



Canadian Journal of
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL
THEORY **Marx and Marxism**
Reconsidered

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MARX AND MARXISM RECONSIDERED

Editor's Note

As announced in our last winter issue, this number of the *Journal* is devoted, in part, to papers and commentaries from a conference held in San Francisco last March under the sponsorship of the *Conference for the Study of Political Thought*. This conference, organized around the theme of "Marx and Marxism Reconsidered", generated a wide variety of commentary not only on the analytical edifice of Western Marxism but also on the political stance appropriate to a revitalized Marxist tradition. Consistent with the *Journal's* aim of both encouraging debate among competing theoretical perspectives and elaborating the diverse forms of authentic intellectuality, the *Journal* is pleased to publish selections from the conference proceedings. In revised form, these selections contribute to the ongoing exchange which is central to the deliberative and critical dimensions of a vital intellectual sensibility.

MARXISM AND THE REIFICATION OF POLITICS

Ronald F. Perrin

Reconsideration and Revision

Let us begin on a note of candor. To address the problem of reification is not merely an admission of the unfinished nature of the Marxian enterprise, but the recognition of its present instability. More than a century after Marx and Engels initiated their critique of bourgeois ideology the capacity to distinguish between the authentic and the false in the publics' understanding of its interests still eludes us. Understandably, the situation has prompted Professor Leiss to suggest that, "the received notions of commodity fetishism and reification in radical theory may well be obsolete."¹ The sources of his skepticism are not difficult to document. Instead of the classical Marxist projection of a society increasingly polarized between the interests of capital and labour, we witness the continued and escalating fragmentation of society. What is more, these various factions and groupings articulate demands which are, in their immediate context, equally legitimate. How does one arbitrate, for example, between labour's demand for salary increments that will keep pace with inflation and the demand of environmentalists for a curb on productive growth? Where is the truth and where is the false in the need of elderly home owners for some measure of property tax relief and the competing interest of the poor in those basic social services that are often funded through such taxation? It is not enough to respond with the tired litany that "these conflicts are grounded in the structural contradictions of monopoly capital". In theory and in practice they are central antagonisms for Marxism as well. In theory, because Marxism is the attempt to comprehend them; in practice, because Marxism maintains the promise of their resolution.

However, despite the "evidence", I am not ready to concur with Leiss's prognostication. Insofar as the concepts of commodity fetishism and reification reflect the intention to identify, within the production and circulation of commodities, a reascent human substance, they are essential concepts for any radical theory that would claim a Marxist lineage. I recognize however, that this

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is a visceral response and not a counter-argument. The real case for this "reconsideration" of Marxism initially rests with the fact that the need for such systematic self-evaluation is a theoretical commonplace.

Notwithstanding its claim to maintain a critical posture towards history Marxism has its own genesis and future within history. Like the humanistic sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) to which it is kindred, Marxism contains an irreducible core of relativity.² However, Marxist theory remains unique where it knows itself, *i.e.* where it acknowledges that its understanding is prepared and shaped by its subject matter, even as it struggles to make the historical event meaningful.

Nonetheless, as a theory of society, there was a sense in which the original Marxist dialectic had its object outside of itself. The ideas and events that engaged Marx's attention were manifestations of the bourgeois stage of history. Our present situation is different in one important respect; to the extent that Marxism would now address the full range of humanity's social organization it must be prepared to encounter its own history in such varied settings as the official socialism of the Marxist-Leninist states, the dispersed radical opposition in the United States and Canada, and the recent development of a Euro-Communism.

The process of reconsideration is further aggravated by its immediate practical consequences. Let me anticipate one possible response to this conference by noting that those who would embark upon the reconsideration of Marxism had best prepare themselves against the charge of revisionism. Whenever, as it most assuredly must, Marxism takes its place alongside those political alignments that are seeking to direct the course of human affairs the reconsideration of its theory will force the revision of its practice. To be sure, the cry of "revisionist" is, more often than not, the cloak of sectarian nonsense. Yet it does reflect a genuine conflict between the need to maintain some degree of theoretical integrity (to keep one's wits together) while maintaining a responsive flexibility towards new circumstances and possibilities. The capacity to sustain this tension is the mark of any dynamic political programme.

The test of Marxist theory, then, does not lie with the ability of its adherents to preserve their principles above or against the shifting interests of society. It rests instead with our competence in locating within the theory the resources for its own regeneration. My purpose here is to make some contribution to this effort by reconsidering Marxism through the prism of its own conceptual framework. My presumption is simple, namely that the most telling appraisal of Marxism's present situation will be one that locates itself within the generation of Marxist theory and practice. If there is anything contrary to the spirit of Marx it is the notion that one can assume an Archimedean point *vis à vis* the meaning of historical and social events.³

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Reification and Commodity Fetishism: Genus and Species

The suggestion that the notion of reification is obsolete strikes me as premature since it presupposes that clear understanding of the concept's significance which still eludes us. In part, the elusiveness of the term is a feature of its problematic relationship to the analysis of commodity fetishism. Lukács, for example, takes Marx's account of the fetishism of commodities as a description of "the basic phenomenon of reification",⁴ and Marcuse also turns to the account in Volume I of *Capital* as the place where Marx most clearly expounded the process of reification.⁵ Yet it is clear from a full reading that both Lukács and Marcuse find in the fetishism of commodities only a particularly instructive illustration of reification and not an exhaustive account of its significance. Implicit in their arguments is the claim that the concept of reification enables us to address those social relationships which lie beyond the immediate domain of commodity production and exchange but have been endowed with that pseudo-objective character which one finds in the fetishized commodity. Both men, for example, make reference to the reified conception of natural law in Stahl's positive philosophy of the state.⁶ However, as far as I can determine, in neither case is the distinction between commodity fetishism and reification fully developed. As a result there is a tendency in Marxist theory (as we see from Leiss's conjunction) to conflate the two terms, limiting the significance of reification to the analysis of economic relationships within capitalism and their most direct reflections in the attendant (bourgeois) ideology. The thrust of this approach is to undermine the employment of the concept in a more reflective undertaking, *i.e.*, one that would consider the process of reification as a characteristic of the Marxist, as well as the bourgeois, experience.

What then is the relationship between commodity fetishism and reification? As Marx developed his analysis of the former he drew attention to the distinction between commodities and objects *per se*. "There is a physical relation between physical things. It is different with commodities."⁷ The commodity, as an expression of a "value-relation between the products of labor," has "absolutely no connection with (its) physical properties".⁸ Here the value-relation in question is *exchange value* and it is this, labour in exchange for capital, that assumes with the fetishism of commodities the form of an objective character "stamped upon the product of that labor".⁹

We ought not, however, to allow the distinction between physical objects (the things of nature) and commodities to eclipse the obvious fact that "a commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us ..."¹⁰ If this were not the case then the fetishism of commodities would be simply one more form of mystification. The "secret" of commodity fetishism is that, as the form of use-value in capitalist society, the commodity gives objective form to the social

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relationship between otherwise isolated individuals. "Commodities are things, and therefore without any power of resistance against man.... In order that these objects may enter into relation with one another as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another, as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and part with his own, except by means of an act done by mutual consent."¹¹ Thus the objective character of commodities is fundamental to Marx's analysis. We could go further and note, with Marcuse, that it is the objective character of use-value that enables Marx to speak of human needs and capacities as "objective powers". This is not my concern here; the point is to indicate the subtle, but crucial, difference between the terms of this analysis and the circumstances which are appropriate to the process of reification.

With reification we are not exclusively preoccupied with a state of consciousness that attributes to *the object* material properties that are in fact the contribution of an acting subject. More often than not, the situation is quite the opposite. A process (such as technology) or an idea (the "rights" of property) is perceived as an indeterminate force, empowered to shape and direct human affairs while remaining impervious to social intervention or control. In this instance, to paraphrase Marx, we are not concerned with the products of men's hands but with the results of human thought and will; mental constructs and states that seem to extend beyond the bounds of any historical determination.

So understood, the process of reification does indeed have a much more extensive sphere of reference than the phenomenon of commodity fetishism. With reification we find human beings enslaved by their ideas; with commodity fetishism they are dominated by their things.

Let me suggest that the generic relationship of reification to commodity fetishism can be clarified by reference to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In his "Observation on the Antinomy of Pure Reason" Kant cautions that, "if from our own concepts we are unable to determine anything certain, we must not throw the blame upon the object as concealing itself from us. Since such an object is nowhere to be met with outside our idea, it is not possible for it to be given."¹² In this manner Kant seeks to undermine the dogmatic solution to the antinomies, *i.e.* the response that involves the transformation of, "our idea into a supposed representation according to the laws of experience."¹³ From this perspective one might characterize the whole of Marx's work as an extended confrontation with the "dogmatic solution" of bourgeois society, that is, with the demand that every dimension of experience (education, culture, the family, etc.) submit to the laws of the market. This perspective, however, also provides a framework within which we can situate Marx's analysis, enabling

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us to observe that the concern with commodity fetishism bespeaks its *specificity* with respect to that situation in which the instrumentalities of the market place give a definite cast to the reified structure of life and consciousness in bourgeois society. By preserving the critical significance of "reification" beyond Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism it becomes possible to address the question of how the oppositional view that was developed on the basis of Marx's critique could reduce its understanding to the twin dogmas of the proletarian revolution and the withering away of the state.

The Reified Proletariat

The seeds for a reified conception of the proletariat are planted in Marx's earliest commentaries on the state and politics. Most striking, perhaps, is the discussion in the *Introduction to the Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*. There the language clearly evokes the proletarian class while the context of the argument indicates just as clearly that the conditions for the formation of that class have yet to be met. "No particular class in Germany has the consistency, the severity, the courage or the ruthlessness that could mark it out as the negative representative of society." "[T]he proletariat is coming into being in Germany only as a result of the rising *industrial* development," a development that in 1843 could only be anticipated by Marx. Finally there is Marx's revealing claim that the proletariat "can no longer invoke a *historical* but only a *human* title...."¹⁴ Nonetheless, Marx concludes that the proletariat is "the dissolution of the existing world order".¹⁵

In commenting on these early characterizations of the proletariat Leiss has noted "a propensity in Marxian theory to assume the existence of a class which was autonomous *a priori*," a class that "would be, as it were, the material medium of Marxian theory, a medium already prepared for the theory which was the simple expression of its objective being."¹⁶ That there is such a propensity is, of course, one of my contentions in this essay. However, Leiss's observation is a bit too indiscriminate. The idea of the proletariat eventually did find its objective expression in the industrial working force of early capitalism. What strikes me as crucial is the fact that in the remarks cited above Marx was describing the proletariat in a context devoid of any specific economic considerations. Here the concern is with the proletariat as the agent of revolutionary change. In this context Leiss is correct; the proletariat exists only in theory.

Nonetheless, the theory is not drawn from wholecloth. On the contrary it represents Marx's considered assessment of the *political* revolution in France, the revolution of the bourgeoisie. One fundamental feature of the bourgeois revolution was a multiplicity of particular interests and classes, with each class

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claiming to represent itself as the general "emancipator" of society. "For the storming of this emancipatory position, and *hence for the general exploitation of all spheres of society in the interests of its own sphere* ... all the defects of society must conversely be concentrated in another class ... so that liberation from that class *appears* as general self liberation."¹⁷ (my emphasis) These, Marx argues, are the circumstances upon which a "partial, merely political revolution are based".¹⁸

Thus, in drawing upon the experience of France, the most fully developed political practice available, Marx concluded that every political representation of the general will was, at bottom, a *misrepresentation*. The conclusion of his essay followed inexorably; the *absence* of any clearly developed political state in Germany, together with the *presence* of a dissolute feudal order, established the necessary political conditions for the formation of a universal class. This is what is signified in Marx's claim that, "Germany has accompanied the development of modern nations only with the abstract activity of thought without playing an effective role in the real struggle of that development (but) it has, on the other hand, shared the *sufferings* of that development, without sharing in its enjoyment or its partial satisfaction."¹⁹

It is difficult to avoid the sense that Marx viewed the underdeveloped character of Germany's political evolution as a virtue insofar as it prevented the dispersal of her revolutionary potential in a variety of piecemeal programmes and struggles. Indeed, this may have contributed to the enthusiasm with which he portrayed the German proletariat: a class with neither "historical title" nor "particular interests". However, the real problem lies elsewhere, namely, with his limited conception of the political state.

Throughout the essay on Hegel's *Philosophy of Law* Marx presumed a fundamental and unmediated dichotomy between the political state and civil society (*bürgerlichen Gessellschaft*). It was a distinction that he developed most explicitly in the *Essay on the Jewish Question*. There he was concerned to demonstrate that the universality of rights proclaimed in the bourgeois philosophy of the state was without any inherent substance. The real substance of life was contained in the fractured civil society that had emerged from the feudal order.

Where the political state has attained its true development, man — not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life* — leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life: life in the *political community*, in which he considers himself a *communal being*, and life in *civil society*, in which he acts as a *private individual*, regards

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other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.... In his *most immediate* reality, in civil society, man is a secular being. Here, where he regards himself as a real individual, and is so regarded by others, he is a *fictitious* phenomenon. In the state, on the other hand, where man is regarded as a species-being, he is the imagined member of an illusory sovereignty, is deprived of his real individual life and endowed with an unreal universality.²⁰

Marx's indictment continues to resonate wherever the state persists in mocking humanity's most genuine aspirations towards fellowship and community; but his claim compounds the dilemma, it does not point the way to a resolution. By asserting that this represents the "truth" of the political state, the possibility of achieving any universal human emancipation within the structure of the state is precluded. By definition the state is consumed (theoretically and practically) by the play of the particular interests within the realm of *Gesellschaft*. Yet the state "occupies" this particular moment in history. In limiting his political analysis to the circumstances appropriate to the French revolution and its aftermath Marx was forced to project the alternative to the state in a class that would somehow escape history. The reified proletariat, a "class that is in but not of civil society", is the logical corollary to a conception of the political order which has forgotten that the nature of that order is not fixed but dialectical, that the laws of its development are not physical but human, that its truth is not to be discovered but rather, to be made.

To accept these early formulations as Marxism's final statement on the meaning of the state and politics is to remain at an impasse. The proletarian revolution will occur only with the absence of the nation-state since wherever the labouring class is brought into the realm of civil society (where its existence as a particular interest within civil society is recognized and guaranteed by law) the revolutionary transformation is preempted. The paradox brings the history of Marxism into sharp relief and forces that encounter with its own past which I have already indicated. Let me turn to the two poles of that history — the Soviet Union (which continues to dominate the intellectual and moral horizon of the Left) and North America (where Marxism continues to exist only as theory).

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The Practice of Reification

The natal environment of the Bolshevik revolution bore a striking resemblance to the world of Marx's early political writings. Marx's following appraisal of Germany, for example, could well have been an observation on the state of Russian society between 1905 and 1917. "It is therefore not only the ... kings who accede to the throne *mal a propos*; every section of civil society goes through a defeat before it has celebrated victory, develops its own limitations before it has overcome the limitations facing it and asserts its narrow-hearted essence before it has been able to assert its magnanimous essence."²¹ Furthermore, the development of the Russian proletariat (a minority before the revolution and a class without an industrial base after the havoc of civil war) was every bit as problematical as it was in Marx's Germany.

We should not be altogether surprised, then, to find Soviet Marxism recapitulating in practice the limitations that Marx ascribed to the 19th century bourgeois state as well as the ambiguities in Marx's political analysis. Lenin's address to the Eighth Congress of Soviets is instructive on both accounts. In the first instance the sovereignty of the proletariat is legitimized by its antithetical relationship to capitalism.

The dictatorship of the proletariat has been successful because it has been able to combine compulsion with persuasion. The dictatorship of the proletariat does not fear any resort to compulsion and to the most severe, decisive and ruthless forms of coercion by the state. *The advanced class, the class most oppressed by capitalism, is entitled to use compulsion, because it is doing so in the interests of working and exploited people, and because it possesses means of compulsion and persuasion such as no former class ever possessed.*²² (my emphasis)

The argument recalls the setting of the Bolshevik ascendancy. On the terrain of a shattered civil society a courageous minority succeeded in empowering itself and representing its interests as universal. The *formal* medium of its rule became, admittedly, the Party rather than the State. It is precisely here where the ambiguity cuts deepest. Like the bourgeois state, the Party presupposed those distinctions within civil society that were the necessary substance of its administrative (and in this instance, dictatorial) rule. However, consistent with the devaluation of politics that was inherent to Marx's analysis of the state, Lenin turned away from the political resolution in favour of that policy of

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bureaucratic economism which continues to mark Soviet domestic policy.

We have, no doubt, learnt politics: here we stand as firm as a rock. But things are bad as far as economic matters are concerned. *Henceforth, less politics will be the best politics.* Bring more engineers and agronomists to the fore, learn from them, *keep an eye on their work*, and turn our congresses and conferences, not into propaganda meetings but into bodies in which we can learn the business of economic development.²³ (my emphasis)

Thus, there was to be no withering away of the state but instead the substitution of the Party as the official overseer of society.

With Marx the idea of the proletariat was significant to the extent that it informed his critique of society, enabling him to highlight the purely formal character of bourgeois justice. With Lenin the critical edge is lost. Rather the "proletariat" becomes an instrument of policy superimposed upon the Russian experience with implications that tend towards the surreal. By denying from the outset its own political character the Soviet government remains theoretically and practically incapable of translating the diverse interests of Russian society into a public form or language. The issue was stated cryptically by a colleague of mine in Soviet Studies at the University of Montana: "The Soviets are as congenitally incapable of resolving the problem of human rights as we are of resolving the problem of unemployment." Against the force of a politically effaced state apparatus, the opposition can represent itself only in private — in the moral protests of the individual conscience. There remains little prospect for a praxis that might mediate between the opposing "moments" of the bureaucratized state and civil society.

The State Before Society

Is the situation really different in the West? It becomes increasingly evident that in North America, at least, a heavily bureaucratized state also functions, with less and less success, to administer the affairs of an apparent multiplicity of social groups and interests. Thus, the socialist and corporate states appear to occupy parallel, if not intersecting, trajectories. However, the appearance is misleading insofar as it obscures historical differences that may yet prove decisive.

In North America the political structure of the state was fashioned under

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conditions vastly different from those that prevailed in either revolutionary Europe or Russia.²⁴ Specifically, the North American setting was predominated, not by the forces set in motion with the destruction of an *ancien régime*, but by the dynamic of settlement and expansion. The political order derived its functional legitimacy from its capacity to control and assimilate the waves of immigration rather than the ability to facilitate the transformation of an indigenous peasantry into an industrial army. In both Canada and the United States the recurring preoccupation with federalism, secession and separatism bespeaks the absence of any inherent social substance. In short, the creation of the state preceded the formation of society and this unique chronology continues to give the two nations a much different composition than those societies which Marxists have traditionally taken as the model for their political understanding and strategies.

In that model political authority rests upon the capacity of one class to represent its interests as universal. In the North American case the presumption is that such a universionality is, in principle, inaccessible.

From the birth of the nation, a hierarchy of local governments, formerly sovereign and autonomous, interposed itself between the individual and the supreme power of the state ... the constitution took form as a series of compromises between competing interests — large states versus small, agriculture versus commerce, slave holding versus free labor. The structure of the Union was designed to balance these interests, giving each a voice but none command. The conception of politics as a conflict of more or less permanent groups was thus introduced into the foundation of our government.²⁵

As Professor Wolff's analysis indicates, the interests and needs of the citizenry in the Federalist setting gain political expression, not through the organized voice of a class or party that implicitly or explicitly views itself as the bearer of a general will, but rather through forms that are at bottom sectarian.

To be sure, Marxist critics have had little difficulty demonstrating that, from the beginning, the assumption of the absolute and inviolable rights of private property functioned as the reified universal within the statements of the founding fathers, (*e.g.* Madison's observation in the Federalist #10 that "the diversity in the faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate is no less an insuperable obstacle to the uniformity of interests. The protection of

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these faculties is the first object of government.''²⁶). Nonetheless the failure to translate this critique into any practical movement or form reflects a failure to concretely address the intrinsic capacity of the political structure to deflect the radical alternative into the play and conflict of particular interests.

