' experience" (111). If the constitution of culture is an active process, then criticism must also be constitutive, never "a case of going 'beyond' the literary work, but of going more thoroughly into its full (and not arbitrarily protected) expressive significance" (167). By the same token, the emphasis Williams gives to hegemony is a gauge of his own development: hegemony articulates theoretically the process he groped towards describing in *Culture and Society* when he insisted that culture was "a whole way of life".

At this point Williams' evaluation of culture as a process of lived experience necessarily polemically engages the difficulties raised by structuralist analyses, especially the static grid which structuralism imposes on the multiplicity of experience: "the relatively mixed, confused, incomplete, or inarticulate consciousness of actual men in that period and society is thus overridden in the name of this decisive generalized system, and indeed in structural homology is procedurally excluded as peripheral or ephemeral" (109). In other words, structuralism substitutes synchronic stasis for the multiple inter-relations, the confusions, conflicts and contradictions which constitute the entirety of culture.

Here Williams' orientation radically opposes Eagleton's structuralist conceptualizations. To a degree Eagleton's assertion that the text remains hollowed, partial, fissured and his stress on the production of ideology, encapsulates a notion of culture as constituting process. Moreover, the re-constituting task of the critic in forcing the text to know its own absences represents a rupture of the traditionally passive posture of criticism as sophisticated consumption of the text. Yet, paradoxically enough, the tenor and direction of his other analytic categories undermines much of the innovative and disruptive potential in *Criticism and Ideology*.

This anomaly can be explained by observing that Eagleton's structuralist methodology effects a reduction of experience and of history. It substitutes for the density of reality a schematic abstract model which he calls the "literary mode of production" (or LMP).⁷ On the whole the LMP functions as a *sign* whereby the surface phenomena of the literary work are *signifiers* representing a more profound underlying *signified*. Here the fundamental question confronting the critic is the discovery of an ultimately determining instance which may represent the signified to the other more insubstantial signifiers in the text (events, details, characters, etc.). Whereas an economicist Marxism gave

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priority to a purely formal unity of correspondences between abstracted socio-economic elements, Eagleton assigns precedence to the atemporal system or structure of the LMP.

The precise deformation such a methodological device produces on the multiple complexities of the concrete literary work manifests itself in Eagleton's analyses of organic ideology. He contends that the notion of organicism, of an inter-related unity, was translated into a cultural metaphor to articulate the critique of a splintered and alienating market society: "as Victorian capitalism assumes increasingly corporate forms, it turns to the social and aesthetic organicism of the Romantic humanist tradition, discovering in art models of totality and affectivity relevant to its ideological requirements" (103). A crucial weakness, however, in his analyses of organicism in the works of writers from Matthew Arnold to D.H. Lawrence is the emphasis on the *presence* of organic form and not on its transformation during those sixty years. Originally, the romantic notion of organic form stressed evolution, growth or temporal development. By the twentieth century the diachronic element had been eliminated; in the neo-classic formulations of T.S. Eliot and T.E. Hulme organicism came to signify static, ahistorical synchrony. This closure is, as Fekete argues, a transitional moment in the hypostatization of the aesthetic object into a formal unity for critical consumption. For while the presence of history, of development, of process, is ineluctably diminished and ultimately precluded from organic form, Eagleton's methodology focuses simply on the ideological *existence* of organicism.

In addition, the problems raised by structuralist analyses extend into their notions of praxis, subjectivity and the human subject. Part of Eagleton's project is to displace the expressionist conception that literature has its genesis in the creative energies and subjectivity of the author. Inspired by Macherey's writings and Althusser's essay on ideological state apparatuses, Eagleton's formulation of a literary mode of production is intended to supersede the category of the individual subject as the locus of aesthetic production. As a radical interrogation of subjectivist and expressionist aesthetic theories his project has its moment of truth. Even so, the implications of structuralism do not merely throw the existence of a unified, integrated human subject into question. History and the irreducibility of human praxis are abolished and the terrain shifts to, in Fekete's aphoristic phrasing, the death of man announced by structuralism.