Again, the resemblance between this state of affairs and the circumstances which Marx drew upon in his analysis of early bourgeois society is misleading. Here there is no latent "moment" of universality (no endemic culture, no shared recollection of a common religion) whose human core might be emancipated through a revolutionary transformation. Instead, the temporal and functional priority of a political state that is structurally determined to generate factions seems to contain the Marxian alternative in a perpetual state of prematurity. The situation is not unlike that which Marx described in his observations on competition in *The German Ideology*. There he noted that despite the physical proximity of workers in the industrial labour process, competition continued to force them into a state of isolation. He recognized that every, "organized power standing over against these individuals (and) reproducing this isolation could only be overcome after long struggles."²⁷

What prognosis do these brief observations imply? The immediate prospects for the *political* articulation of a universal interest, seem to me, precluded by the basic character of our societies. I find little comfort here from the fact that it is possible to demonstrate the systematic character of the corporate state in our philosophical and economic critiques. The continued failure of this effort to generate any public response only serves to underscore the absence of a corresponding political analysis.

However, the peculiar circumstances of the political order in Canada and the United States do suggest a practical course. In effect, the political process in our societies is designed to produce and reproduce a state of social anarchy that can only be averted by larger and larger doses of state intervention. The task of Marxists in such circumstances is to take up the struggle against the organized power of the state at the point where the issue is joined most directly and most immediately, namely, where the state encroaches upon the individual.

Euro-Communism: The Middle Way?

I have been arguing that for differing reasons the Marxist theory of politics in the Soviet Union and North America has been constrained by an uncritical acceptance of Marx's early response to the bourgeois state. By questioning the actuality of Marxist practice in the former instance and the possibility of Marxist theory in the latter, I have traced the outline of a crisis in Marxism. Even this bare bones account would be incomplete without some mention of Euro-Communism. The movement captures our attention because it seems prepared

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to recognize that crisis and respond by re-situating Marx and Marxism squarely within the experience of the modern state. In its eschewal of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", its willingness to enter the arena of constitutional politics, its recognition of at least a semi-autonomous state in concepts like Carillo's notion of the "director state",²⁸ and its insistence that a concern with individual rights is not the exclusive province of bourgeois social theory, Euro-Communism suggests a middle ground between the arcane Marxism of the Soviet Union and the embryonic Marxism of North America. Moreover the theoretical development that accompanies these strategic revisions reveals a refreshing break with the reified understanding that I have been describing. The following declaration by Norberto Bobbio is typical of the new spirit of inquiry that is both point and counterpoint to the practice of Euro-Communism.

The fact that there are so many Marxisms is not a scandal. On the contrary, it is a sign of vitality, as the multiplication of sects at the time of the Reformation was a sign of Christianity's vitality. Even the "neo" is a good sign. I am suspicious of philosophical systems which are not reborn under that sign. Had there remained only one Marxism, one would have to think that it died or is dying, and I would keep my distance from it, advising others who still believe in the critical function of reason to do the same.²⁹

Again, these events are exciting — and promising, but at the risk of sounding far more pessimistic than I am, I must conclude on a note of caution.

Any social programme that strives to pursue a middle course in a period of crisis cannot fail to be preoccupied with the dangers which lurk on its respective flanks. The situation is compounded in the case of Euro-Communism because the threat in each instance is both domestic and foreign. For example, if the Communist parties of Western Europe are to gain their legitimacy within the established political process they must achieve an unprecedented measure of autonomy *vis à vis* the Soviet Union — "the independence of the communist parties in relation to the Soviet state is essential"³⁰ — while at the same time avoiding domestic suppression by demonstrating an "unequivocal" commitment to the basic principles of that process.

As regards the political system established in Western Europe, based on representative political institutions — parliament, political and philosophical pluralism, the theory of the separation of powers, decentralization,

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human rights, etc. — *that system is in its essentials valid* and it will be still more effective with a socialist, and not a capitalist, economic foundation.³¹ (my emphasis)

Conversely, the need to preserve intact the allegiance of the Party membership and concentrate its energies behind the electoral programme dictates a heated re-affirmation of Marxist principles that seems to mitigate the commitment to democracy.

Within our own movement, too, there is no lack of more or less veiled accusations. We are not returning to social democracy! In the first place because we are not in any way discarding the idea of coming to power in a revolutionary way, if the ruling classes were to close the democratic paths and a set of circumstances were to develop in which the revolutionary road would be possible.³²

This conflict between a liberal and a revolutionary posture illustrates the shortcomings in any attempt to confine the Marxist Renaissance at the level of strategy. Such a stance produces a hybrid formation of bourgeois and Marxist principles, contributes to a shifting and uncertain political practice, and undermines the effort to forge a new socialist majority. Equally telling is the extent to which it obscures the distance which divides Europe from its revolutionary past and Euro-Communism from its Marxian antecedents. Carillo's willingness to embrace a "political and philosophical pluralism" for example, is worlds removed from Marx's insistence that only one class is historically entitled to represent the universal interests of humanity. Until the advocates of Euro-Communism are prepared to acknowledge the fact that their situation calls for theoretical as well as practical innovation my fear is that their movement may yet succumb to the atrophying effects of a reified interpretation of Marx.

One last note, there is a disposition among North American Marxists to seek elsewhere for the solution to our problems. Its expressions are as old as the capitulation of the C.P.C. and the C.P.U.S.A. to the Third International and as recent as the attempts within the New Left to employ a guerilla style of politics in the urban metropolises of imperialism. To be sure we are involved, affected and instructed by the fate of Euro-Communism, but we ought not to allow its development to divert our energies from the need to generate a Marxism that is indigenous to our own countries.

Philosophy
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Notes

1. William Leiss, "... an ontology of stoned concepts," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1977), p. 105.
2. For an excellent discussion of the historical limits of dialectical theory see Herbert Marcuse, "On the Problem of the Dialectic", *Telos*, No. 27 (Spring, 1976), pp. 21-24.
3. "When you ask about the creation of nature and man, you are abstracting, in so doing, from man and nature.... Since the *real existence* of man and nature has become evident in practice, through sense experience, because man has thus become evident for man as the being of nature, and nature for man as the being of man, the question about an *alien* being, about a being above nature and man — a question which implies the admission of the unreality of nature and of man — has become impossible in practice." Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Karl Marx - Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 3, New York: 1975, pp. 305-306.
4. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*. London: 1971, p. 86.
5. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*. New York: 1960, p. 279.
6. Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Marcuse, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-371.
7. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1. New York: 1967, p. 72.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
12. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: 1963, p. 434.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 435.
14. *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 3. New York: 1975, pp. 185-186.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
16. William Leiss, "Critical Theory and its Future," *Political Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (August, 1974), p. 342.
17. Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

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21. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
22. Lenin, "Report to the Eighth Congress of Soviets, Dec. 22, 1920," from Robert C. Tucker, *The Lenin Anthology*. New York: 1975, p. 492.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 492-493.
24. In the following remarks I want to focus on those political-historical features which the United States and Canada have in common. Obviously a complete discussion would have to explore the implications of our differences as well. Moreover, in this brief treatment I have had to draw examples from my own experience which is necessarily specific to my knowledge of developments in the U.S. I hope that my Canadian colleagues will correct me where I might be over-generalizing.
25. Robert Paul Wolff, "Beyond Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Boston: 1965, pp. 8-9.
26. *The Federalist, A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States*. The Modern Library, New York: p. 55.
27. *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels, Collected Works*. Vol. 5. New York: 1976, p. 75.
28. *Santiago Carillo, Eurocommunism and the State*. Westport: 1978, pp. 24-25.
29. Norberto Bobbio, "Is There a Marxist Theory of the State," *Telos*, No. 35 (Spring, 1978), p. 6.
30. Carillo, *op. cit.* p. 40. Since I find Carillo the least ambiguous spokesman for Euro-Communism I have confined these brief remarks to observations on his work.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

COMMENTARY

THE REIFICATION OF THE PROLETARIAT

Herbert Marcuse

I will start with a restatement of the reified concept of the proletariat: the proletariat is, by its very existence, a (the) potentially revolutionary force — this quality being definitive of its very existence. Given its existence, its (potential) function in the transformation of society is also given — realisation of its existence. Now I want to defend this reification, which has at least the advantage that it stops the desperate search for the lost revolutionary Subject: a loss held to be due to the prevalent integration of the working class into the capitalist system. The working class still is the “ontological” antagonist of capital, and the potentially revolutionary Subject; but it is a vastly expanded working class, which no longer corresponds directly to the Marxian proletariat.

Late capitalism has re-defined the working class: today, in the advanced countries, industrial labourers are no longer the great majority of this class. The “deproletarianization” of the working class is indicated not only in the higher standard of living, in the sphere of consumption: it is a trend rooted in the development of the production process itself, which integrates large strata of non-proletarian workers into the working class: White collar employees, technicians, engineers, and the steadily growing private and public bureaucracy which assures the creation as well as realisation of surplus value. All these have to sell their labour power and are separated from the control of the means of production. In this greatly enlarged working class, the gap between intellectual and material labour is being reduced, knowledge and education are generalized; however, these achievements are invalidated to the degree to which the system reproduces itself through the productivity of *unproductive* labour, which does not increase the social wealth, but rather destroys and abuses it through the production of waste, planned obsolescence, a self-

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propelling armament industry, management of consciousness and sub-consciousness, etc.

The capitalist mode of production, through the increasing mechanization and intellectualization of labour, accumulates an increasing quantity of general ability, skills, knowledge — a human potential which cannot be developed within the established apparatus of production, because it would conflict with the need for full-time de-humanized labour. A large part of it is channelled into unnecessary work, unnecessary in that it is not required for the construction and preservation of a better society but is necessitated only by the requirements of capitalist production.

Under these circumstances, a "counter-consciousness" emerges among the dependent population (today about 90% of the total?), an awareness of the ever more blatant obsolescence of the established social division and organization of work. Rudolf Bahro, the militant East German dissident (he was immediately jailed after the publication, in West Germany, of his book *The Alternative*) uses the term *surplus-consciousness* to designate this (still largely vague and diffused) awareness. He defines it as "the growing quantity of free mental energy which is no longer tied up in necessary labour and hierarchical knowledge" (*New Left Review*, no. 106, November-December 1977).

"*Surplus Consciousness*" does not describe an ideological entity, signifying a relapse into idealism. Rather, this strange term designates a quality of the mental energy expressed in the actual behaviour of men and women under the impact of the mode of production in late capitalism. This energy is "surplus" over and above the energy spent daily in the alienated performances required by the established production relations. Blocked in finding satisfying ways of effective realisation, it becomes, among the dependent population, consciousness of frustration, humiliation, and waste. At the same time, capitalist mass production constantly stimulates this consciousness by the display of an ever larger offer of commodities over and above the necessities (and even amenities) of life. The system is thus compelled, by the requirements of enlarged competitive accumulation, to create and to renew constantly the *needs* for "luxuries", which are all but inaccessible to those who lack the necessary purchasing power. Late capitalism invokes the images of an easier, less repressive, less inhuman life, while perpetuating the alienated labour which denies this satisfaction. In short, late capitalism daily demonstrates the fact that the wherewithal for a better society is available, but that the very society which has created these resources of freedom must preclude their use for the enhancement (and today even for the protection) of life.

In this form, the consciousness of the underlying population is penetrated by the inherent contradictions of capitalism. To be sure, their appearance does not

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correspond to their essence; surplus consciousness does not conceptualize the dynamics of late capitalist production. Nonetheless, surplus consciousness tends to become a material force, not primarily as class consciousness, but rather as the consciousness of an opposition which expresses itself in new (or recaptured) modes of action, initiated not by any specific class, but by a precarious and temporary "alliance" of groups among the dependent population. Such actions include the "citizens initiatives" (e.g., the organized protest against nuclear energy installations, against capitalist urban renewal), the fight against racism and sexism, the students' protest, etc. At the same time, workers' initiatives transcend the merely economic class struggle in the demands for the self-organization (autogestion) of work.

Under the concentrated power of corporate capitalism, its productivity and destructiveness, the opposition is effectively contained. There is no room for a radicalism which would be supported by the people, and the range of movement as well as the demands which result easily appear ideological and reformist. Is this a throwback to previous stages of bourgeois democracy?

In this situation the classical Marxist "time table" of historical revolutions gains new significance. According to this time table, a bourgeois-democratic revolution precedes the proletarian-socialist revolution. The former is to create the *pre-conditions* for the ideological, political, economic, and organizational transition to socialism (assertion and enlargement of civil rights and liberties, reduction of monopoly capital, institutionalization and extension of equality and of public services, emancipation of oppressed racial and national minorities). Today, the subjection of the majority of the bourgeoisie to the hegemony of corporate capital, and the increasingly totalitarian character of the capitalist state threaten to cancel the achievements of the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries; they are to be recaptured and radicalized. The loss of economic power sustained by large sections of the bourgeoisie, and the intensified exploitation of the working class (old and new) make for the formation of a popular base for change. Thus, the "historic compromise", the alliance with bourgeois forces, the rejection of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the strategy of Eurocommunism has roots in the very structure of late capitalism. "Eurocommunism" does not aim at replacing the revolution by the vote, nor does it necessarily project features of the revolution itself. It rather claims to be a theory and praxis responding to a whole (and probably long) period during which capitalism mobilizes its entire economic, technological, and military power to make the world — its world — safe for enlarged accumulation. This implies, on the part of capital, the need to contain the class struggle within economic forms, to obtain and maintain the collaboration of the working class by dividing it into a privileged population in the advanced capitalist countries, and an underprivileged population both in

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these countries and abroad. Within the global system, the multi-national corporations keep the competitive conflicts from becoming explosive.

This overall capitalist policy is largely successful. The subjection of the petty and middle bourgeoisie to monopoly capital has not led to their "proletarianization". The material achievements of capitalism, its life-and-death power, and the apparent absence of a better alternative stabilize the system. Within the global framework, however, a vast reservoir of anti-capitalist sentiment is built up. In the developed capitalist countries, it does not result in a revolutionary movement, if by "revolutionary" we understand commitment to the mass struggle for the overthrow of the established social system.

Eurocommunism aims at articulating and winning over this large anti-capitalist (but not yet socialist) opposition outside the "proletariat". The changes are promising. One reason: the "surplus consciousness" has negated the *reification* which veiled the real mechanism of domination behind the facade of free, objective exchange relationships. Can there still be any mystification of who is governing and in whose interests, of what is the base of their power? Not only is the ideology of capitalism wearing thin (inalienable human rights? the "invisible" hand of free competition? private enterprise? equality?) — the very reality of the system no longer conceals its utter destructiveness (the proliferation of nuclear energy, the poisoning of the life environment, chronic unemployment and inflation, perfected control of the population, etc.).

To conclude: The tendency is to the Right. It meets an enlarged opposition, qualitatively weakened by internal division, and by the lack of an organization adapted to the conditions of corporate capitalism. At the same time, the global conflicts between the capitalist powers, and with the Third World tend to weaken the stabilization of the system, without, however, posing a serious threat. The life-and-death question for the Left is: Can the transformation of the corporate State into a neo-fascist State be prevented? The question, as well as the possible answers do not arise from a *revision* of Marxian theory, they are posed by Marxian theory itself!

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THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY:
ONTOLOGY AND FALSE NEEDS*

Alkis Kontos

I return link by link along the iron chains
of memory to the city which we inhabited so
briefly together: the city which used us ...
precipitated in us conflicts which were hers
and which we mistook for our own. ...

I see at last that none of us is properly to
be judged for what happened in the past. It
is the city which should be judged though we,
its children, must pay the price.

Capitally, what is this city of ours?

Lawrence Durrell

Any serious, philosophical inquiry into the question of human needs is a normative discourse which must consider the ontological status of needs. Ontology and human needs are so inter-connected that no meaningful consideration of the one without the other is possible. We cannot affirm certain needs as truly human and thus vital to our self-fulfilment, and at the same time pretend to know nothing about the ontology of the individual beings to whom we attribute such needs. Nor can we claim to know the essence of human beings but be blissfully ignorant as to the needs this essence implies.

An ontology implies certain needs and certain needs presuppose an ontology to which they correspond; be they explicit or implicit, ontological assumptions are inevitable in relation to the question of human needs. The very structure of

* For my friend Ato Sekyi-Otu; wounded by colonialism, history's bizarre political contingency, he retained his fidelity to both, the memory of lost, ancient, mythic kingdoms, and the poetry of the promise of the future.

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our mind renders it impossible, indeed inconceivable, otherwise. Try to imagine a human face without imagining any identifiable features. If you can do that then you can also sever ontology and needs. Such severance defies the nature of our mental constructs and intellectual conceptualizations.

In this essay I propose the indispensability of an ontological argument regarding human needs and proceed to suggest a conceptual clarification, as a prolegomenon to a perspective for the resolution of the problem of competing ontological claims. In doing so I draw upon relevant aspects of the thought of C.B. Macpherson and Herbert Marcuse. My ultimate aim here is to address critically Leiss' claim regarding ontology and false needs.

A meaningful analysis and evaluation of the quality of human life cannot be initiated if the nature of human beings is either presumed to be unknown or non-existing.¹ Such analysis cannot go beyond mere description of externalities. The question of quality involves values, relations, judgments and critical interpretation. None of these is possible if one adopts the hollow view that everything is equally inessential or essential. We all know the sterility of that pseudo-scientific study of political life which, with immense idiocy, sought to divorce facts from values. Avowed empiricists delude themselves in believing that facts are visibly discernible, like solid objects; or that the truth of a factual universe is self-evident and thus fully and freely accessible; or that what constitutes a social fact is instantly and unambiguously declared. Those ecstatic creatures who believe they have entered the realm of profound analysis should be reminded of Shakespeare's elegant words: "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".² There are no alternatives to intelligent, imaginative, critical interpretation.

Theory possesses no magical method for the resolution of the ontological issue. Neither techniques, nor mechanical systems exist. Ontology must be deciphered within the flux and turmoil of historical time. The struggle with the riddle of history is difficult, but not impossible. History offers us no vantage point, no Archimedean point from which a panoramic view of its topography would yield automatically the truth of its inner structure — its essence, our essence. History must be interrogated from within. We are immersed in history.³ We are nothing outside history. We are our history, but we are also more than any historical actuality. We are ontologically constituted by historically developing.

The question of ontology has been central to political theory from its very ancient beginnings. The perennial tension between appearance and reality constitutes the problem of essence in philosophy. Plato's allegory of the cave is the first in a series of such articulations. Plato's allegory seeks to capture in a timeless, non-dialectical form the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

The supreme task of critical thought has been, and still remains, to unveil

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ontology within history. This is not to imply that ontology, like those princesses in fairy tales, lies dormant awaiting the magic kiss of her prince to awaken and find eternal happiness. This is a fool's paradise, not ontology. Adorno's elegant, cryptic reflections from damaged life should dispel any such naiveté. Nor is ontology a solid, inert object to be seen and touched by doubting Thomases. Rather, it is like beauty and intelligence. They exist nowhere but in beautiful and intelligent objects and beings. They constitute characteristic properties of objects and beings but cannot be found independently of such objects or beings (just as in ordinary language no qualities attributed by an adjective can exist apart from a noun, a subject, to which such qualities are attributed).

The fact that ontology is not embedded in the realm of empirical reality, that it is not subject to immediate visibility, does not mean that it is a mysterious entity or an illusion. Nor does it mean that ontology can or must be determined *a priori*. To speak of ontological assumptions we need not, and should not, invite either metaphysical mysteries or theological divinities or preconceived, ossified systems of measure.

History, like empirical reality, does not disclose its truth without philosophical scrutiny and interpretation. History alone, unaided by philosophy, stands mute before its own riddle. History without the enlightenment of a philosophy of history is nothing but a babel of contradictions, the fusion of appearances and reality, the thoughtless interplay of light and darkness. Philosophy steps into the flux of historical time to harness its multiple, contradictory manifestations. To render history coherent and meaningful, it is imperative that we distinguish appearance from reality, the true from the false, the human from the inhuman.

C.B. Macpherson in his recent essay "Needs and Wants: an Ontological or Historical Problem?"⁴ offers a brief, insightful analysis and evaluation of the various views of needs in the modern traditions of political theory. Macpherson's main thesis is that ontological assumptions are necessary (I would say indispensable) in any consideration of human needs and that the problem of needs must be seen as both an ontological and an historical one. Both of these dimensions are necessary because the ontological alone could easily lapse into an immutable concept of human nature immune to the passage of time and changing historical circumstances. This would amount to a denial of a developmental perspective. Alone, the historical dimension lapses into relativism because it cannot provide a qualitative criterion for differentiating essence from appearance. Everything becomes engulfed by the one-dimensionality of history. Untouched by history, ontology is reduced to an inert, unreal claim; untouched by ontology, history cannot acknowledge its inhumanity.

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Macpherson cautions us regarding the distinction between needs — things absolutely necessary to sustain human life — and wants, things not necessary but gratifying. He tells us that this distinction is both insular, maintained in the English language but not, for example, in French or German, and ideological — only the liberal tradition makes or comes close to making it. Although Macpherson's critique exposes the weakness, inadequacy, and danger, of the needs-wants distinction, and although he proposes its rejection, he continues to make use of it for no apparent reason.

I suggest that any such distinction be discarded.⁵ It permits the introduction of an artificial and misleading separation between survival and conditions of existence beyond mere survival. The distinction produces a hiatus between the fact of survival and the qualitative conditions of a genuinely human life, which insulates the first and undermines the normative significance of the second. It is not the seriality of survival needs and needs beyond mere survival, which characterizes human needs, but the combination of these dimensions — a combination which is warranted ontologically but satisfied historically. Furthermore, the fact that these two dimensions are combined in human needs precludes the distillation, even if only for purposes of analysis, of their survival dimension. Because they are manifested and satisfied culturally they are no longer biological, but bio-social. Thus they are more complex in their concrete historicity than in their abstractly conceptualized function. What these needs satisfy cannot be severed from how they meet this function — their mode of satisfaction. Food and sex are examples of survival needs which would be severely impoverished, if reduced to their merely necessary function. A complex, sophisticated constellation of socio-cultural modes of satisfaction would be constricted to its minimum biological roots. In contrast, the distinction we need is one between truly human and false needs — ontology and domination.

Macpherson develops four main categories of modern theories of needs and elaborates their corresponding ontological assumptions. The categories are: (1) Rousseau; (2) Liberal Individualism; (3) Ethical Liberalism; and (4) Marx.

Macpherson's brief analysis discloses Rousseau's argument regarding the gradual historical development, increase the final degeneration of natural man's simple physical needs. The transvaluation of natural needs, their quality, through the quantity of artificial needs permits Rousseau to assert his values of equality and freedom, and to affirm his distinction of natural/artificial needs. Needs are viewed by Rousseau as both historical and ontological but the glorification of natural needs is rejected by Macpherson, and correctly so. Nature becomes, in a paradigmatic sense, trans-historical. It would be more accurate to speak of culturally determined needs and draw the distinction between needs freely developed and needs in effect "imposed by a predatory culture".⁶

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Macpherson's criticism of the Liberal Individualists — primarily the classical political economists and the Utilitarians — is that the essential postulate operative here is that every individual's needs naturally increase endlessly, without limit. This increase is viewed by its proponents as positive. Macpherson sees here a totally unhistorical view which, because it accepts the capitalist market society, disallows any qualitative distinctions between needs.

Ethical Liberalism, the liberalism of J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, L.T. Hobhouse, and a host of twentieth century followers, rejected the mere quantity of classical liberalism. The importance of quality is stressed. Man is not seen as infinite consumer but rather as exorter and developer of all his capacities. Intellectual, moral and aesthetic needs are affirmed. Macpherson's objection to this liberalism is that it fails to take into account the role of capitalist market society in the genesis of certain deplorable needs.

With Marx, Macpherson rejects the possessive, alienated society. For Marx the truly human need consists in "creative transformation of nature and of oneself and one's relations with one's fellows".⁷ With Marx we have a proper understanding of the dual dimension of human needs — ontology and history. Furthermore, according to Macpherson, no rank-order or hierarchy of needs is suggested by Marx, nor is it necessary. Rank ordering is unhistorical — unchanging human nature must be postulated. In a brief but devastating examination of Maslow's hierarchical scheme of needs, Macpherson re-affirms Marx's superior approach.

Macpherson tell us this: No needs can be affirmed without an ontological postulate; the validity of an ontological postulate, and consequently of its corresponding needs, depends on the accuracy with which ontology and history are perceived. A balanced, truthful view would not render ontology eternally fixed nor would it accept history's developments blindly. Free, creative activity becomes the measure of history's humanly appropriate development.

In a characteristically lucid sketch of the central features and logic of the modern traditions of political theory, Macpherson, in accord with Marx, suggests that not all of history is good but that all that is good is in history regarding the question of human needs.

In Macpherson's own theory, ontological considerations are central, and so are historical developments. His seminal analysis and critique of possessive individualism and particularly his brilliant treatment of Hobbes rest on the Marxian insight that the historical reality of the market society has been ontologized. Rousseau was the first to claim that neither Hobbes nor Locke managed to reach far enough into natural man. They did not strip man of all his socially acquired attributes. Macpherson's claim is that Hobbes' natural man, man in the state of nature (I treat the Hobbes study as the prototype, it is also the most fascinating) is a projection of civilised man, an analysis of men in

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established social relationships, established in a *specific* society — capitalist market society. He also argues that Hobbes did grasp accurately the social structure of his time. This is why Macpherson is so meticulous in demonstrating that indeed England was what Hobbes perceived her to be. His study moves on two levels, the internal-textual, and the external-empirical.

Hobbes, a bourgeois theorist, portrays accurately his society but grants his portrayal an ontological status. Hobbes remains for Macpherson the fiercely accurate analyst of capitalist market relations. Macpherson's fascination with Hobbes is the latter's analytical ability; Macpherson's rejection of Hobbes is the latter's inability to differentiate ontology from history. Where Hobbes describes, Marx restores reality. Hobbes and Marx are the intellectual poles of Macpherson's thought.

Macpherson's treatment of Hobbes tells us this about ourselves: alienated and dehumanized in our market relations, we should not see our negation as our essential self. Macpherson's ontological postulate insists on free, creative activity; he frequently speaks of the free development of human capacities; the individual is seen as essentially a doer, a creator, an exerter of energy, an actor.⁸

In order to understand Macpherson's thought it is imperative to realize that the fundamental context in which his analysis operates is that of liberal-democratic theory — its contradictions — and of capitalist market relations. The first constitutes the limiting context; Macpherson defines his intellectual project as an attempt "to work out a revision of liberal-democratic theory, a revision which clearly owes a good deal to Marx, in the hope of making that theory more democratic while rescuing that valuable part of the liberal tradition which is submerged when liberalism is identified with capitalist market relations".⁹ Man as infinite appropriator contradicts man the exerter, enjoyer, and developer of his essential powers. This is so because to appropriate without limit is to appropriate land and capital as well as goods for consumption. This consequently results in all the land and capital being appropriated by some, leaving the rest without their own means of labour. This is necessarily so in a capitalist market society. I believe it is because of the logico-historical contradiction within liberal-democratic theory that Macpherson's aversion to metaphysics does not damage his treatment of ontology as it could. A great deal regarding ontology that warrants argumentation and proof is, in Macpherson's case of liberal-democratic theory, already granted as a feature of the universe he wishes to rehabilitate.

That Macpherson does not agonize over crucial ontological and metaphysical problems is not because he is oblivious to them but because his own goal carries such specificity that within its boundaries no such metaphysical problems arise. The context of his theme is the problem of liberal-democratic theory, his desire to revise and thus rectify it. This context forces his analysis toward the concrete

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political reality and disallows him from undertaking any abstract philosophical analysis. It is true that temperamentally he is not attracted to the realm of metaphysics. Consciously he tries to keep his critique as close as possible to the requirements of his intellectual project. Macpherson's critique of capitalist market relations on Marxian grounds is the road that can lead his analysis and insights well beyond the liberal-democratic theoretical perspective and predicament.

The master analyst of possessive individualism has achieved the simultaneous establishment of a precise domain of investigation and a theoretical perspective expansive enough to embrace the universal. Macpherson's impeccable scholarship and illuminating analysis command our attention. The principles and logic of Macpherson's own ontological postulates, as well as his critique of other such postulates, stop short of a full, systematic investigation of ontology. That Macpherson does brilliantly what he set out to do and that such a task is of great importance, we should have no doubt. Still, the ontological argument warrants more, especially when removed from the protective logic of liberal-democratic theory.

Macpherson's analysis of ontology could be summarized as follows: (1) although ontological postulates are necessary, not *any* such postulate will do; (2) ontology should not be set apart from history, but historical developments must be evaluated from the qualitative perspective of ontology; (3) freedom, free creative activity is *the* ontological postulate; (4) society must be rationally organized to permit the actualization of this postulate and fulfill its corresponding human needs.

Certainly this much suffices for Macpherson's purposes, but more must be said about ontology and history, their possible differentiation and the validation of ontological postulates. For example Macpherson argues that an ontological postulate is a value postulate and as such not entirely a factual one. Since postulates about human essence are value postulates, "they may properly be discarded when they are seen to be at odds with new value judgments about newly possible human goals."¹⁰ Here Macpherson is referring to the postulate of man's essence as infinite consumer, infinite appropriator. Logical and technological considerations permit us to discard it.¹¹ The postulate that is being discarded is now obsolete. This process of discarding could prove problematical. Certainly there is ambiguity in Macpherson's reference to value postulates and factual postulates. The fact that we can discard a postulate surely is evidence of its invalidation independently of its being a value postulate as opposed to a factual one. A valid value postulate would not be discarded. Furthermore, the argument that is employed in discarding this postulate does not validate the ontological postulate which claims man to be an exserter, doer, developer. The negation of the one postulate does not necessarily support the

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other except in the context of liberal-democratic theory. It is the dichotomous historical character of the liberal-democratic paradigm which permits Macpherson's force of argument. It must be borne in mind that the two postulates of the liberal-democratic paradigm are not exhaustive. There can be, and have been, other quite different postulates. One such postulate involves the ascetic rejection of both capitalist possessiveness and rational-technological foundations of freedom. Such a postulate calls for refutation on distinct grounds rather than by association. In another essay, Macpherson refers to the supposed infinite desire for utilities as "this perverse, artificial, and temporary concept of man".¹² Here Macpherson leaves no doubt that this postulate is incorrect, that it pretends to be ontological but is not. From a strictly philosophical point of view this is precisely what must be established: independent grounds for the validation of ontological postulates.

Thus I am cognizant of the inherent difficulties in the attempt to validate the truth of *the* ontological postulate. However, I am also adamantly convinced of the indispensability of ontological postulates, and hence the inescapability of attempts at validation. I do not expect unanimity on any proposed resolution of the problematical character of ontology, nor do I acknowledge unanimity as a validating principle. The arguments, evidence and inference that can be presented in support of an ontological position, do not and cannot carry the conclusiveness of a strictly empirical assertion — nor is ontology proven in the manner and method of the natural sciences. Neither the apodictic character of a syllogism nor the force of a mathematical theorem applies here. Ontology is not demonstrable in any of these senses. However, we should not assume that ontological postulates are arbitrary, mere questions of taste not amenable to logical inference, rational discourse, intelligent insight nor imaginative perception and creativity.

To search for ontology as such, for an entity, would be vain as well as idiotic. We do not search for love independently of lovers. Ontology is empirically manifested, or rather, suggested. It does not disclose itself fully for it is always in a process, an historical process of becoming. I take ontology to be a set of essential attributes which disclose the essential human being in his/her membership in the species. These attributes define human beings *per se*. Within the *genera* we must recognize the unique. The attributes we name as ontological are potentialities, capacities, in the expression of which the human essence is manifested and realised. This essence is not a fixed immutable quality of certain quantity. It is not fixed like the physical dimensions of an object, its weight or volume. Rather, it is like a quality which characterizes something but which transcends its specific expressions. Consider artistic talent. Without an objectified expression/performance of it we cannot know of its existence; but no specific expression or expressions of it determine, reveal or

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exhaust its totality. The next expression is always qualitatively rooted in the talent, but its concrete specificity remains veiled in indeterminacy until fully objectified.

Ontological capacities are not identical to teleological views of human nature. Telos can mean a terminal point of arrival, completion; it can also mean purpose, orientation for an ongoing voyage. It is the former which I reject here. Teleology suggests a determinate telos in the beginning which unfolds in the passage of time: the tree is in its seed, potentially — more precisely it is there actually. Teleological views are developmental only in a formal sense. The historical dimension is never an active feature. The telos can and might be prevented from materializing; however, without any negative intervention it is secure, and with its arrival the process terminates. Teleology pays lip service to history but in reality it affirms an unhistorical development: preconceptionalization and unfolding. Teleology of this type as well as insistence on a fixed, rigid concept of human nature both fail to consider the historical existence of ontology. They are utterly axiomatic. This is so because from the diversity of historical human behaviour and action a selection is made as truly testifying to the proposed image of human nature. On what ground, however, can such an image be enunciated? History testifies in paradoxes, in ironic opposites: war and peace, cruelty and generosity, sacrifice and exploitation, suffering and joy, knowledge and ignorance. These contradictory manifestations refuse to disclose a coherent pattern. Alone, such opposites offer us a veritable dualism. In formal logic either the dualism would have to be accepted as *the* truth or we would have to approach the impracticable assertion that there is no human nature. Thus, either our attempt to understand history's drama and the nature of its protagonists must terminate in the morass of historical episodes, or, in desperately arbitrary fashion, an *a priori* concept of human nature must be advocated which we pseudo-validate by partial, artificial historical evidence which itself ignores the other side of the historical dualisms. None of these alternatives are satisfactory.

That ontological capacities should not be imagined as solidly sealed in any form that quantifies them, does not mean that these capacities are in constant mutation which either permits their qualitative reversal or precludes their recognizability. Ontology suggests an orientation, a propensity or proclivity of a certain quality. Just as intelligent thoughts emanate from intelligence so it is with ontology. It imputes quality, the ontologically essential one.

I visualize ontological capacities as inherent and dynamic, in constant dialectical relation with historical time and its emergent structures, material and mental. Only in this sense do the otherwise unresolvable and confusing historical opposites enter into the dialectic of appearance and reality. They are transformed into meaningful, active dialectical opposites. They are no longer

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isolated, inert contradictions. The dialectic embraces actualities and potentialities. The actual is visible and conceals potentiality. It is this dialectic which discloses ontology and renders it simultaneously empirically inferable and intellectually-imaginatively visible. Ontology is not fully of the actual but it is fully submerged in it. It is relational, but dialectically. It is this dialectical relation that Macpherson's thought circumvents although it is perfectly capable of accommodating it. Let us not forget that Macpherson is a critic of capitalist market relations from a Marxian perspective.

Marcuse's thought is centred upon such a dialectic. It should be pointed out that both Macpherson and Marcuse postulate free creative activity as the human essence. Both of them, in accord with Marx, claim that the full content, the substantive expression of a free life cannot and should not be pre-planned, pre-articulated; the creation of its substantive structure remains the task of free individuals.¹³ To pronounce its content in advance is to extinguish the very meaning of freedom.

That Marcuse imposes a Marxian perspective on Freud's theory, thereby drawing the distinction between ontology and history, is a well known fact. My intention here is not to offer a systematic elaboration of Marcuse's thought.¹⁴

Marcuse's narrative of the history of civilisation is based on certain fundamental conceptual distinctions. These distinctions usher in qualitative differentiations which permit the intellectual-empirical decipherment of history and ontology. These distinctions are:

Necessity: A permanent, ineradicable feature of human existence, it is present whatever the form of social organization. This is the realm of human struggle for survival. The material production of everyday life belongs here.

Scarcity: In a world too poor to satisfy human needs without constant work, scarcity is the existential experience of necessity. The fact of scarcity and the organization of scarcity are not the same thing.¹⁵

Surplus-repression: Additional, excess, unwarranted repression, it is repression over and above what is necessary for the maintenance of civilised human association. It is repression in the service of social domination. With this concept, Marcuse literally forces us to visualize the non-inevitability of domination. It consists of strata of repressive controls not necessitated by civilisation itself.¹⁶

Performance principle: the prevailing historical form of the reality principle in contemporary civilisation. Under this principle a society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members. The fact of surplus-repression is empirically manifested in the organizational, institutional structures of the prevailing historical form of the reality principle. In turn, these structures operationalize such surplus-repression.

Unfreedom: It is distinct from toil, alienated labour, social domination. It is

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the rationalized and technologized realm of socially necessary work. It is the highest possible amelioration of human effort and work in the realm of necessity. This humanization of necessity does not suggest its eradication. Nor does it transform necessity into freedom. It establishes the necessary and sufficient conditions for ontological realisation: freedom.

Freedom: Human activity as an end in itself — the expression and fulfilment of the human essence.

For Marcuse the optimal possible human existence would be defined by the co-existence of unfreedom and freedom where unfreedom serves as the foundation of freedom. Surplus-repression, in any form, is incompatible with this optimum. Because of this necessary relationship between unfreedom and freedom, the latter cannot prevail in the absence of unfreedom as defined above. Clearly then the human condition must be seen as developmental; it follows that where societies are precluded from attaining the necessary material base for the actualization of freedom, the only meaningful goal is to ameliorate the realm of necessity, of exploitation: to reduce human suffering to its minimum and thus raise the society to its maximum possible level of development under the prevailing material circumstances. Material improvement of impoverished conditions, paramount as it might be, should not lead to the belief that quantitative progress is the meaning of freedom — far from it. Capitalist material possessiveness is not freedom. Nor, however, should we assume that nothing can or ought to be done for improvement because the material conditions of the historical moment preclude freedom in the ontological sense. Simply, we should not confuse survival with the conditions of survival, nor should we forget that qualitative distinctions are necessary to any meaningful social critique and must balance the possible with the desirable — the ontologically desirable.

For Marcuse the question of ontology is neither a strictly empirical nor a purely intellectual issue. To proceed toward the recognition of ontology we must effect a genuine recollection. This is not to recall the ancient, timeless past, but to reconstitute the fragments into a coherent totality, to unify what has been set assunder through alienation and domination. Memory — individual and collective — must rupture its repressive prisons of amnesia. Art, where the great refusal is nourished and preserved, must be seen as testifying to the perennial, primordial condemnation of human suffering. These are sources of evidence and inference; none of them alone suffices. In unison they do not validate the ontological postulate of free creative activity as the human essence. However, all these sublime and most elemental voices of past and present humanity become sources of imaginative affirmations of totally other worlds, of a totally other destiny, a leap into a qualitatively different future. It is with such images and metaphors that the critical spirit can step into the flux of

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historical time where the gordian knot of ontology and history can be forced loose, where the labyrinth of appearance and reality can be seen for what it is in the reflection of the dialectical movement. There, in history, we can find the actual, concrete negation of what the imagination dreams, of what critical thinking demands, of what reason proclaims. Historical experience becomes the concrete denial of the realisation of the human essence. In its inversion, the human essence *is* the evidence of its truth.

Dehumanization, then, has a structure and a logic which can be investigated under the auspices of critical thinking. The potentiality of freedom and happiness is reflected, albeit through a glass darkly, in the historical forms of human suffering. Its study and analysis touch many crucial areas of human existence; some are empirical, others are not.

When we begin to think seriously about ontology we must realize that our thinking does not begin from a desolate nothing. We have the thoughts and dreams of others who preceded us. We have experience, we have the world before our eyes. We have our own individual self. A full systematic analysis and articulation of our ontological dimension must ultimately be the ground upon which we claim our own self-identity. Such ground cannot be either fully subjective or fully objective. It must be both, bridged in consciousness and imagination.

When we turn to the dehumanized social world we must see individual destinies in their full negation. When ontological capacities are being denied it does not mean, at least not yet, that they have been eliminated. They are exiled to the interior.

What is alive, even if exiled, manifests itself. Thus the grand denial of ontology need not initiate the great refusal, but it does show signs of its betrayal, of its false claims against ontology. The false, as an actual, concrete denial of the essence that it masks, confesses its secret misery.

Evidence can be marshalled to show how contradictory and hollow that universe is, riddled with anxiety, loneliness, troubled sleep, the frenzy of possessiveness. Evidence can be marshalled to indicate the secret meaning of its beliefs and values.

Systematic investigation of the material and value universe of the subjects of domination would reveal their false paradise. Marx as a young man wrote of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. His utterances and condemnations were passionate and poetic. He gave a fierce, penetrating critique of the transvaluation of values, the inhumanity of money-capital.¹⁷ He called money "the alienated ability of mankind".¹⁸ He quoted Goethe and Shakespeare, for they knew of the false world that money can fabricate. Money becomes "the common whore, the common pimp of people and nations".¹⁹ To the truth of the poets Marx sought a counterpart, the truth which is found in the workings

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of the market place. The methodical analysis of the workings of capital as well as the faces of the suffering constitute the other reality that Marx studied as an older man. The *Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital* are the major results.

It is in the dialectical relations of matter and mind, of economy and quality of life that astonishingly we find evidence of other possibilities. Ontological

It is in the dialectical relations of matter and mind, of economy and quality of life that astonishingly we find evidence of other possibilities. Ontological postulates permit and grant entry into the solid world of everyday life. There, a meaningful interpretation can commence in which the claims of ontology can be measured against the presumed achievements of society. There, the great exile can return to accuse and re-claim.