Here the problem of *Criticism and Ideology* intersects with the anti-structuralist orientation of *The Critical Twilight*. Like structuralism, Fekete argues, the modern tradition of literary criticism, with its emphasis on coherence, integration, harmonization and equilibrium finds itself on methodological assumptions which annul human praxis: "increasingly

systematically, the tradition embraces the 'whole,' and structures a totality without struggle and historical movement, that is, without the conditions necessary for the development of the historical subject."⁸ Ironically, the tradition of literary theory which claimed to protect, to foster and develop human capacities is complicit in the disappearance of the human subject into the stasis of the structuralist paradigm.

The *leitmotif* of structuralist methodology is the reduction of ontology to a scientific epistemology. Structuralism collapses the multiple relations of lived experience, of a constitutive process of totalization, into ossified, frozen levels of signification. By displacing the diachronic dimension in order to isolate the synchronic, it prohibits any interplay with a still-to-be-realised future, thereby denying the supersession of the present. In Fekete's words structuralism cannot articulate "an active, value-based response in line with real human possibilities" (197). The structuralist insistence on *coupure*, on epistemological break, as the meaningful form of historical transition precludes the constituting presence of the future, locking human activity into a perpetual present and condemning man to a future which is a mirror image of what exists. Such a methodology denies what Williams has designated as the interpenetration of residual and emergent culture, or what Fekete calls the subjunctive mode of culture — the articulation of qualitatively new needs, longings, values.

The critique of structuralism in *The Critical Twilight* is presented with a clarity and rigour unusual in literary studies. Yet, at times, it risks veering into abstract negation. No doubt part of this tone derives from the urgent necessity Fekete feels to confront the increasing popularity of structuralist methodology in the Anglo-American context during the last decade. The consequence of this urgency, however, is a conception of human praxis which elides or diminishes the very notions of alienation he cogently outlines elsewhere. On the most basic level, his argument emphasizes structuralism's failure to perceive that the systems it analyzes are themselves the products of objectified human activity: "it is forgotten that these structures and systems are not dead things, but all the products and forms of human activity, living complexes of human relations and objective mediations which support much human aspiration and intention and are every minute sustained in their human meaning by human consensus." (196) In so far as this commentary recognizes the human praxis implicit in every *structure* it is a necessary and valid critical moment.

However, attention is shifted away from the other side, that is, from the *ossification* of the praxis-project. If the systems and structures human beings inhabit are felt to be dead things, then it is precisely because their own praxis is apprehended as alienated objectifications of their original self-actualizing projects. Alienation and reification are born at the moment when human praxis is turned against itself, when man's own activity is perceived as inert otherness.

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For this reason the weight of synchrony encapsulates a critical perceptual moment, it is the point at which the totalizing project reverses itself in de-totalization. In literary terms, it is conceivable at this moment in the production of the text that it turns back against itself creating the fissures, the fractures and the absences.

The pivotal issue here is not that the moment of ossified structuration receive priority, but rather that its full weight be recognized in a constitutive process of totalization, de-totalization and re-totalization. On the theoretical level Fekete's effort to displace structuralism is often in danger of creating a dialectic which emphasizes the moment of praxis at the expense of hollowing out the pressuring weight of its ossification. Ultimately the necessary supersession of the structuralist problem will only proceed from an awareness of the *need*, of the moment of truth, which that theory fulfilled.

A similar problem re-emerges in the question of the de-centered subject, primarily in the Lacanian attack on substantialist notions of integrated consciousness. According to Fekete, Lacanian psychoanalysis represents a further variant of structuralism's elimination of the subject, and "the point that must be made is that the subject, today displaced from the centre by the reification of social relations, can in fact be centered: not the epistemological subject of structuralism, but the ontological subject of historical praxis." (197) Again the issue is one of emphasis, but it must also be stressed that the process and motion of human praxis necessarily involves de-centring the subject. Or, in Sartre's succinct description: "the problem is not to know whether the subject is 'decentered' or not. In a sense, it is always decentered There is a subject or subjectivity if you prefer, from the instant in which there is an effort to surpass while conserving the given situation. The real problem is this *dépassement*."9 Perhaps this difficulty can most clearly be delineated by refocusing on Fekete's own praxis-project: the trajectory of his polemic against structuralism, with its accent on the re-instatement of creative human activity, submerges the full weight of the moment of objectified praxis.