In a brief, little known essay in which he summarizes his social theory,²⁰ Marcuse argues that values, "norms and aspirations which motivate the behavior of social groups in the process of satisfying their needs, material as well as cultural, and in defining their needs",²¹ are expressions of "the exigencies of the established society, but they are also expressions of "the possibilities inherent in but repressed by the productivity of the established society".²² He then proceeds to elaborate the two-fold character of values. He argues that the value of honour in feudal society expresses:

the requirements of a hierarchy of domination and dependence founded on direct personal relationships assured not only by force but also by the sanctity of contracts. The value of loyalty, proclaimed in a society of oppression and inequality, was idealized, sublimated, in the great epics, the romances, the court ceremonial of the time, but it would be nonsense to say that heroes like Tristan, Percival, and others are nothing but feudal knights and vassals, that their ideals, adventures, and conflicts do not transcend the feudal society; they certainly do. In and above the feudal framework, we find universal human possibilities, promises, sufferings and happiness.²³

Similarly with the values of liberty and equality which "express first of all the exigencies of the capitalist mode of production, namely, competition among relative equals, free wage labor, exchange of equivalents regardless of race, status, and so on".²⁴ They also project qualitatively better forms of human association — as unrealised possibilities. Work as necessity is also said to be the vocation and the calling of human beings. Marcuse, arguing for the ambivalence of values, suggests that the hidden other meaning is the self-realisation of a human being in creative work.²⁵

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Macpherson's critique of the contradictions that beset and vitiate liberal-democratic theory and the conceptual-analytical apparatus which Marcuse employs to differentiate ontology from history offer us a perspective which dissects historical existence into essentials and contingencies, into inevitable fates and possible new destinies. Their powerful analyses move between the theoretical and the empirical, sketching a socio-political universe which must be rigorously explored. Although Macpherson's and Marcuse's theoretical achievements are enormous, much remains to be said and done. Even if one does not fully agree with their views and interpretations, still many insights and challenges are discernible in the corpus of their works.

The negation of (the ontological postulate of) free, creative activity can be effected in two distinct modes: oppression and domination.²⁶ Oppression, reaching its apex in tyranny, is a condition of overt, visible, forceful restriction of another's life-activity. It enslaves the other. This condition can occur in any material circumstance, primitive, technologically advanced, or other. What characterizes this condition is the forceful deprivation of another's life-activity for the presumed personal gain of the oppressor and that the oppressed perceives his state as one of enslavement. There is no illusion or deception here. The pain and the anguish are experienced as such and they correspond to the exercise of mastery and the infliction of subordination. The privileges extracted by the masters might be seen as natural from the crushed perspective of the slave. The slaves might believe themselves inferior to the powerful masters.²⁷ The possible confusion, passivity and ignorance of the enslaved do not, however, eradicate the fact of their negative experience. Whatever magical, divine or superhuman powers and talents they might assume to be the special and unique qualities of their masters, whatever grotesque, abysmal and unreal distance they might draw between their masters and themselves, the oppressed always experience their oppression as a negative condition. The hellish dimension of oppression is never presented or perceived as a blessing. The oppressed can be manipulated to believe that their condition is natural or divinely ordained; they can be made to see no alternatives; they can be driven into total fatalism; they can be made oblivious to the political dynamics of their fate. They cannot, however, be made to experience their oppression as something pleasant and wonderful. Oppression is visible deprivation.

Domination refers to a totally distinct condition. The dominated are denied the fulfilment of their ontological capacities, a fulfilment which is objectively possible but intentionally rendered invisible by the masters of the social organization of domination. The victims of domination are systematically and continuously presented with a social structure and activity that is granted the semblance of the natural, rational and positive. They reorient their goals and aspirations toward this prevailing socio-cultural universe. Yet this social order,

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which is presented as and presumed to be the humanly appropriate order of things, misleads and deceives. It is an actual negation of what could have been the negation of ontological fulfilment and realisation. Domination rests on an actual but false social order — false in the disguised meaning and significance which are granted to it.²⁸ It is false because it establishes a self-image of humanity against its real essence. False needs are the daily quest of the dominated, not of slaves. Unlike slaves, the dominated appear in the guise of free, self-determined agents, but it does not mean that they are so. The process of internalization of the external structures of domination can be identified and exposed. The inner state of being of the dominated does not suggest idiocy. It is not a matter of intelligence, it is a matter of consciousness. Although there cannot, perhaps, be consciousness without intelligence, there can be intelligence without consciousness. Intelligence is the necessary and not the sufficient condition.

Oppression can be effected both in conditions of material-technological advancement and in primitive, less developed social circumstances. It does not warrant technological implements, although their availability could render oppression more effective and/or more wide-spread. To enslave and conquer we must crush the will of the other. Physical force and coercion remain the universal, classical modes. Terror and torture need not be technological. Orwell brilliantly reminds us in his haunting masterpiece that the final, most unendurable torture in Room 101, beyond pain and courage, was what Imperial China knew and practiced as punishment.²⁹ Here, a punishment rooted in the past practices of human cruelty is resorted to by those whose fondest desire is the abolition of the past.

Domination, however, presupposes material-technical advancement. It is possible only where a rational re-ordering of existing circumstances could result in the realisation of freedom. By redirecting all such capabilities, domination is in effect the negation of freedom, the denial of the expression of freedom in what could have been a rationalized, technologized realm of necessity.³⁰ The distinct novelty of domination as a mode of human bondage is precisely this: it negates the actual possibility of freedom and grants to its negation the aura of paradisiac bliss. It falsifies experience itself. It is this falsification, effected on psycho-material grounds, that cannot be achieved in conditions other than those prevalent in advanced industrial societies.

Absence of oppression when a society is materially incapable of conquering scarcity does not mean ontological fulfilment. It means experiencing natural scarcity equitably but severely enough not to be able to achieve freedom. Clearly then, in Macpherson's precise, measured words "technology assists ontology".³¹

If then technology is so imperative when rationalized, we must come to

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understand that the historical development of ontology not only demands a future orientation but also renders irrelevant, if not misleading, quests for true humanity in the primitive. Our needs have transcended that predicament as well as the innocence of individual childhood.

This essay, as a prolegomenon, sought to clarify and conceptualize the ground upon which to construct an appropriate perspective on ontology. The schema of what I attempted to do regarding ontology is this: to point out the impossibility of social critique without ontological postulates; to argue that the validation of *the* ontological postulate warrants quite a distinct method of proof-validation; that such an ontological postulate is neither an arbitrary *a priori* nor a pure empirical datum. Such a postulate does not originate from nowhere. We do not begin *ex nihilo*. We begin from many aspects of the past and present. I have used Macpherson's and Marcuse's thought here because of their significant claims and insights. I do not treat their thought as conclusive truth, nor do I claim to have done anything more than suggested that free, creative activity is *the* ontological postulate. I do feel, however, that I am in good company regarding this postulate. Minimally, I have suggested that ontology is not a *terra incognita*. Much remains to be done. The investigation of consciousness, of the logic, contradictions and ambivalence of our norms and values, of domination and the possible sources of recollection, of the realm of the imagination and memory, of myth and technology, and more, is the intellectual task that lies ahead. Macpherson and Marcuse have pointed the way.

Recently, in what I take to be a regressive move, William Leiss argued explicitly against the concept of false needs and commodity fetishism and by implication voiced his doubts as to the viability of ontological postulates.³²

Leiss implicitly holds an ontological postulate. He suggests that his implicit normative posture is "an ontology of needs founded on the somewhat dubious values of stability and clarity".³³ I think his implicit ontology is not what he confesses it to be. Leiss holds a holistic image of the world where a symbiotic relationship exists between human beings and the rest of the world, organic and inorganic. This image suggests a complex and intricate interconnection and interdependence between the human race and the environment. The precise balance of this coexistence warrants reason and moderation. Stability and clarity result from reason and moderation.

Leiss' implicit ontology also argues for a diversified notion of human experience, diversified beyond commodities and possessions. This diversification is expressed and reflected in the dual character of commodities: symbolic and material. For Leiss, therefore, the socio-material context of human satisfaction ought to be provided by the symbiotic harmonization of man with nature and some necessary degree of symbolization. However, Leiss focusses instead on the high-intensity market setting, and shows that what exists is a futile search for

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satisfaction in a confusing quest for commodity appropriation.

Had Leiss explicitly stated his ontological postulate a great deal of his analysis would have been altered. An explicit ontology would have compelled more cautious but critical speculation than his presumed critical phenomenology³⁴ permits.

Leiss' implicit ontological postulate is not a feature of the high-intensity market setting. The grounds upon which it is affirmed transcend the narrow phenomenological methodology of the whole study. The articulation and elaboration of these grounds would have suggested and consolidated the indispensability and non-arbitrary primacy of the ontological argument. Leiss, however, is silent as to the logic, method, and sources of his implicit ontology. Leiss' implicit ontological postulate, had it been fully stated, would have consequently suggested certain corresponding human needs which would have permitted a more realistic exploration of commodities and market relations. Such an ontology would have demanded that Leiss pay attention to the subjective status of needing and satisfaction without ever having to elevate them to a sacrosanct mystery immune to objective judgment. Indeed such an explicit ontology would have protected Leiss from a "pure empiricism" or critical phenomenology in which the terrain under investigation is neutralized as much as the methodology employed, thus eliminating *a priori* any critical insights. The very character of the intensified needs-commodities interplay within the high-intensity market setting, precludes the disclosure of anything meaningful.³⁵ Neither the ferocity of the battlefield nor the variety of military uniforms can disclose the connection between war and imperialism. Detailed description and observation cannot show the inversion of an actual, empirical situation; they are not dialectical.

Leiss alludes to capitalism and market relations. Instead of applying his obvious and many talents to a badly needed analysis of these phenomena, he hides behind the virgin mind of the confused consumer. To interpret is to unveil, reveal the reality beneath all appearance. Leiss has furnished us with the appearance itself. I see nothing wrong with this, but I see everything wrong when he insists that he has grasped reality.

The conservative positivist Durkheim pointed out that morality cannot be seen directly. It must be read in social indices, in laws and suicide rates. Anomie, he told us, must be seen in human unhappiness and dissatisfaction, which must be read in the suicide rate. Durkheim knew that by themselves, the social text of law and the suicide rate disclose nothing. So it is with the high-intensity market setting.

The disastrous effects of alienation and domination could lead to a new era, an era of freedom or of civilised barbarism. Weber spoke of the iron cage and the wasteland of bureaucratic culture and world disenchantment. The full

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significance and terror of barbarism is this: the extinction of memory and imagination, of past and future.

Macpherson has argued that the vicious circle of false needs can only be broken by concentrating on the external impediments, now internalized under domination. He says, "the external impediments, palpable, rooted in class, remain basic and deserve the first attention."³⁶ They are an empirical reality, ontologically perceived.

The inadequacy of our society must be shown, but it must also be seen as such by the dominated themselves;³⁷ whether this is possible remains to be seen. Whatever the outcome, these dark times must be registered as the epoch of domination. Domination militates against critical thinking, but certainly it does not command confused thinking. Ortega y Gasset has said, I am I and my circumstances. That "I", that self, to become truly itself warrants as its circumstances freedom, freedom for all. If freedom were realised, those who witnessed this transformation, this leap from pre-history into human history, could say with Nietzsche's old Athenian: "how much did this people have to suffer to be able to become so beautiful".³⁸

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Notes

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958. This is a perfect example. She claims that we cannot know human nature and that it is highly probable that such nature does not exist, (p. 10) but the analysis of the human condition is initiated under the auspices of three, implicitly ontological, categories: labour, work, action. My point is simply this: Arendt could not initiate her analysis without *de facto* refuting her claims regarding human nature, and this applies to everyone.
2. Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, W.J. Craig, ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 868 "Macbeth".
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, tr. Benita Eisler, New York: George Braziller, 1965, pp. 102-3. Here Sartre replies to Camus.
4. In *Human Needs and Politics*, ed. Ross Fitzgerald, New York: Pergamon Press, 1977, pp. 26-35.
5. See William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An essay on the problem of needs and commodities*, Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1976, pp. 61-3. Leiss rejects the distinction but for reasons of his own: the confused consumer.
6. C.B. Macpherson, "Needs and Wants..." p. 31.

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
8. Such ontological attributes can be found in his *The Real World of Democracy*, Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (The Massey Lectures), 1965, especially pp. 54, 58, 59, 67; *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973; especially pp. 4-5, Essay 11 *passim*, pp. 42, 51, 53-5, 61, 184; *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, especially pp. 47-8.
9. C.B. Macpherson, "Humanist Democracy and Elusive Marxism: A Response to Minogue and Svacek", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, ix, no. 3, (September, 1976), p. 423.
10. C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, p. 38.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-8.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
13. C.B. Macpherson, "Needs and Wants..." p. 34. "For Marx's whole point about the future good society was that it would be a realm of freedom — freedom for people to develop their own needs and wants in whatever ways they liked. It would have been perfectly inconsistent for him to say in advance what they would be". Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 20. He says it is impossible to anticipate "the ways in which liberated human beings would use their freedom". This attitude toward freedom should be understood as suggesting only this: the quality and meaning of freedom, free, creative activity, are not in doubt; the specific configuration of their concrete expression remains open and indeterminate. It is just the same as with intelligence and intelligent thought. Affirming the value of intelligence does not mean that we can express in advance the intelligent thoughts of others, simply because we know of their intellectual talents. The specific expression remains exclusively theirs. Intelligence is the condition; its concrete manifestations are the thoughts of actual, intelligent individuals. So it is with freedom. Freedom is the condition; its concrete manifestations are the actions of free individuals which cannot be foreclosed. Certainly their quality can be specified: Negatively, freedom is inverted in alienation and domination; positively, it amounts to their abolition. The process of abolition itself is that of liberation.
14. See Alkis Kontos, "Between memory and dream", in *Thinking About Change*, ed. David P. Shugarman, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, pp. 53-70, especially on Marcuse pp. 60ff. Marcuse's philosophic genius, complexity and sophistication have been missed by both his vitriolic detractors and his politically radical, but philosophically naive, followers. A systematic monograph is necessary in order to do justice to Marcuse's thought.
15. Marcuse does not visualize material abundance in indiscriminate massive quantities as the ideal. See his reference to Baudelaire, *Eros and Civilization*, New York: Vintage Books, 1962, p. 139. Neither is Marcuse advocating a return to a simple, ascetic or idyllic primitive past. He is wiser than that. On scarcity, Macpherson is very instructive. He distinguishes natural scarcity from scarcity that was set up as an organizing principle for the emerging capitalist market society. Macpherson and Marcuse are very similar on scarcity and the technological prerequisites to the liberation of ontology. See Macpherson's "Democratic Theory: Ontology and Technology" in his *Democratic Theory*.
16. See Alkis Kontos, "Domination: metaphor and political reality" in *Domination* ed. Alkis Kontos, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1975, pp. 211-228. Surplus-repression is the fact of any mode of exploitation. It is present in tyranny and in domination. It is the common denominator of all forms of dehumanization. The performance principle, a specific historical manifestation of surplus-repression, constitutes the ground of domination in my sense of the

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- term. Mr. Charles Rachlis' work in progress treats systematically and perceptively Marcuse's fundamental categories. See his excellent essay "Marcuse and the Problem of Happiness", in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Winter, 1978), pp. 63-88.
17. Karl Marx, "The Meaning of Human Requirements..." and "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society" in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
 19. *Loc. Cit.*
 20. Herbert Marcuse, "A Revolution in Values", in *Political Ideologies*, eds. James A. Gould and Willis H. Truitt, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1973, pp. 331-6. See also his brilliant essay "The Concept of Essence", in his *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, tr. Jeremy J. Shapiro, Boston: Beacon Press, 1968, pp. 43-87.
 21. Marcuse, "A Revolution in Values", p. 331.
 22. *Loc. Cit.*
 23. *Loc. Cit.*
 24. *Loc. Cit.*
 25. *Ibid.*, pp. 331-2.
 26. Marcuse uses the two terms, and alienation, interchangeably. I believe this to be inaccurate. Rachlis is one of the very few who draws correctly the distinction between them. Doug Torgerson is another one. See his sensitive, elegant "Domination and Liberatory Politics", in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1978) pp. 137-157.
 27. Marx was irritated by the passivity of enslaved human beings. Weber was more sensitive and, at times, more perceptive regarding the mental and psychological legitimation process of hierarchical social structures. He saw their ideology as emanating from both sources, the masters' self-righteousness and the victims' tangible misfortune. Theodicy was the result of the victims' desire for the restoration of justice — the improvement of their suffering fate. Whatever the delusions of divine justice, the point here is that suffering humanity sought refuge in an other-worldly promise precisely because they perceived and experienced their condition as one of suffering. See Weber's "The Social Psychology of the World Religions" and "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, tr. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958. Unfortunately Weber does not distinguish between existential suffering, the tragic dimension of human life, and socio-political suffering. The victim of tragic events and the slave are indistinguishable in Weber's perspective.
 28. See Alkis Kontos, "Domination: metaphor and political reality", pp. 219-221.
 29. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Penguin, p. 230.
 30. See Alkis Kontos, "Between memory and dream", pp. 61-4.
 31. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, p. 37, and Marcuse states: "The classical Marxian theory envisages the transition from capitalism to socialism as a political revolution: the proletariat destroys the political apparatus of capitalism but retains the technological apparatus, sub-

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jecting it to socialization. There is continuity in the revolution; technological rationality, freed from irrational restrictions and destructions, sustains and consummates itself in the new society". *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, pp. 22.

32. William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction*; in his exchange, "... an ontology of stoned concepts" in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1977), pp. 103-6; Stephen Kline and William Leiss, "Advertising, Needs and 'Commodity Fetishism'" in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1978), pp. 5-30. In my review of *Limits to Satisfaction* I have praised what I thought original and significant there. I stand by that praise. I also pointed out my philosophical disagreements. I stand by those too. See *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter, 1977).
33. Leiss, "... an ontology of stoned concepts," p. 165.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
35. The high-intensity market setting is not the equivalent of Macpherson's structured liberal-democratic theory, nor does it carry Marcuse's conceptual apparatus or anything approximating it to permit a critical analysis.
36. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, p. 76. Marcuse argues similarly. Technological advancements alter external structures which allow internal changes, leading to instinctual changes. See *Eros and Civilization*, ch. 10.
37. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, p. 76; and his *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, pp. 99-108. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 6.
38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, last paragraph.

COMMENTARY

SECOND AND THIRD THOUGHTS ON NEEDS AND WANTS

C.B. Macpherson

I

I am grateful to Professor Kontos for having raised objections to my "Needs and Wants" paper, especially as one of his objections has led me to some second and third thoughts. Let me take up first his criticism of my having continued to use the needs/wants distinction after I had said that it was both insular and ideological. The reason for my having done so is that I was chiefly addressing an insular and ideological audience, *i.e.* English-speaking liberal-democrats, who are best addressed in terms familiar to them. Current English usage commonly treats needs and wants as different, which perhaps just shows how fully that usage has been shaped in the liberal tradition.

After Kontos's criticism, on second thoughts it occurred to me that another reason might be offered; but on third thoughts I am inclined to reject it.

The other reason is that the needs/wants distinction might still be thought useful in enabling us to carry the analysis a little farther than can otherwise be done. There is obviously a difference between those things that are necessary for the maintenance of individuals' lives (air, water, food, and in most climates clothing and shelter) and all the other things that may in different societies be wanted but are not absolutely necessary to maintain life. Why should we not call the first "needs" and the second "wants"? Could we not, by so doing, advance our analysis by considering separately two rather different phenomena: (1) the obvious ways in which "wants" change over time, through various levels of complexity of civilisation, and (2) the evident fact that some "wants" change over time into "needs", not only in Rousseau's pejorative sense, but also from real changes in the requirements of life in increasingly complex

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organizations of society (*e.g.*, in crowded cities, (a) sewage systems became a "need", for mere life-support, and became possible after Sir John Harrington's invention of the water-closet; and (b) transportation systems to get people to and from work, and to and from the holidays needed from modern work, become "needs" with increasing urban spread. Both of these phenomena must clearly be taken into account in any analysis of human needs, but are they best taken into account by starting from the needs/wants distinction? I think not.

Although that distinction is general enough to be held to be valid for all times and places, it is in fact only useful in respect of the most primitive humans. For at any more advanced level, some of what were "wants" become "needs", or if you prefer, "needs" change and increase. The point is, that there is really no difference in saying "some wants become needs" and saying "needs change and increase". So we are not any farther ahead by keeping to, or re-introducing, a needs/wants distinction.

The most useful distinction, I suggest, is not between needs and wants, but between needs defined narrowly, defined intermediately, and defined still more broadly. This is a more meaningful distinction if we are trying to cope with the question of changes in needs over time.

By the narrow definition I mean those needs that are required simply to keep alive (air, water, food, shelter). These do not change over time.

By the intermediate definition I mean those things that are necessary to keep people efficient as workers. Those needs do change over time, as the nature of the socially required work changes, *e.g.* from predominantly rural labour (hedging, ditching, ploughing etc.) to modern factory work and the still more highly skilled work required to sustain modern society (airline pilots and air traffic controllers). These may be described as social needs, but they are individual needs too; they are needs imposed on the individual by the society. They require more complex food and drink, and sedatives or other releases from tension.

A still broader definition of needs is not only possible but also required, if one starts from the humanist assumption that individuals ought to be enabled to make full use of, and to develop, their human capacities. In that case, "needs" will include whatever is required, and possible given the full use of existing technology (which in our time is generally far from fully used), to enable that use and development. Clearly, these needs do change with changes in what technology makes possible.

On this third definition of needs, and I think only on it, the distinction, made by Marcuse and championed by Kontos as against Leiss, between *true* and *false* needs becomes of utmost importance. For by the third definition, some needs that emerge at successive levels of social organization will be truly

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necessary (those which would need to be incorporated into the most advanced human society), and some will be falsely necessary (those which are required only by an exploitive class-divided society, whose maintenance economically requires the endless creation of artificial needs, and politically requires an ideology which legitimizes both those needs and the state which upholds that economic system).

It seems to me therefore that, whether or not we fully accept the third definition of needs, we are farther ahead, in coping with the problem of changes over time, if we abandon the needs/wants distinction and move to the distinction between needs defined narrowly, intermediately, and more broadly. If we accept the third definition, the superiority of the latter distinction is obvious. Even if we do not, it appears more promising. If we are not to stay at the level of "universal" statements about needs, which as I have argued are not universal but only applicable at the level of the most primitive society, we need to go beyond "needs" and "wants". Change over time is surely more important than Robinson Crusoe universals.

II

Let me now turn, more briefly, to Kontos's other criticism of my position. He contends that the opposed ontological postulates I employ — man as infinite consumer/appropriator, and man as exalter/developer of human capacities — are not exhaustive "except in the content of liberal-democratic theory", and that therefore, even if my rejection of the former is granted, the validity of the latter is not thereby demonstrated. "There can be, and have been other quite different postulates," he writes. The only example he mentions is "the ascetic rejection of both capitalist possessiveness and rational-technological foundations of freedom."

I grant him the ascetic rejection, and would grant him others that he might have mentioned from the past. I do not however, see any *present* contexts where my two ontological postulates are not exhaustive. They are, surely, in Marx: is it not essentially those two postulates that he had in mind in his distinction between the wealth and poverty of political economy and the rich human need of a totality of human life-activities (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan, 1959, pp. 111-112)? Would anarchists or Maoists see it any differently, or conservative libertarians such as Nozick and Milton Friedman, or non-liberal idealists such as Leo Strauss and his followers? I do not think so, nor do I see any other significant schools of political theory in our time which would dissent more than marginally from the exhaustiveness of the opposed postulates I have used.

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III

Let me conclude with a remark on the issue raised at the end of Kontos's paper — the question of the validity of the distinction Marcuse has made and Leiss seems to reject, between true and false needs. I begin with the well-known remark by Pontius Pilate as quoted by Aldous Huxley: ' "What is the truth?" asked jesting Pilate, and did not stay for an answer.' This is not to suggest that disputes about true and false needs are entirely semantic or unreal or irresolvable. They are real, but they may not be irresolvable.

We may find a clue in Rousseau's insight that with advances in techniques of production individuals came to desire more and more material satisfactions; that at each new level these became real needs, in the sense that it was more painful to be without them than pleasant to have them; and that the multitude of new needs "subjected man to all of nature and especially to his fellow men", since the only way to gratify the new desires was to dominate other men.

I think we may extrapolate from, and perhaps improve on, Rousseau's still profound perception. Needs induced by advances in techniques of production have in fact led to domination and class exploitation, imposed by the institution of an unlimited right of private appropriation. As I suggested earlier, from any humanist position (such as Rousseau's), needs which are so imposed must be considered adventitious, not truly but falsely human needs. However, we may add, following Marx's remark about "crude communism" as "a regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and undemanding man" (*op. cit.*, p. 100), that increases in needs are not always vicious. They are so in circumstances such as bourgeois society, where they do lead to domination; they are not so in an imaginable communist society, where increase of needs goes along with fully human existence.

In this view, there is a real distinction between true and false needs. False are those imposed by relations of production which require domination: these are false in any circumstances, such as our present ones, where it is possible to envisage meeting a civilised level of needs without domination. True needs are those which could be met by a rational, non-class-dominated, organization of production (work and leisure), given the presently available technology; and these can be seen as increasing indefinitely with future improvements in technology, provided that those improvements are no longer harnessed to the right of unlimited private appropriation.

I conclude that the distinction between true and false needs is real, pressing, and not be lightly abandoned.

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COMMENTARY

ONTOLOGY AND THE "CIVILIZING MOMENT" OF CAPITAL

William Leiss

I have been pestering my good friend Alkis Kontos for some time to offer a statement of his position on the distinction between true and false needs, including instruction on how I had erred in finding that distinction wanting. The paper before us is not unexpectedly difficult to respond to, falling as it does somewhere between the cryptic utterances of the Delphic oracle and the riddles of the Sphinx. Moreover, Kontos has wrapped himself in the mantles of not one but two great thinkers, here present, to whom I am much indebted, thus tending to insure in advance that I would appear not only unreasonable but ungrateful should I persist in the error of my ways.

Yet persist I must. I shall take up three points: (1) the relation between an ontological assumption and a theory (and practice) of social change; (2) the application of Kontos's ontological postulate to the Marxist theory of capitalist development; (3) the implications of the appearance-reality distinction for social inquiry.

1. Kontos claims that "ontological assumptions are inevitable in relation to the question of human needs." The assumption to which he is inclined is that the human essence is reflected in "free, creative activity"; he warns us that we cannot expect to demonstrate the correctness of our ontological assumptions in any apodictic sense, and he suggests we adopt one as an "orientation". I can accept all this, at least for the sake of argument. Yet I still do not think we should build a theory of social change on such foundations.

Kontos himself reminds us of "the problem of competing ontologies". I take this to mean that reasonable men and women can disagree about ontological questions and that no final resolution of such questions should be expected. Thus, among such reasonable persons, some will accept the above-mentioned representation of the human essence, and some will not. More importantly, however, there can be strong disagreements, among those who do accept it, over what conclusions in social analysis can be drawn from it. In my

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view one cannot, for example, *demonstrate* the superiority of a liberal approach (incrementalist reform of capitalism) over a radical one (democratic socialism or revolutionary communism), or vice versa. In a purely theoretical sense both can be made internally consistent with the same ontological postulate, given certain assumptions. There is no way to leap from the postulate to any specific practical recommendations for social change. I am prepared to state quite flatly that we must be content to live with the divorce of theory and practice.

More specifically, Kontos makes no attempt to show how his own judgments on social activity follow from his ontological postulate. In what sense are we "dehumanized in our market relations"? Does this mean we must abolish them? Is such a thing possible? "Man as infinite appropriator contradicts man the exorter, enjoyer, and developer of his ethical powers." Why "contradicts"? Totally or partially contradicts? What are the implications of this alleged contradiction?

2. In elaborating his ontological postulate Kontos says: "Free, creative activity becomes the measure of history's humanly appropriate development." Again, I can accept this for the sake of argument; but I do not see that very much follows therefrom. Does it give us *any* guidance for choosing among social change options in contemporary society, for example?

Let us stay within the orbit of Marx's critique of capitalist society and ask how this "measure" could be applied in that context. Recall Marx's repeated statements about the progressive character of capitalism, *e.g.*, the passages in the *Grundrisse* about the "civilizing moment" of capital which frees us from the "limited" spheres of needs in earlier societies. It is perfectly plausible to suggest, quite within Marx's frame of reference here, that capital has not yet completed its liberating work and thus that the expanded reproduction of capital is, in the range of actual social options, the best promoter of "free, creative activity" or the realisation of the human essence today. This may be regarded as an extremely dubious position, but it is not — granted Marx's assumptions — *prima facie* erroneous or inconsistent with those assumptions.

The ontological postulate recommended by Kontos is too general to provide a basis for a critical theory of capitalist development or for a theory of the distortion of needs in capitalist society.

3. Kontos claims that in *The Limits to Satisfaction* I have grasped only the appearance, and not the reality, of contemporary society and that the "character of the intensified needs-commodities interplay itself ... cannot disclose anything meaningful." He urges me instead to "revitalize the truth of ancient theorems and modern legends."

I accept Hegel's notion that appearance is the appearance of essence. It is meaningful, although it is not the whole truth. More important is the implication in Kontos's criticism that we already know (since Marx wrote) the "essence" of the social relations in capitalist society. Apparently all we have to

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do is to polish these theorems assiduously, until they shine so brilliantly that all who now reject them are dazzled into submission. I do not think we know this essence, and therefore we must continually call into question our theoretical apparatus even as we employ it. For example, I think that there is a fetishism of commodities in today's society, but it is not the kind of fetishism described in chapter I of *Capital*.

To conclude: Despite Kontos's attempt to widen the gap between our positions, I believe that at bottom it is not so great a disagreement. I look forward with pleasure to narrowing it in future work.

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THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY:
MARX'S TRANSFORMATION OF
HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF THE POOR

Erica Sherover

In 1842 Marx wrote a series of articles for the Rhineland Newspaper in which he reported on the debates in the Rhineland Provincial Assembly on the laws governing the gathering of fallen wood. These articles (henceforth referred to as the "Wood Theft Debates") have received remarkably little scholarly attention.¹ This may be due to the fact that they do not contain any of Marx's more "popular" concepts which lend themselves so readily to random philosophizing — concepts such as species being, alienation or estrangement. What the "Wood Theft Debates" do contain is an explicit discussion of the nature and character of the poor *vis à vis* civil society, a discussion which in many respects is the starting point for Marx's later concept of the proletariat.

This paper has two aims: the first is to show how Marx's discussion of the poor represents a particular transformation of Hegel's view of the poor; the second is to suggest how Marx's early views of the poor may prove problematic for his later thinking about the proletariat.

The most cursory examination of the "Wood Theft Debates" reveals that Marx's description of the poor as "*die Standeslosen*", those of no estate, is a direct borrowing of Hegel's own characterization of the unincorporated poor. (#232)² However, even as Marx takes over Hegel's terminology, he transforms the meaning of this description by making it synonymous with his own definition of the poor as "the elemental class of human society". (234)³ In order to appreciate the significance of Marx's transformation of the Hegelian characterization of the poor it is necessary to elucidate the meaning which this concept holds in Hegel's political philosophy.

Hegel's uses the term "*Stand*" to refer both to the legally recognized social group or class to which an individual belongs and to the explicitly political function which these social groupings possess in relation to the state. It is not accidental that Hegel uses the term *Stand* in this dual manner. He claims that his usage is justified by the German language itself (the same word has both

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meanings) and that in this respect the German language is closer to the truth of the matter than those "so called theories" which see no connection between the classes of civil society and the political function of these classes. The truth of the matter is that there is a unity (*Vereinigung*) between the civil and the political elements of life in civil society. (#303 Remark)

According to Hegel, this unity consists in the element of universality or community (*Gemeinwesen*) which characterizes both civil and political life. For Hegel, the locus of universality in civil society is in the estates themselves, although their relation to universality is different in each case. The class of civil servants has universality as the "goal [*Zweck*] of its essential activity". (#303) Inasmuch as the civil servants are the officers of the state which is itself the realm of concrete universality, civil servants are "the universal estate". (*ibid.*) The agricultural estate or landed nobility "attain their position by birth" (#305) and have a "natural or familial" relation to universality. Lastly, the business class (which includes both proprietors and artisans) achieves its relation to universality through its articulation into substructures known as Corporations — which are roughly equivalent to guilds. It is particularly Hegel's discussion of the Corporations which will concern us here.

The most succinct statement of Hegel's views regarding Corporation membership is found in paragraph 253 in the *Philosophy of Right*. Because Hegel's discussion of the unincorporated poor so strongly depends on his views as to the advantages of being a member of a Corporation, it is worthwhile to quote this passage at length.

The Corporation member needs no external signs beyond his own membership as evidence of his skill and his regular income and subsistence, i.e. as evidence that he is a somebody. It is also recognized that he belongs to a whole which is itself an organ of the entire society and that he is interested in and makes efforts to promote the disinterested end of this whole. Thus he finds his honor in his estate. [*Es hat so in seinem Stande seine Ehre.* (translation somewhat changed)]

The Corporations are organs of universality; herein lies their importance for Hegel and the importance he attaches to membership in a Corporation as far as individuals are concerned. The individuals of the business estate first attain "real and living determination for [*i.e.* in] the universal in the sphere of the

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Corporation ..." (#308, Remark) The Corporations are organs of universality inasmuch as their members share common aims *qua* members of their individual Corporations. In this respect the universality of the Corporations is a partial and limited universality since the aim of any given Corporation is common only to a certain group in society but not to the society as a whole. The individual who is a member of a Corporation is a member of an organization whose "universal purpose" is "no wider than the purpose involved in business, its proper (*eigentiümlich*) task and interest". (#251)

For Hegel there is a reciprocal relationship between membership (legal status) in civil society and membership in a Corporation. Hegel refers to the individual who is a member of civil society as a "*Mitglied der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*" (#251) and he uses the same German term (*Mitglied*) to refer to the individual who is a member of a Corporation. "A member of civil society (is) in virtue of his particular skill a member of a Corporation." (#251) It makes no difference whether it is only members of civil society who are members of Corporations or (for individuals of the business estate) only members of Corporations who are members of civil society. The point is the same: for individuals who are not members of the landed nobility or the estate of civil servants, only membership in a Corporation confers membership in civil society. This means that to be a non-member of a Corporation, *i.e.* to be "unincorporated" is to be a non-member of civil society. We will return to the significance of this conclusion below.

Hegel insists on the distinction between the member of a corporation and the "day laborer". (#252, Remark) This distinction between corporation members and those unfortunates who are unincorporated is the foundation of his views regarding the unincorporated poor. Hegel refers to this group as the *Pöbel*. (#245) This term is often rendered in English by the word "rabble", a translation which accurately captures its dual meaning of being both poverty-stricken and malcontent, rebellious. Hegel's description of the poor and their state has nothing in common with the notions of "genteel" or "honorable" poverty. His discussion of the unincorporated poor is free from any traces of idealization. (#241-245) There is nothing honorable in Hegel's eyes in being a member of the *Pöbel*.

Honor for Hegel is civil honor (*Standesehre*) (#253). Honor is a concept that applies only to those who are members of civil society and in a significant sense the poor are not members of civil society. It is not their extreme poverty which makes them outsiders, non-members; it is primarily the fact that since they do not belong to any authorized Corporation they also do not belong to any recognized estate. This fact has serious consequences, "Unless he is a member of an authorized Corporation (and it is only by being authorized that an association becomes a Corporation), an individual is without *Standesehre*."

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(#253, Remark) Such an individual "cannot live according to his estate because this estate does not exist (*da der Stand nicht existiert*).'" (*ibid.*)

Hegel's reasoning on this point is as follows: the only common element (*Das Gemeinsame*) which really exists in civil society is "what is legally constituted and recognized" (*ibid.*), and it is clear that a social order which consists of Corporations and estates cannot bestow legal recognition on an "estate" of unincorporated individuals. In terms of the standards of civil society such an "estate" is a non-estate.

The consequences of this reasoning are that the poor do not "really exist" in civil society, *i.e.* as members of civil society, for they lack the requirements of membership in this society; they are not members of any recognized estate. Hegel draws an identity here between the notion of real existence in civil society and the notion of membership in this society. Real existence is legally recognized existence, it is rational existence. (The real is the rational), and in terms of this standard the existence of the poor is entirely irrational, purely contingent. "Irrational existence" in civil society is equivalent to non-membership in this society, whose requirements for membership are that one belong to an authorized Corporation and thereby to a legally recognized estate. Contemplating the spectacle of the ever increasing numbers of these non-members of civil society Hegel remarks, "The important question of how poverty is to be abolished is one of the most disturbing questions which agitate modern society." (#244, Addition)

Having explicated Hegel's views of the unincorporated poor we can now turn to Marx's characterization of this group as the "elemental class of human society". By characterizing the poor in this manner Marx succeeds in completely transforming the meaning of the Hegelian description of the poor even as he retains the Hegelian terminology. To describe the poor as the elemental class of human society is to attribute to them a positive significance which was entirely absent from Hegel's characterization of them as the *Pöbel*.

Marx accepts Hegel's description of the poor as non-members of civil society but he embeds this description in its larger context. In doing so Marx transforms Hegel's description into a critical concept. For since the poor are the "elemental class of human society" *simpliciter*, the fundamental class of the human community generally, the fact that they have no legal status or recognized existence in a particular social order becomes an immanent critique of this order. That the existence of the poor "has been a mere custom of civil society" is itself a criticism of this society, a criticism of its standards of universality and rationality. (234)

I shall now turn to the details of Marx's discussion in the "Wood Theft Debates". The issue being discussed by the Rhineland assembly is whether the poor ought to have the legal right to gather wood which falls from trees

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growing on privately owned land. Marx claims that the wood gathering activities of the poor are in effect a customary right and he argues that the assembly ought to transform this customary right into a "custom which has become law, *i.e.* into a *Staatsgewohnheit*, a custom of the state". (231) Marx's discussion of the customary right of the poor is worth examining in some detail for it provides the backdrop for his views as to the consciousness or subjectivity of the poor.

Marx's defense of the custom of wood gathering is not a defense of the *customary* aspects of this activity but a defense of the *rational* aspects of this custom. It is these which make the traditional activity of the poor into a customary right. It is Marx's view that only the poor can be said to have customary rights. "By its very nature", a customary right "can only be a right of this lowest, propertyless and elemental mass." (230) That Marx is no defender of custom for its own sake is seen in his refusal to speak of the customary rights of the aristocracy; "The so-called customs of the privileged classes are understood to mean *customs contrary to right (wider das Recht)*." (*ibid.*) Marx's exposition of this point is unambiguous.

The customary rights of the aristocracy conflict by their *content* with the form of universal law. They cannot be given the form of law because they are formations of lawlessness. The fact that their content is contrary to the form of law — universality and necessity — proves that they are *customary wrongs* and cannot be asserted in opposition to the law ... no one's action ceases to be wrongful because it is his custom ... (231)

Marx argues that the right of the poor to gather fallen wood is a custom "of the entire poor class", a custom "which is not of a local character but is a customary right of the poor in all countries." (230) It may appear here that Marx is asserting that the custom of wood gathering is just something that poor people have always engaged in, and thus that it has what Kant would call "comparative universality" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction Section II).⁴ This, however, is not the case. Marx is arguing that the wood gathering activity of the poor is fundamentally correct and rational and that it therefore ought to have the strict universality of legal recognition.

Most significant for our purposes in Marx's discussion of this issue is the justification he gives to his position. Marx finds that the wood gathering activity of the poor has what we might call ontological significance; their

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customary activity expresses their essentially correct perception of the real nature of things. Marx claims that the poor have a "sure instinct" for the *indeterminate* aspect of property" (*die unentschiedene Seite*). (233)³ The custom of wood gathering illustrates the fact that "there exist objects of property which *by their very nature* can never acquire the character of private property" (*ibid.*, italics added). In effect Marx is claiming that the customary activity of the poor is itself informative about the *nature* of certain objects. Objects which can never acquire the character of private property are

objects, which by their elemental nature and their accidental mode of existence, belong to the sphere of occupation rights, and therefore to the occupation right of that class, which precisely because of these occupation rights, is excluded from all other property, and which has the *same position in civil society as these objects have in nature* (*ibid.*, italics added).

This last phrase is central to Marx's argument. Marx is claiming that there is an ontological correspondence between the position of the fallen wood in nature and the position of the poor in civil society. The poor are the dead branches of civil society; therefore, on Marx's view they have what I would call an ontological right (a right resulting from their very being) to gather the fallen wood, an object whose nature is identical to their own. It is not only the case that the poor everywhere engage in certain traditional activities like wood gathering, but that these customs themselves are right, in a cosmic sense.