Traces of these disputes remain inscribed in the general debate on Marxist aesthetic theory. Fekete's aesthetics have their genesis in a Lukácsian model which contends that the act of creating or internalizing aesthetic objectifications homogenizes previously disparate human capacities to precipitate a cathartic effect: "in experiencing the work of art, the person who receives it, like the one who created it, 'suspends' everyday life and rises to the level of humanity as a whole." (225) The shock of recognition in the aesthetic rupture of fetishized perception carries with it a moral imperative for a qualitatively transformed world. If the outline of Lukács' aesthetics is distinct, however, the moment of intersection between human subject and art object remains opaque. For, as Fekete has powerfully argued, the crucial ideological distortion modern

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bourgeois theory effected was a reduction of the inter-relations between man and art to a reified act of consumption and appropriation. An ethical art, as Brecht's insistence on *Verfremdung* or estrangement indicates, demands a rupturing of perception which excludes simple appropriation on the part of the receiver. At this point, therefore, Brechtian aesthetics vigorously opposes the sort of identification with unified, heroic figures in the novel which would involve nothing but vicarious spiritual agitation on the part of the reader.¹⁰ Yet this type of engagement is precisely where the Lukácsian concept of the closed formal totality of the art object (the very qualities through which art interrogates the fragmentation of lived experience) would seem to inhibit active response.

These difficulties ought not to suggest that the thematics of *Criticism and Ideology*, *The Critical Twilight* and *Marxism and Literature* imply an impasse in Marxist aesthetics which condemns us to relive the earlier debates about realism and modernism among Lukacs, Adorno, Brecht and Benjamin. Of decisive importance is the supersession both of the notion of art as a closed formal unity, forbidding access, and the notion of art merely as an open, fissured form which ultimately risks inscribing in itself the perceptual fragmentation of what Guy Debord has cogently designated *la société du spectacle*. The need to re-thematize the moral and intellectual imperative in art emerges with increasing urgency in the one-dimensionality of the post-industrial world: how can aesthetic experience disentangle the seamless web of such a totally administered universe? It may be exactly possible here to recapture the potentially subversive element from Macherey's formulations. If the text is hollowed, fissured, structured in part by its absences, and if the aesthetic encounter re-invents those elisions, then the interaction of art and receiver may provoke a process of totalization in which both are actively constituted and constitutive.

The act of totalization could be the critical point at which aesthetic experience ruptures the fetishized perception of uninterrupted reification, permitting the incursion of the apprehension of a qualitatively transformed future. To re-invent the aesthetic form in a renewed process of totalization, de-totalization and re-totalization, in an erotic interplay which resembles the flux and flows Gilles Deleuze has polemicized for, would also be to actualize the utopian imagination which Fekete speaks of in the final chapter of *The Critical Twilight*. Ultimately it may be to perceive within the chiaroscuro of the past and present the whole spectrum of an emancipated future.

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Notes

1. *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 164.
2. For a critical evaluation of this tradition's major figure, Christopher Caudwell, see Francis Mulhern, "The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell," *New Left Review*, 85, 1974, pp. 37-58.
3. *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, p. 18.
4. This tendency of criticism is apparent in *The Politics of Literature*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter. New York: Random House, 1970. *Weapons of Criticism*, ed. Norman Rudich. Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976, follows a similar orientation but in a more theoretically sophisticated manner.
5. See Eagleton's assessment of Macherey, "Pierre Macherey and the Theory of Production," *Minnesota Review*, 5, Fall 1972, pp. 134-44.
6. *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 299.
7. *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 44-63.
8. *The Critical Twilight*, p. 195.
9. "Replies to Structuralism: An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre", trans. Robert D'Amico, *Telos*, 9, Fall 1971, p. 113.
10. See Brecht's arguments in *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: New Left Books, 1977, pp. 68-85.