This notion of cosmic rightness pervades Marx's discussion of the wood gathering activities of the poor. In gathering the fallen wood the poor demonstrate their "instinctive sense of right (*ein instinktmässiger Rechtssinn*) (whose) roots are positive and legitimate". (234) The wood gathering activities of the poor are an instance of the "social instinct," an expression of a "rightful urge". "It will be found not only that his class feels the need to satisfy a natural need, but equally that it feels the need to satisfy a rightful urge." (233-4)

The rightfulness of the wood gathering custom is anchored in the natural order of things. It is modelled on the "elemental power of nature" (234) and it is the counterpart to the play of natural forces. Marx argues that the relation between the living trees and the fallen (dead) wood is a representation of the relation between wealth and poverty in society. "Human poverty senses this kinship and deduces its right to property (the dead branches) from this feeling

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of kinship." (*ibid.*) Nature itself provides the model for the poor by causing the wood to fall.

The fortuitous arbitrary action of privileged individuals is replaced by the fortuitous operation of elemental forces, which take away from private property what the latter no longer voluntarily foregoes. (*ibid.*)

The correspondence between the activity of the poor and the activity of nature is what ultimately justifies the custom of wood gathering.

Thus far I have concentrated on the ontological aspect of Marx's defense of the customary rights of the poor. I now turn to another dimension of Marx's discussion of the poor, his comments as to their character, subjectivity or consciousness.

In Marx's view the poor as the elemental class of human society is the only group which has not been affected by the false conceptions and artificial values of civil society. The poor, "those of no estate" are the only ones who have not been deceived as to certain fundamental truths. The poor are not confused as to what is really valuable. Unlike the forest owners who seem to believe that the "rights of young trees" ought to take precedence over the rights of human beings, the poor know that human beings are more important than property. (226)⁶ The poor do not have hearts of wood, they have human hearts and consequently they do not confuse the heart and soul of a human being with the heart and soul of a piece of wood.

One might say that the insight of the poor is morally superior to the insight of the provincial deputies sitting in the assembly. It would be more accurate, however, to say that for Marx the insight of the poor is superior in both a moral and an ontological sense in that they are able to perceive truths of a moral-ontological sort. That the poor have this ability is evident from the fact that (unlike the deputies in the assembly) they do not confuse the human essence with something non-human, with "an alien material being". (236) Further, Marx explicitly maintains that the poor are not victims of the fetishism which enslaves the members of the provincial assembly. Marx does not use the term *fetishism* but he does use the term *fetish*. He notes that the so called "*savages of Cuba* regarded gold as a *fetish of the Spaniards*" and he claims that if these so called "savages" had been sitting in the Rhine Provincial Assembly they would have "*regarded wood as the Rhinelanders fetish*". (263)⁷

It is clear from the text that Marx regards the insight of the Cuban natives and the insight of the poor as superior to the insight of the Spaniards and the

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Rhinelanders. Those who worship fetishes take these objects to be endowed with some sacred or holy aura. The ability to see gold or wood as a fetish is the ability to see through this mystification, the ability to see through mystified reality. The poor seem to possess this ability. The poor are not deceived by an "abject materialism" which "enthrones the immoral, irrational and soulless abstractions of a particular material object." (262) The poor understand that wood is only wood; they do not endow it with a soul. Most importantly, the poor do not possess "a particular consciousness which is slavishly submitted to this (material) object." (*ibid.*). The poor do not have a particular consciousness; they have only an elemental human consciousness.

Marx has two different justifications for supposing that the poor have a morally superior consciousness. The first has to do with the sort of "property" which the poor possess, the second has to do with their ontological status. I turn first to the property justification.

Marx characterizes the poor as "those whose property consists of life, freedom, humanity and citizenship of the state, who own nothing except themselves". (256)⁸ In contrast to the particular material property of the forest owners these "possessions" are non-material "universal property" — the property of all human beings *qua* human beings.⁹ Marx's emphasis on the advantages of owning nothing but oneself contrasts strikingly with Hegel's justification of private property. Hegel follows Kant in arguing that the ownership of property is essential for the expression of an individual's free will, and thus that the ownership of property is essential to the realisation of the individual as personality. For Hegel, any disqualification from holding property or any encumbrances on property are "examples of the alienation (*Entzuserung*) of personality." (#66)¹⁰

Marx's identification of universality with the lack of private material possessions is reminiscent of Plato, but for Plato's philosopher kings the lack of private material possessions was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of their universalist perspective. For Marx the lack of property seems to be the determining factor in shaping the consciousness of the poor. Marx seems to be claiming that it is because the poor have only "universal property" that they have only universal interests, and it is because they have only universal interests that they have the kind of subjectivity which they do.

Marx identifies the objective/ontological sense of interest and the subjective/psychological sense. Interest in an objective/ontological sense is the interest which "belongs" to one in virtue of one's social being, it is a feature or property of what one is. Interest in a subjective/psychological sense describes or refers to what one is interested in, the values, ideals, goals, desires that one has or pursues. Interest in this sense is what one wills. The distinction between the forest owners and the poor in terms of this latter sense of interest is that the

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forest owners are interested in their property rights while the poor are interested in life, humanity, freedom and citizenship. The connection between the objective/ontological sense of interest and the subjective/psychological sense means that it is because the poor *have* only universal interests in the first sense that they are only interested *in* universals in the latter sense. Life, humanity, freedom, and citizenship are all universals of human existence. To be interested only in these (as the poor are, on Marx's analysis) is to have a universalist subjectivity or consciousness.

Secondly, the universalist consciousness of the poor seems to be a result of their negative ontological status *vis à vis* civil society. Here we see most clearly the way in which Marx has transformed Hegel's concept of the poor. Hegel's discussion of poverty and the unincorporated poor reveals the disadvantages in not belonging to any estate. For Hegel the situation of the unincorporated poor is unfortunate in every respect. They "lack all the advantages of society." (#241)¹¹ Marx analyzes the situation differently. For Marx the fact that the poor belong to no estate (the fact that they are estate-less) has compensating qualities; indeed it becomes a positive factor.

Marx focuses on the fact that as *non-members* of civil society the poor do not share in the "disadvantages" of this society. The disadvantages of civil society, as Marx describes them, concern the effect of private interest on the lives of individuals. Private interest dominates all aspects of life in civil society. It "makes the one sphere in which a person comes into conflict with this interest into this person's whole sphere of life." (236) The disadvantages of civil society are not only "objective"; they are "subjective" as well; they are disadvantages in terms of individuals' relations with others and in terms of their own "inner life", their subjectivity, mental structure or consciousness.¹²

The difference between Hegel and Marx with respect to civil society is not that Hegel is full of uncritical admiration for civil society while Marx is "critical". Hegel is very critical of civil society, even in the *Philosophy of Right* (he is much more critical in the *Jenenser Philosophie* which Marx could not have read). Hegel does not shy away from detailing the negative aspects of civil society. Anyone familiar with Hegel's description of civil society as "the battleground of the private interest of each individual against all" (#289) cannot maintain that Hegel supposes civil society is a pleasant place to be. The difference between Hegel and Marx is that while Hegel does not notice the "advantages" in being a non-member of civil society, Marx does.

For Hegel the idea that there could be any advantage to being a non-member of civil society does not make any sense, because Hegel identifies membership in civil society with participation in the modern human community generally. According to Hegel it is only by participating in an organized and rational totality that the individual can participate in the human community. For

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Hegel, to participate in such a totality is to participate in universality and it is only by virtue of such participation that the individual is a full (or real) member of the human community. Without such participation the existence of the individual is reduced to isolated contingency; his activity becomes "mere selfseeking". (#253, Remark) Hegel views the estates as providing their members with "a more universal form of life", (*eine allgemeinere Lebensweise*). (*ibid.*) Thus for Hegel non-membership in an estate is not only tantamount to non-membership in civil society, it is also tantamount to non-membership in the modern human community. In other words, non-membership in civil society is *eo ipso* non-membership in the human community, and it is obvious why there would be no benefits in being in this situation.¹³

When we say that a man must be *something* we mean that he must belong to some determinate estate, since to be something means to be a substantive being. A human being of no estate (*ein Mensch ohne Stand*) is merely a private person and does not exist in (the realm of) real universality. (#207, Addition) (Translation somewhat changed)

Marx does not share Hegel's identification of civil society and the human community and therefore he focuses on the "benefits" of being "outside" civil society, the benefits of non-membership. These are the benefits of being untouched by the narrow concerns of civil society. If private interest tends to dominate the whole sphere of a person's life in civil society, then those who are not members of civil society are free from this influence. They are free to have thoughts and feelings other than those inspired by the "petty, wooden, mean and selfish soul of (private) interest (which) sees only one point, the point in which it is wounded ..." (236) Private interest is inherently limited and one-sided. Inasmuch as it "makes the one sphere in which a person comes into conflict with this interest into this person's whole sphere of life", it has no sense of perspective. It mistakes one sphere of reality for the whole. Private interest and all who share its point of view (all members of civil society) are unable to rise to the perspective of universality, the point of view of the whole. The poor however have no difficulty in attaining this perspective. Paradoxically, it is the poor, the non-members of civil society who are, on Marx's analysis, the ideal citizens of the state, for they share the perspective of the state immediately, without any effort on their part. This perspective is

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theirs by virtue of their very being.

This last point is very important. Marx claims that the poor do not have to do anything to attain a universal consciousness. This is something they already have or possess by virtue of what they are (the elemental class of human society), and by virtue of what they do not possess (property). There is an immediate connection for Marx between the social being of the poor and their consciousness or subjectivity — a parallel between their elemental (fundamental) nature in human society and their ability to perceive fundamental (moral-ontological) truths. The poor can thank their poverty for the fact that they have the superior insight and perspective which they allegedly do.

The social instinct of the poor is not a social conscience as we might understand the term. There is no suggestion in Marx's discussion of the consciousness of the poor that their social instinct has to struggle against the baser motives of egoism or meanness. Their social instinct is something they possess by virtue of their ontological status, a fact of their nature. Moreover, it seems to be a permanent feature of their being. There seems to be no danger that they might lose their social instinct or their "instinctive sense of right"; there seems to be no danger that they might become enamoured of false values or fetishes.

We can say that Marx's poor do not need to have their consciousness transformed in any way. They seem to have the correct (morally right) perceptions and values *a priori* simply by virtue of their poverty. They do not need to undergo any process of subjective development (consciousness-raising) to acquire their social instinct, nor do they need to engage in a process of education to acquire the perspective of "reason and morality" — they simply have to be what they are.

Marx's transformation of Hegel's concept of the poor and his emphasis on the virtues of poverty do not take place in a vacuum. Marx is operating with a set of assumptions from another political tradition. His discussion of the "positive" aspects of poverty is indebted to the Jacobin notion of the poor as being both well intentioned and naturally virtuous.¹⁴ To the extent that Marx adopts some of the elements of the Jacobin perspective on the poor, he also adopts some of the problematical and romanticized aspects of their thought.¹⁵ This has consequences for his own subsequent thought concerning the proletariat.

Specifically, Marx's combination of Hegel's concept of the poor as non-members of civil society along with his use of the Jacobin concept of the natural virtue of the poor create difficulties in Marx's thought concerning the proletariat. These difficulties are not significant in the context of the "Wood Theft Debates". Marx is not concerned here with the analysis of revolutionary possibilities but with the defense of the customary rights of the poor. In the "Wood Theft Debates" Marx's problematic is not that of a possible social

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transformation. His appeal is still to the state as the guardian and guarantor of universality in the social order even though this universality is to be measured by the situation of the poor.

The situation changes, however, once Marx turns from a defense of the customary rights of the poor to an analysis of the possibilities of a social transformation in which the proletariat are to take the leading role. In this context the nature and characteristics of the proletariat become significant, and at this point the roots of Marx's conception of the proletariat reveal their importance. To the extent that Marx's transformation of Hegel's concept of the poor with its emphasis on the ontological superiority of non-membership in civil society remains an element of his thought concerning the proletariat, Marxian theory is characterized by a tension between the ontological and the dialectical-historical notion of the proletariat. According to the former, the proletariat is by its very nature and existence the revolutionary subject; according to the latter, this subject can only emerge in the course of a long process of the education and emancipation of consciousness — in theory and in practice.

Philosophy

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Notes

Editor's note: All parenthetical references given as "(262)" refer to page numbers in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, and all parenthetical references given as "(#251)" refer to paragraphs in Georg Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*.

1. The only extended analysis of these articles which I have seen is an essay by Heinz Lubasz entitled "Marx's Initial Problematic: The Problem of Poverty", *Political Studies*, Vol. xxiv, no. 1 (March, 1976) pp. 24-42. Lubasz correctly insists on the significance of these articles for an understanding of Marx's later thought but I find that his perspective on the relation between Marx's and Hegel's discussions of poverty overly schematizes the possibilities and fails to consider the problems in Marx's discussion of the poor.
2. References are to the following edition: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* New York: 1975, Vol. 1 pp 224-263. The series of articles on "The Wood Theft Debates" is listed as "Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Assembly. Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood". For Hegel's discussion of poverty and the poor see the *Philosophy of Right* paragraphs #241-246. References in my discussion of Hegel's views are to the numbered paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Right*. I have generally followed Knox's translation except where I felt his rendering to be inaccurate or too general.
3. We should note that Marx uses the term "class" at this point in a generalized sense to mean any social group. In fact even as late as his *Contribution to a Critique Of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844), Marx uses the terms class and estate (*Stand*) interchangeably.
4. The distinction between comparative and strict universality is comparable to the distinction between empirical and rational universality. Only the latter is grounded in reason and hence absolutely binding. Comparative universality as Kant uses the term is in effect an empirical generalization and can justify neither *a priori* knowledge nor morality.

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5. The indeterminate aspect of property is that aspect which comprises its existence as *Gemeineigentum* (common property). Marx argues that feudal laws regarding property made some allowance for this aspect of property inasmuch as in recognizing the existence of property in the form of privilege, they also recognized the traditional rights of the poor in the form of institutionalized (and customary) charity. As a result medieval laws regarding property were essentially ambiguous or two sided. The reform of medieval law consisted of the transformation "of privileges into rights", a transformation which was "onesided" in that it overlooked the customary rights of the underprivileged. The monasteries are a case in point. When church property was secularized the monasteries received compensation; the poor who lived by the monasteries (and who had a traditional source of income thereby) did not receive any compensation. (231-232)

In view of the issue of "Marx's relation to Hegel", it is particularly interesting to note the way in which Marx characterizes the nature of modern property legislation. His description could be a paraphrase of Hegel's discussion of the understanding in the *Lesser Logic*:

For the purpose of legislation, such ambiguous forms could be grasped only by the understanding, and understanding is not only one-sided but has the essential function of making the world one-sided, a great and remarkable work, for only one-sidedness can form and tear the particular out of the inorganic slimy whole (*unorganischen Schleim des Ganzen*). The character of a thing is a product of the understanding. Each thing must isolate itself and become isolated in order to be something. By confining each of the contents of the world in a stable definiteness and solidifying the fluid essence (of things) the understanding brings out the manifold diversity of the world, for the world would not be many-sided without the many one-sidednesses. (233, translation slightly changed)

6. One of the Rhineland deputies had argued that there was essentially no difference between gathering fallen wood and stealing live timber and he had supported his argument by claiming that in his district "'gashes were made in young trees and later, when they were dead, they were treated as fallen wood'" (226). Marx contrasts the concern shown for the welfare of "young trees" with the lack of concern for human welfare and remarks: "It would be impossible to find a more elegant and at the same time more simple method of making the right of human beings give way to that of young trees ... the wooden idols triumph and human beings are sacrificed." (*ibid.*)
7. The various references in the "Wood Theft" articles to idols, animal masks, worship of animals, and fetishes reflect Marx's systematic study in 1841-42 of primitive religion. His notebooks from that time indicate that he was particularly interested in the concept of fetishism — its nature, its origins, and the difference between ancient and "modern" forms of fetishism. *MEGA*, Vol. 1, Part 2 p. 115ff. One bit of information gleaned from his earlier study appears directly in his discussion of the wood theft laws: Marx's notebooks contain the phrase "gold as fetish in Cuba". The phrase reappears in the context of Marx's comparison of the Spaniards and the Rhineland deputies.
8. Maximilien Rubel has argued that at the time Marx wrote the "Wood Theft" articles he was only "a step away from rejecting the state as such". Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx Essai de Biographie Intellectuelle* Paris: 1971, p. 48. But however critical Marx may have been of some of the details of Hegel's political thought (and of some of the actual institutions of Prussian society), the fact is that he still considers the state as the locus and guardian of universality in the society — provided that the state is a true state, and "corresponds to its concept." (241). This means that at this point Marx assumes that the perspective of the state and the perspective of private interest are diametrically opposed. See for example the following: "The meager (*dürftige*) soul of private interest has never been illuminated and penetrated by a state-like thought (*Staats-gedanken*)", (241, translation slightly changed). See also Marx's description of the relation of the state to its citizens (p. 236), his claim that the state "will (not) forsake the sunlit path of justice" in order to defend the interest of the forest owners, (257) and his identification of the state with the perspective of "reason and morality" (262).

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9. The German text makes the relation to property even more explicit. Marx says the interest of the poor is the interest "des Lebenseigentümers, des Freiheitseigentümers, des Menschenseigentümers, des Staatseigentümers." (MEGA, Vol 1. Part 1 p. 298). The German text says quite clearly that the poor are the "Eigentümer" (proprietors) of all of these — hence the poor are among other things the proprietors of the (genuine) state.
10. For Hegel's discussion of property see paragraphs 40, 41, 45, 65 and 66 in the *Philosophy of Right*. We should note that Hegel does not justify property on any utilitarian grounds. "The rational (element) of property does not consist in its satisfaction of needs, but rather in the fact that it overcomes (*aufhebt*) the mere subjectivity of the person. Only in property does the person exist as Reason" (#41, Addition, my translation) For a recent discussion of the philosophical significance of property in Hegel's system see Richard Teichgraber, "Hegel on Property and Poverty" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. xxxviii, no. 1 (Jan-March, 1977) pp. 47-64.
11. Again we should emphasize that for Hegel it is *unincorporated* poverty which has this negative existential status. For although the poor who are members of a corporation may suffer material distress, their membership in the corporation assures them that they are "somebody". Poor as they are, corporation members still have their *Standesehre*, and they retain their dignity as persons even when they receive material assistance. "Within the Corporation the help which poverty receives loses its accidental character and the humiliation wrongfully associated with it." (#253, Remark)
12. Individuals under the sway of private interest are unable to perceive anything but the injuries to this interest. Marx says they are like the man with corns on his feet whose judgement of a passerby is solely determined by the fact that the latter has stepped on his foot. Marx's German original makes the point in a pun: "Er macht seine Hühneraugen zu den Augen, mit denen er sieht und urteilt." MEGA, Vol. 1 Part 1. p. 277. (English text p. 235).
13. Hegel's identification of membership in civil society with membership in the modern human community might be traced to his reading of Aristotle's *Politics*. If the human being is a *zoon politikon*, then membership in the *polis* is tantamount to being fully human. Slaves of course were not members of the *polis*, but then slaves were not assumed to have fully human status.
14. We know from Marx's Kreuznach notebooks that he studied Rousseau very carefully at this time and we know that in his subsequent analysis of German conditions he frequently makes reference to the French revolutionary tradition. (For example his discussion of the possibilities of radical revolution in Germany in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* is based upon a comparison of German and French conditions). It is quite possible therefore that Marx read the writings of Robespierre and Saint Just, but my claim that his view of the poor is indebted to the Jacobin tradition does not depend upon my being able to document that Marx actually read these authors. By the time Marx is thinking about the poor the Jacobin tradition has become part of the wider tradition of political thought; it is in the air, so to speak. To say that certain of Marx's assumptions about the poor originate with the Jacobins is only to trace these assumptions to their roots. It is not to claim that Marx went directly to the source to acquire them.
15. The Jacobins, especially Robespierre, had a tendency to glorify and admire "an honorable poverty". See for example his comments on the nature and characteristics of the poor in his speech in April 1791: "Sur la nécessité de révoquer le décret sur le marc d'argent". The speech is found in Maximilien Robespierre, *Textes Choisis* Paris: 1956, Vol. 1 pp. 65-76. Other examples of Robespierre's views about the poor are found in his "Lettre a Mm. Verniaud, Gensonne, Brissot et Guadet" in *Lettres à Ses Commettans* Deuxième Série, No. 1. See also letter no. 6 in this volume: "Observations sur une petition relative aux subsistances", and his speech "Sur la Constitution" May 10, 1793. The latter is found in Robespierre, *Oeuvres*, Paris: 1840, Vol. III.

COMMENTARY

COMMENTS ON ERICA SHEROVER'S "THE VIRTUE OF POVERTY"

Jeremy J. Shapiro

The dialogue with Marx's writings and theories that has been going on in Europe and North America for the past few decades has had two aims: historical comprehension of Marx and the historical forces that he influenced and that invoke him, and the development of a framework for comprehending and acting on and in the present. It seems that the more deeply we understand Marx from outside the dogmatic traditions, both pro and contra, the more we can identify the assumptions, both philosophical and historical, that shaped his thought, and the more we discover the irrelevance of Marxism to our own situation. With less exaggeration, and with reference to the split in Marxian thought first identified by Lukács, the more Marxism is clarified and refined as a dialectical-critical method, the less the body of Marxian social, economic, and political theory seems useful for the orientation of social theory or political practice. Of course, Marxian theory is still applicable in a sense that makes it prone to dogmatism: it is a schematism into which reality can always be made to fit comfortably. Does it tell us, however, what we need to know or what we ought to do? Kant tells us that the questions: what can I know, what ought I do, and what may I hope are incorporated in the question: What is man/woman? The ongoing re-examination and re-interpretation of Marx's thought appears to have provided better answers to the question: what is man/woman, and ever worse ones to the questions: what can I know, what ought I do, and what may I hope. Capitalism of course, is rotten and we may hope for a democratic, egalitarian society governed by freely associated individuals, but for any more concrete answers to these questions we must abandon the territory occupied by Marx and enter what is still an historical no-man's land — in some ways similar to the one in which Marx found himself before Marxism came into being.

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Marxism contains both liberating and repressive, progressive and regressive elements. It has been progressive to the extent that it has aided and guided or attempted to aid and guide humanity to a completely democratic and rational society of autonomous and co-operating human beings by supporting and refining the revolutionary, radical, and creative impulses and innovations of oppressed groups, classes, and individuals in capitalist society; and that it has helped in the formulation and promotion of their authentic needs. It has been repressive and regressive to the extent that it has become an accomplice of totalitarian, authoritarian, sectarian, and dogmatic nations, parties, organizations, and individuals and their manipulative, exploitative policies, practices, and ideologies. Marxism is not something finished that can tell us what is true, right, or correct. Rather, it is an historical project and intention that needs to be continually created in order to be a revolutionary force. It can serve as a useful accumulation of theoretical and practical guidelines as long as these are recognized to be modifiable in the light of new social forces and historical situations. It can serve as a form of reaction, as part of the debris of history, when it is employed to define in advance what can or cannot happen, to squeeze the flow of history into a rigid mold.

These considerations and the present global context of social oppression give significance to the task of unraveling Marx's assumptions and isolating those that contribute to dogmatism and limit the flexibility of Marxian theory. Probably the most central and recurrent source of dogmatism in the Marxian tradition is the notion of the proletariat as an ontological entity which by its very nature is the demiurge and negation of capitalism. This conception has a number of weaknesses: 1) It has introduced into the concrete, dialectical analysis of history a metaphysical conception that immunizes the theory against empirical analysis of actual capitalist development, the working class, and forces of negation. 2) It makes absolute the features of capitalist development of the period of liberal capitalism that have been rendered obsolete by advanced capitalism. 3) It is particularly suited to absorbing cultural, religious, and psychological elements that operate to reinforce dogmatism and inhibit critical thought and activity. 4) It begs the question as to the manner of the formation of revolutionary consciousness and political organization. 5) Because it serves as the metaphysical foundation and justification of the labour theory of value, it impedes understanding economic developments that supersede Marx's formulation of this theory. 6) It impedes comprehension of other social groups that play an anti-capitalist role, *e.g.* peasants, women, youth, ethnic minorities. 7) By assuming that there is a self-subsistent essence of the proletariat, it justifies authoritarian political practices that claim to act in the name of this essence, regardless of the actual will of the working class.

The value of Erica Sherover's research, as formulated in her paper on "The

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Virtue of Poverty," is to have demonstrated that the moral-ontological interpretation of the proletariat as possessing inherent universality and negativity preceded Marx's economic and historical analysis of capitalism and of the working class and is independent of the labour theory of value. By isolating this assumption of Marx's, Sherover has made it easier to understand the genesis of Marxian theory, to see clearly its separate components, and to sort out the truth value of the theory from its metaphysical and mythical accretions. Of course, in itself the fact that Marx did think of the proletariat ontologically in 1842 does not necessarily mean that Marx's later thought shares this assumption. Nor does the fact that moral and ontological elements entered into Marx's conception of the proletariat necessarily mean that there is no place for such elements in a critical, emancipatory theory. Yet it does appear that the unity of classical Marxian theory is provided by the background assumption, ultimately of Hegelian structure, that proletariat, commodity production, and revolutionary practice do relate to one another as being, essence, and concept (or objectivity, reflection, and subjectivity) in Hegel's logic. The revolutionary practice of the proletariat is the arrival at self-consciousness of an already existing being, the working class, whose nature possesses universality and negativity owing (as Sherover points out) to its lack of property and exclusion from civil society. This arrival at self-consciousness from the realm of alienated labour in commodity production is at the same time morally good, because it is the concrete realisation of essential spiritual capacities that at first existed only in a negative form. Now it may be that the Hegelian model of self-reflection is the legitimate basis of emancipatory theory (as Habermas has argued from a materialist point of view). However, that this model has the same structure as an empirical social class and its history is not something that can be assumed.

For Marx this conflation made sense because of an unusual historical circumstance. Marx stood at the historical threshold between estate and class society. Prior to advanced capitalism, the distinction between the ruling and ruled classes expressed itself in different rights. The working classes in the initial stages of industrial capitalism did not have the right to vote, the right of association and combination, the right to education. Hence the accuracy of describing the proletariat as outside of civil society. Hence the significance of the contradiction between bourgeois liberalism and the proletariat's lack of right (which Sherover shows to be the link between Hegelian and Marxian social theory). Hence also the importance of seeing that, under these conditions, the growth of the working-class both numerically and in its economic importance in the social order was bound to be an explosive cause of both political and social change. If the development of capitalism was to lead to the first (non-estate) class society, it would also change the historical import of a social and political analysis based on the vestiges of estate society. More of the

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political struggles of 19th and 20th century industrial capitalism in Europe (and the concepts of revolution, reform, and dictatorship of the proletariat) have been concerned with estate society and its legacy than with class society *per se*. This is as true for imperialism and national liberation movements as for domestic politics in national capitalism.

The embourgeoisement of the proletariat, often used by Marxists as a dirty word and an unfortunate historical *bad thing*, is actually as inherent to capitalist development as is the construction of a rational legal system. Yet so heavily does the moral and ideological tradition of the virtue of poverty and the moral/ontological superiority of the proletariat weigh on the consciousness of the Left, that breaking out of it is as difficult and traumatic as the Reformation. This is not the place to analyze why this is so. However, it is worth pointing out that the model of the "virtue of poverty" appears to be quite common to members of ruling elites (and here Sherover's linking of Marx's concept of the poor with that of the Jacobins is important). In *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner points out that in a wide variety of societies, rituals of status elevation for members of the ruling classes involve stripping down the individual to his bare humanity, to a "liminal" state devoid of roles and statuses which emphasizes communitarian values. Furthermore, founders of religious and ethical movements are often members of high status groups who teach the virtue of poverty and the stripping off of property and status distinctions. Is it possible that Marxist dogmatism is a ritual process for those members of the middle and upper-classes in capitalism who have been the standard-bearers of the ideology of the proletariat's moral/ontological superior status? If so, this dogma will not be effectively combatted by intellectual argument. Indeed, little of dogmatism, Marxian or otherwise, can be combatted by argument. Nevertheless, Erica Sherover's paper does locate the fork in the road that separates, in her terms, ontological and dialectical-historical Marxism.

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REIFICATION AND COMMODITY FETISHISM REVISITED

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I propose to bring the issue of "commodity fetishism" and "reification" into conceptual and historical focus by analyzing the concepts as they originally occur in Marx's writings and by identifying some problems. My argument is that the doctrines of commodity fetishism and, to some extent, reification are familiar but problematical ideas in Marx's own terms. Specifically, there are problems with the adequacy of Marx's explanation of the occurrence of commodity fetishism and with his justification of these two doctrines. Nevertheless, attention to the doctrines serves to expose interesting features of Marx's underlying thought, *e.g.*, his assumption of a productive community. I maintain that it is such a premise which has contributed whatever vitality the doctrines have been deemed to have. Furthermore, awareness of some problems facing such doctrines may assist in their reconsideration and possible rehabilitation, even to the point of investing them with new meaning and altered roles in contemporary social theory.

I

Marx said of *Capital* that with the exception of one chapter, his "volume cannot stand accused on the score of difficulty."¹ The allegedly single difficult chapter was the first containing his analysis of commodities and closing with his doctrine of commodity fetishism. That chapter, Marx confessed, had "coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to [Hegel]."² Many supposed that the use of Hegelian expressions exceeded coquetry and thus contributes to the difficulty of the chapter. If that is true, the doctrine of fetishism may be similarly affected.

It is somewhat surprising to stumble upon the section on fetishism. At the end of a chapter which purports to elucidate the nature of a commodity, we meet the claim that a commodity is actually quite mysterious. Some may be inclined to think it is Marx's doctrine of fetishism which is mysterious; others have questioned its relevance to a theory of political economy; and some have

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found it inconsistent with part of Marx's theory of value.³

"Fetishism" may be taken to mean the attribution of properties, powers, or values to an object which the object does not in fact possess, together with an attitude of interest, respect, awe, or even reverence toward the object. Because of the misattribution, such an attitude can be regarded as "displaced" or "misplaced". For example, one might hold an amulet in some esteem because of its supposed protective properties, or avidly follow bio-rhythm charts and horoscopes in newspapers because of their supposed measuring and predictive powers.

What then does commodity fetishism consist of? Some powers or properties are mistakenly attributed to commodities, but what are they? The mistake that occupied Marx does not concern the physical properties of commodities as things, nor is their use-value — their capacity to satisfy human needs — the source of any mistake. Nor does the fact that commodities are the results of human labor as such make them mysterious.⁴

For Marx, commodity fetishism is an economic exemplification of the more general philosophical problem of appearance *vs.* reality. Marx argues that the "social character" of human labor appears in commodities in a perverted or distorted form, as an objective character of the commodities themselves. This assertion is worth examining. Marx held that common sense views commodities as easily understood but that analysis reveals them as mysterious.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour: because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.⁵

There seem to be two theses asserted in this well-known passage. There is first the "mystery thesis" which asserts that commodities are somehow puzzling. Who finds commodities mysterious? Presumably Marx meant that the readers of his analysis should find them mysterious, for the ordinary person of common sense will find commodities to be "trivial things", "easily understood", and we may assume that Marx himself did not find them ultimately mysterious. Possibly Marx also meant that political economists should have analyzed commodities as he had, and would thereupon discover something mysterious about commodities. Marx did not say whether the analysis to be

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followed is political-economic, metaphysical, or philosophical in some other sense, but the "mystery thesis" is reminiscent of Hegel's procedure in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where apparently well understood forms of experience are subjected to critical analysis to display their defects in order to move on to a more adequate form of experience.

The second thesis may be called the "transposition-distortion thesis" and what it asserts is that the social character of human labor is transposed to commodities, there to appear as an objective character of the commodities themselves, which is a distortion. This second thesis is more important and philosophically interesting than the mystery thesis,⁶ and requires analysis.

To exploit the appearance-reality aspect of commodity fetishism, Marx first resorts to an imperfect analogy. "In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself."⁷ The reality is nerve stimulation by light; the appearance is an object outside us. The analogy is imperfect, as Marx notes, because in perception light does pass from one physical thing to another and a real physical relationship is involved. In commodities, however, it cannot be held that the social character of labor is physically transposed to them.

Marx thus favours a religious analogy suggested by Feuerbach's philosophy of religion. In the "mist-enveloped regions of the religious world ... the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race."⁸ For Feuerbach, our religious ideas only *appear* to be about the divine and godly, that which transcends our human secular world. Our religious ideas are really about us, distorted projections of human nature and its potentialities. Theology is really anthropology. The real reference of the products of human thought is the human species; the apparent reference is God; religion and God are actually our creations. Marx merely adds to his one-sentence allusion to Feuerbach's view of religious belief, "So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."⁹

There is some divergence here. Feuerbach was concerned with the products of our consciousness, Marx speaks of the products of our hands. It is clear, however, why the religious analogy is more congenial to Marx, for he had said the social character of human labor passes to the commodities to re-appear as an objective character of those products. This "social character" is not a physical property anymore than, for Feuerbach, the "human character or significance" of our religious ideas is a physical property.

Feuerbach regarded religious belief as an understandable and rectifiable mistake and commodity fetishism is likewise a mistake for Marx. We perceive commodities in social relationships among themselves whereas only humans

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have social relationships. The mistake, understandable and rectifiable, involves a false attitude toward commodities, a misattribution of social properties to things. What is the "social character" of human labor?

Labor has a social character in that 1) as useful labor, it has the capacity to satisfy actual social needs and as such is recognized as part of the collective labor of society. 2) If it is to also satisfy the needs of the individual laborer, the labor must find its place in a social system which acknowledges the "mutual exchangeability of all kinds of useful private labor." Thus labor has a social character provided it is socially useful and socially exchangeable.¹⁰ My sorting of fishing gear in my tackle box or tying up hooks is neither socially useful nor exchangeable. My sorting out or creation of fishing tackle for a company which produces tackle for the market can be both socially useful and exchangeable. For then I produce not only articles of social utility but, on Marx's theory of value, I deposit exchange-value in such commodities by my labor.

Marx, however, must be interpreted as holding that individuals are naive about the social character of their labor and become re-acquainted with it in a modified form when commodities are exchanged. I have called this the transposition-distortion thesis. What is Marx's explanation of this fetishistic phenomenon?

He claims that workers produce commodities as individuals or groups of individuals in relative independence to one another. While the sum total of the individuals' labor is the aggregate labor of society, laborers lack significant social contact during production, thus they are not aware of the social character of their labor as Marx defined it. Workers enjoy some social contact during acts of commodity exchange and thus commodity exchange seems to be the primary arena of social relationships; people exhibit social relationships indirectly as exchangers and consumers.¹¹ Commodity producers thus view their working activity as "material relations between persons". Presumably this means they have a "reified" conception of their productive activity in the sense that their labor is viewed abstractly, mechanically, matter-of-factly. I discuss "reification" in section II below.

On the other hand, commodity producers, viewing exchange activity, are struck by the appearance of "social relations between things" as commodities in exchange with one another acquire "one uniform social status". Marx believed, on the basis of his labor theory of value, that the commodities actually acquired their "one uniform social status" (exchangeability) during production. The realm of productive activity thus becomes "materialized" (or "reified"), while the realm of commodity exchange becomes "socialized."

Marx's attempted explanation of the fetishism phenomenon runs a little deeper. Over time, social custom tends to stabilize the proportions in which commodities are exchangeable so that such proportions seem to result from the

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intrinsic nature of the commodities as objects. The value character of a commodity, which in reality stems from the social character of labor, appears as an objective character stamped on the commodity itself simply by virtue of certain natural properties. Since the value-character of commodities varies "independently of the will, foresight and action of the producer", the fact (for Marx) that the value-character is ultimately rooted in the social division of labor simply goes unnoticed. "To them [the producers] their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them."¹² Marx seems to be arguing that our attention is fixed so much on the "interaction" and exchanges of numerous different commodities that we come to take commodities as mysterious remarkable repositories of value endowed with a "life" of their own. Marx's "scientific" discovery is that this is to treat commodities fetishistically. Commodities exchange in response to "the labor time socially necessary for their production" which "forcibly asserts itself like an overriding law of Nature."¹³

Thus, commodity fetishism is an illusion peculiar to a commodity-producing society similar to the mercantilist illusion about gold and silver as "natural objects with strange social properties" and the physiocratic illusion about the "natural" rents produced from the soil.

Marx's position raises at least four questions. 1) Are people commodity fetishists? 2) How adequate is his explanation of commodity fetishism? 3) Can his doctrine of commodity fetishism be justified? 4) How serious a problem is commodity fetishism?

1) Asking whether people are commodity fetishists resembles asking whether they are alienated or subject to an ideology. Too often our attention remains rivetted to the familiar terms and concepts of a theory without our bothering to ascertain under what conditions the theory might be true. Is this the sort of theory which can be empirically confirmed? What sorts of observations would be relevant to deciding the truth of the doctrine of commodity fetishism? At the very least, it seems one would have to consult the realm of consumer beliefs and attitudes about commodities and that is a very shadowy, uncharted realm indeed. We could grant Marx that people do not generally consider commodities as endowed with value because of the social character of human labor, but is it in any way clear that they view commodities as having inherent value? It would not be surprising to learn of some cases of gold fetishism, money fetishism, Kruggerand fetishism, or real estate fetishism, but it is simply not evident in general how to go about proving or disproving the proposition, "people are commodity fetishists." I raise the question without offering a decisive answer. There is some reason to leave it an open question for the present until further research on consumer behaviour and on advertising helps fill some of the void of our knowledge about consumer beliefs and attitudes.

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2) Marx says far too little to explain the origin of commodity fetishism. In the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* he explains the fetishism in terms of social conventions.

Only the conventions of our everyday life make it appear common-place and ordinary that social relations of production should assume the shape of things, so that the relations into which people enter in the course of their work appear as the relations of things to one another and of things to people. This mystification is still a very simple one in the case of a commodity.¹⁴

In *Capital*, he explains the fetishism partly in terms of such social customs and partly in terms of the relative isolation of the producers from each other in the course of production. What is the relationship between these two elements of the explanation? Marx offers none.

Marx says "We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it."¹⁵ This explanation, however, does not seem to overcome the notorious difficulty of appearance-reality claims: how can we be led to appreciate that what seems ordinary and well understood is in fact only appearance, and that there is a reality with which we are so far unacquainted? Marx's attempted explanatory remarks must be judged too modest to be convincing.

There is another problem worth mentioning. To help explain the origin of commodity fetishism, Marx stresses the isolation, independence, and relative indifference of the producers to one another. In a later chapter on "Cooperation", in order to help to show that advanced industry is revolutionizing the factory workers, and that cooperative working relationships and social contact among the workers is schooling the working class for socialistic production, Marx stresses the associative character of production.¹⁶ There seems to be an inconsistency; or is it to be believed that workers are privatized enough to become commodity fetishists but socialized enough to become socialist producers?

I need hardly add that accepting Marx's sketch of an explanation seems to commit one to acceptance of his labor theory of value, a theory which evidently cannot be extricated from controversy.

3) Marx's fetishism doctrine has a justification problem akin to that faced by Feuerbach's theory of religion which partially inspired it. How does one justify Feuerbach's assertion that theology is at bottom anthropology? Feuerbach's interpretation of religious beliefs and claims is rich and suggestive, it may even

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be true, but is it anything more than a psychologically persuasive interpretation? Perhaps it is more than that, for Feuerbach based it on a metaphysical theory of the nature and limitations of consciousness as species-consciousness. Just as the highest object for the bird is a winged creature, so the highest object for the human being is the human species. Our consciousness cannot transcend our own species.¹⁷

Yet Marx does not anchor his fetishism doctrine in a metaphysical theory about species-consciousness. In Marx we have a provocative appearance-reality claim which is largely, if not wholly, parasitic upon the analogy to the Feuerbachian account of religion. I suspect that if we were to delete the allusion to Feuerbach we would be left with a weak and unjustified doctrine of commodity fetishism. However, retaining the Feuerbachian kernel does not seem to improve the doctrine's justifiability.

4) Suppose, however, that we were to grant Marx that people are commodity fetishists, that commodity fetishism arises roughly for the reasons he mentioned, and that some sort of plausible justification can be found for the mystery thesis and the transposition-distortion thesis. So what! How serious a problem is commodity fetishism? First, how serious a problem might Marx think it?

If we hold that the doctrine of commodity fetishism has some metaphysical origin (appearance *vs.* reality, Feuerbach's collapse of theology into anthropology), it seems that it has a *political* rather than a metaphysical point to make. By attributing fetishism to a commodity society, Marx wished to call attention to some peculiarities of that society compared to other societies.¹⁸ Thus the fetishism doctrine is supposed to advance the overall "critique" of capitalist political economy. How is it to do that?

I think its point is to expose to the working class (first, and second to political economists) that their perceptions and attention are anchored too deeply in the exchange process to the detriment of their understanding of the production process. The working class is vitally and immediately involved in the production process. However, the spectacle of capitalist commodity society is such that people's attention is deflected away from their roles as creative, active producers to their roles as exchangers and consumers. When the realm of production is relatively ignored, we miss how production relations reflect the division of labor in that society, its class relationships, and the absence of direct regulation of production by producers. The possibility and desirability of social control of production goes unnoticed.

Furthermore, when we concentrate on exchange and consumption, commodity society may appear as a bare fact, a naturally evolved social order. Capitalist society with its profits on capital appears as merely an exchange society. The exploitation of labor by capital, an exploitation which begins (but

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may not end) in the production process is simply missed. Capital itself is viewed as a remarkable "thing" which is just "naturally" fruitful, a thing capable of "earning" and "yielding" a "gain," of being "put to work" wisely or foolishly.¹⁹

For Marx, capital is no such remarkable thing, it is not even a "thing" at all, but, as he often put it, capital is a social relation. It is the extraction of surplus labor and hence surplus value from the working class by the capitalist class. The fact of such extraction was shrouded, he thought, in the mists of social custom and history. What glitters through such mists for example, is the dazzling "money-form", the apparent capacity of capital as money to simply "bear" interest as naturally and easily as pear trees bear pears.²⁰

In Marx's view, capitalist society is not merely a spectacular exchange society or consumer society. The belief that it is yields the ideology of equality according to which the various economic actors confront one another as equal exchangers. "Each of the subjects is an exchanger; *i.e.*, each has the same social relation towards the other that the other has towards him. As subjects of exchange, their relation is therefore that of equality."²¹ However, the ideology of exchange equality conceals an exploitation rooted in the economic structure of production. "Thus if one individual accumulates and the other does not, then none does it at the expense of the other If one grows impoverished and the other grows wealthier, then this is of their own free will and does not in any way arise from the economic relation, the economic connection as such, in which they are placed in relation to one another."²²

In sum, the fetishism of commodities posed a serious problem for Marx. It represented an ideological barrier to recognizing the desirability and attainment of social control of the means of production — a pre-requisite of socialist society. Such fetishism consisted of mistaken attitudes on the part of workers (and presumably capitalists too) toward money, commodities, capital, and the exchange process. It involved ignoring the inequality and exploitation of capitalist society along with the acceptance of that society as a neutral or even benign exchange society. Nevertheless, while it is possible to reconstruct Marx's stand on commodity fetishism and acknowledge his concern with it, and while it is not difficult even today to appreciate the novelty and provocative nature of the doctrine, it invites comparison with Marx's own "young Hegelian" period. For we must remember that commodity fetishism was, for Marx, an illusion similar to religion. His attempt to exorcise the demon of fetishism in *Capital* seems similar to the young Hegelian fashion of "critiquing" illusions. Marx's own earlier admonition concerning "critiques" of religion is germane to his treatment of commodity fetishism in *Capital*: "The demand to abandon illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is thus in embryo a criticism of the

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vale of tears whose halo is religion.”²³ Even without yet raising the question of whether there is any reason for one to take Marx’s version of commodity fetishism as seriously as he did, there is some reason to think he unduly elevated its importance.

II

At this point, some brief remarks about the concept of “reification” are relevant. It was Marx’s belief that people were misled not only about the exchange of commodities but about the sphere of production too. He thought that social relationships among commodity producers appeared to them as “materialized” relations. Although Marx did not use the term “reification” in the section on fetishism in *Capital*, he seems to have implicitly considered the concept. This is confirmed by consulting a corresponding section from the *Grundrisse*.

Reification is literally the treatment of something as a material thing, and like so many concepts in Marx it is a critical, polemical concept. That is, Marx typically thought that instances of reification were instances of some sort of mistake or misattribution. Something which is not actually, essentially, or solely a material thing comes to be considered as a thing or thing-like. A reified consciousness or reified concepts are just conceivings of something as thing-like. At one time or another Marx tried to show that human beings in capitalist society reify a large number of items: human relationships, science, values, institutions, activities, economics, etc.

Generally speaking, the reification of something for Marx involves missing its human or social characteristics and its amenability to social control, together with an apprehension of its merely objective, indifferent, independent, abstract, possibly alien or extraneous features. Marx considered a reified *x* much as Hegel regarded Kant’s idea of a thing-in-itself, it was the idea of something fully abstracted from human experience which, however, ought to be re-integrated with human experience. Marx’s doctrine of reification is, at least on the economic level, closely related to his doctrine of commodity fetishism as its counterpart. Indeed, Marx says that the reification of labor is part of the cause of the fetishism of commodities. “This Fetishism of commodities has its origin ... in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them.”²⁴ Our laboring activity in producing commodities is human and social, yet we look upon it in an atomized, abstract, mechanical sense, thus leaving ourselves vulnerable to the fetishistic appearance of commodities.

One expression in *Capital* of the claim that labor is reified is the following: “To them [the producers], their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.”²⁵ In the

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Grundrisse Marx was more explicit. After criticizing Smith's idea that the individual pursuit of private interest serves the general interest without knowing or willing it, Marx offers his own version of the "invisible hand". However atomized and individualistic producers may seem to be, the fact is that they are all mutually dependent upon one another. This mutual dependence gives them a "social connection" or "social bond" with one another even if in their production relationships they happen to be indifferent to one another. Their social relatedness only expresses itself in the arena of exchange where the products of their activity meet and interact and where it becomes clear that the products of labor must serve some social or general need.

... the power which each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth exists in him as the owner of *exchange value*, of *money*. The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket.²⁶

Marx, not wholly unlike Smith, believes that private self-seeking conceals a general social inter-relatedness of which individuals become aware only in exchange and thus only in a temporally removed and qualitatively altered manner. This leads to a reified conception of labor and productive activity generally.

The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual — their mutual inter-connection — here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing.²⁷

What Marx ultimately finds objectionable about the reification of labor is what was objectionable about the fetishism of commodities. He thinks that

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there is a form of social inter-relatedness or community which underlies our association as mere exchangers and consumers. Reification thus masks an underlying community of people, a social inter-relatedness of needy, productive, cooperative, and consuming individuals. As long as our vision is dominated by the spectacle of exchange and consumption, we as producers will in fact be dominated by our productions and the market structure of commodity producing society. Commodity producing society will simply be accepted as an unquestioned, natural, matter of fact. We will not suspect that our social being as consumers and exchangers actually rests on a deeper form of social being as producers. The hidden social character of commodities consists in the social character of labor which serves social needs.

Marx even offers what might be called a "transcendental" argument for the priority of the association of producers over the association of exchangers. He asks why people place faith in a thing like money when they do not place faith in each other. He answers:

Obviously only because that thing is an *objectified relation* between persons; because it is objectified exchange value, and exchange value is nothing more than a mutual relation between people's productive activities money serves him only as the 'dead pledge of society,' but it serves as such only because of its social (symbolic) property; and it can have a social property only because individuals have alienated their own social relationship from themselves so that it takes the form of a thing.²⁸

The underlying, "presupposed" community of producers is defective however.²⁹ As I interpret Marx, our lack of direct, planned, social regulation and control over production actually does leave us prey to the vicissitudes of our products in their behaviour on the market. Commodity fetishism and labor reification thus seem, on Marx's own account, not mere appearances but realities as well. They are characterized as appearances in order to lend some credence to Marx's belief that there is a more fundamental reality which needs to be rediscovered and reformed: the sphere of production needs to be rediscovered and reformed into socialistic production. Only then will commodity fetishism and reification cease afflicting us as illusions, or realities, or both.

III

Marxist theory has presumed that "commodity fetishism" and "reification" signify "monsters lurking in the background". My purpose in revisiting Marx's doctrines of commodity fetishism and reification has been to critically analyze what Marx apparently found "monstrous" about commodity fetishism and reification. Even as Marx may have understood them, they remain relatively abstruse doctrines.

I have suggested that Marx had recourse to metaphysical sorts of reasoning to fashion such doctrines but that he had a political point in doing so. Whatever vitality could be attributed to these doctrines derived in no small way from Marx's ontology of community — his assumption of the fundamental priority of our social being as producers over our social existence as exchangers and consumers. It is not at all clear that these two doctrines had or can have the political function he intended due to some of the shortcomings in the doctrines I have noted. In particular, such shortcomings serve to point out that the premise of an underlying productive community offering a "truer" picture of our social agency is questionable. As I interpret Marx, re-acquaintance with the social relations of production was supposed to assist us in shaking off mystifications of capitalist society such as commodity fetishism and labor reification. That a clearer understanding of the actual power structure of commodity-producing society should alleviate some misunderstandings about the nature, value, or significance of commodities is not implausible. However, the existence of such misunderstandings or illusions is surely in need of demonstration, as I have noted already.

In any event, what exactly is involved in becoming re-acquainted with the relationships of production? At least in an advanced capitalist society, the scale of specialization, the disconnectedness of disparate operations, the multiplicity of productive functions virtually defy an integrative grasp of the realm of production. Both the technical and the human features of the sphere of production largely elude comprehension by the majority of us. Thus the project of penetrating the sphere of production and of "restoring" a sense of an underlying community of producers appears unfeasible. At best, this analysis relegates Marx's image of such a community to the realm of historical possibility, specifically, to the future.

Moreover, on the hypothesis that significant social consciousness of such a productive community could be achieved within capitalist society, I venture to assert that such awareness would at present harbour no evident promise of satisfying people's needs or alleviating a single social problem of the sort with which critical social theory is concerned. To be blunt, to what particular problem or concrete difficulty would the demystification of commodity fetishism or labor reification represent a remedy? A contemporary defender of

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Marx's original doctrines should identify such current ailments explicitly.

Marx thought that reification and commodity fetishism were serious social problems, but should we? Are there good reasons for contemporary Marxism and critical social theory to retain such doctrines? Or are they parts of Marx's theory which can be wisely and safely rejected? I see no obvious reason why they ought to be retained and thought about along Marx's original lines. The original doctrines, if not entirely lifeless, are too emaciated to contribute to the effort of liberation for which they were evidently designed. This is especially true of the original conception of commodity fetishism.

This does not rule out the possibility that the doctrines could be re-interpreted, revised, or re-conceived to illuminate new phenomena in fruitful and interesting ways. This seems to be the direction taken by some recent studies of consumer society which attempt to show how commodities are increasingly invested with a variety of symbolic and cultural properties to an extent which overwhelms a correct perception of their actual attributes and their quality.³⁰ Such studies suggest that people may indeed be commodity fetishists but that their fetishism has a different content from what Marx had in mind. For example, Fred Hirsch cites a "new commodity fetishism" which consists in a "bias" toward commodities "in the fundamental sense of excessive creation and absorption of commodities and not merely an undue conceptual preoccupation with them in the original sense of Marx — a masking of social relationships under capitalism by their mediation through commodity exchange."³¹

Hirsch maintains that "an excessive proportion of individual activity is channeled through the market so that the commercialized sector of our lives is unduly large."³² We increasingly treat all goods and services, including the non-material ones, as commercialized instruments of satisfaction, "social contact, relaxation and play become 'bought' commodities."³³ He also points out that one result of rendering the range of goods and services as commodities is growing dissatisfaction with what we acquire.³⁴

Hirsch appropriates a traditional Marxist label but does so in order to identify and diagnose "modern commodity fetishism". His is the sort of diagnosis which plausibly offers at least preliminary tools for solving certain felt social problems, whereas Marx's original doctrine does not. Confronted with such promising empirical work, it is insufficient to merely voice the caution that our thinking about commodity fetishism and reification should not become reified itself.

Finally, Marx thought commodity fetishism was similar to religion in that it was nourished by factors in our social reality, gave a false picture of that reality, but could only vanish when we learned to embrace reality and change those features which necessitate such myths and illusions.

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The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan. This, however, demands for society a certain material ground-work or set of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of a long and painful process of development.³⁵

I would only add to Marx's claim that it seems best to remain agnostic concerning what role, if any, the original doctrines of commodity fetishism and reification will have in that "long and painful process of development" toward socialism.³⁶

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Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Capital*, I, New York: 1969, "Preface to the First German Edition," p. 8.
2. *Capital*, I, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," p. 20.
3. Stanley Moore, "The Metaphysical Argument in Marx's Labour Theory of Value," *Cahiers de L'Institut de Science Economique Appliquee*, Supplement No. 140 (Aout 1963) Serie S, 7, p.92.
4. Marshall Sahlins has argued that Marx uncritically assumed the use-value of commodities was self-evident and unproblematical. See *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago: 1976, chapter 3.
5. *Capital*, I, p.72.
6. Stephen Kline and William Leiss raise some fruitful questions for the "mystery thesis" in "Advertising, Needs, and 'Commodity Fetishism'" in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol.2, No. 1 (Winter, 1978), pp. 5-30, especially pp.9-13.
7. *Capital*, I, p.72.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. For purposes of the present discussion, I have simplified Marx's concept of the social character of labor. Some of the complexity of his concept may be appreciated by consulting his 1844 manuscript "Free Human Production".

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11. There is, of course, a decisive commodity exchange in the realm of production itself — that of labor-power for wages. Since labor-power in capitalist society is for Marx an alienated commodity, laboring activity may be "reified" and commodity fetishism could attach to labor power as well as other commodities. Professor Arthur DiQuattro brought my attention to this point.
12. *Capital*, I, p. 75.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: 1970, p. 34.
15. *Capital*, I, p. 74.
16. *Capital*, I, "Cooperation," pp. 322-35.
17. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, New York: 1957, p.17.
18. He explicitly compares commodity-producing society with four other productive "societies": a Crusoe situation of an individual producer, a patriarchal peasant family, a feudal society, and a productive order suggestive of socialism. In none of these does Marx believe fetishism will be found. *Capital*, I, pp. 76-79.
19. *Capital*, III, p. 827: "Capital thus becomes a very mystic being since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the womb of capital itself."
20. *Capital*, III, p. 392.
21. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, London: 1973, p. 241.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
23. "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction", in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, New York: 1967, p. 250. In fairness to Marx, it should be stressed that both his early and later "critiques" contain implicit calls for revolutionizing those conditions which foster illusions.
24. *Capital*, I, p. 72.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 75 It is possible to read this as nothing more than the transposition-distortion thesis of the fetishism doctrine rather than a claim that labor appears reified. Cf. p. 73: "To the latter [the producers] the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things." This passage involves an ambiguity suggestive of a two-tiered appearance-reality problem.
26. *Grundrisse*, p. 157.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Grundrisse*, p. 160.

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29. Cf. Hegel's image of a community of reciprocal producers in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford: 1977, pp. 212-214.
30. See Kline and Leiss, *op. cit.*; William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities*, Toronto: 1976; Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, New York: 1976; Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1976.
31. Hirsch, p. 84. Marx's rejoinder presumably would point out that such "inflation" in the production and consumption of commodities is precisely what one should expect to find given the necessarily expansionist character of capitalist commodity production.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Hirsch, p. 103.
34. Cf. Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*.
35. *Capital*, I, p.80.
36. An earlier, shorter version of this paper was presented in a special panel, "Marx and Marxism Reconsidered," at the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association, at San Francisco, California, March 23, 1978. I thank Dr. Stanley Moore for his perceptive commentary and Professors Arthur Kroker and Ronald Perrin for many helpful suggestions. I am also indebted to members of the Social Theory Colloquium, University of Washington, for a valuable discussion of the present version of this paper.

COMMENTARY

SEVEN NOTES ON COMMODITY FETISHISM

Stanley Moore

I have little disagreement with Professor Burke's clear and careful analysis, up to his discussion of what he calls the political significance of commodity fetishism. According to him, the section on commodity fetishism which closes the first chapter of *Capital* exposes the contrast between the superficial equality of commodity exchange and the basic inequality of capitalist production. I agree that Marx treats commodity fetishism as a mask for exploitation, but point out that these applications of his initial analysis occur later in the argument of *Capital*. In the section on commodity fetishism, I suggest, he is primarily concerned to contrast society, class or classless, with community, class or classless, and to prophesy a rebirth of community. The following notes outline my argument.

1. Although Marx presents commodity fetishism as a set of incorrect beliefs, an illusion, he explains that illusion in economic terms. It is strongest, he asserts, in cultures with economies dominated by commodity exchange. Elsewhere, where commodity exchange is marginal or absent, so is commodity fetishism. Furthermore, this illusion cannot be cured simply by replacing error with knowledge, as Feuerbach hoped to dispel the illusions of religion. The scientific discovery of the labour theory of value, according to Marx, by no means clears away the mist of commodity fetishism. The life process of society will strip off its mystic veil, he suggests, only with the disappearance of commodity exchange.

2. The significance of the contrast between appearance and substance in the chapter on commodities that opens *Capital* is revealed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. According to Hegel, substance is distinguished from appearance as that which can exist by itself from that whose existence depends on something else. Because the existence of any man depends on the existence of some community, communities exhibit the independence of substances, individuals the

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dependence of appearances. The family and the political state, those elements in the complex structure of Hegel's ideal state which clearly exemplify the primacy of the group, he calls substantial. Civil society, that element which seems to exemplify the primacy of the individual, he calls the external or apparent state. Marx's account of commodity fetishism parallels Hegel's account of civil society. In each case the contrast between appearance and substance is explained as originating in the historical transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. The culture of feudalism, according to Marx, was free from commodity fetishism; the culture of capitalism is dominated by it.

3. Implicit in Marx's account of commodity fetishism is a moral critique, of the type which uses a theory of man's essential nature as a criterion for evaluating existing institutions. Its counterpart is the moral critique presented more than twenty years earlier in *The Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*. The argument of the *Manuscripts* turns on the contrast between human existence and human essence in capitalist culture: the argument of *Capital* turns on the contrast between appearance and substance in that culture. The argument of the *Manuscripts* starts from Feuerbach's account of man's essential nature: the argument of *Capital* starts from the analogous, but far more complex, account of Hegel. Overcoming alienation — reuniting human existence with human essence — is presented in the *Manuscripts* as a moral imperative (Become what you are!). In *Capital* that moral imperative is disguised as an historical-philosophical dialectic of liberation. Yet the differences are less basic than the resemblance. Buried in his account of commodity fetishism is the demand for a rebirth of community that Marx first raised in 1843.

4. Capitalism, the culture in which all economic relations take the form of commodity exchange, is the middle stage in Marx's dialectic of liberation. The three stages of that dialectic are identified, in the section on commodity fetishism, as community with exploitation, society with exploitation, and community without exploitation. According to the complementary account presented in the *Grundrisse*, relations of personal dependence are the first form of social organization in which human productivity develops; personal independence, based upon dependence on things, is the second major form; and free individuality, based upon universally developed individuals controlling their social productivity as their communal wealth, is the third stage. The crucial step for clarifying this pattern is to explain why Marx considers free individuality incompatible with dependence on things.

5. There are two kinds of dependence, Rousseau writes in *Emile*. Dependence on things is the work of nature: dependence on men is the work of society. Dependence on things, being non-moral, is not a detriment to freedom or a source of vice. Dependence on men engenders every kind of vice:

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master and slave deprave each other. The cure for this social evil is to substitute dependence on laws for dependence on individuals. If the laws of nations, like the laws of nature, could never be broken by any human power, dependence on men would become dependence on things. On what grounds does Marx reject Rousseau's ideal? His narrower argument connects the rule of laws, not men, with capitalist exploitation, which differs from previous types of exploitation in taking place through the impersonal mechanism of commodity exchange. His wider argument rejects the rule of law as such. *The Critique of the Gotha Program* attacks the system of distribution in the classless economy that Marx calls the lower stage of communism, not as a mask for exploitation, but as a system of general rules.

6. Why is free individuality incompatible with a social order structured by general rules? Marx's answer can be derived from the statements of his dialectic of liberation presented in the first chapter of *The German Ideology* and *On the Jewish Question*. The culture of feudalism, like Plato's ideal state, is a structure of complementary roles — a cosmos of callings. In such a community public and private are not divided: the sole expression of individuality is the personal style with which each member plays his role. The culture of capitalism, like Hobbes's ideal state, is a structure of general rules — a system of abstract equality. In such a society public and private are sharply divided: the sole expression of individuality is personal competition within a framework of impersonal coercion. Under capitalism, Marx writes, individuals imagine themselves freer than under feudalism, because their conditions of life are accidental: in reality they are less free, because they are more dependent on the power of things. His ideal of free individuality can be realised only in a new community. Like precapitalist communities, it will not separate the public from the private life of any individual, through general rules. Unlike them, however, it will not limit any individual to a specific role, through division of labour. The prototype of this community with neither rules or roles is not any historical community based upon slavery or serfdom: it is the millenarian vision of a community of saints.

7. To what extent is Marx's dialectic of liberation, culminating in this vision of a new community, compatible with the principles of historical materialism? To explore this question is to find a key to forty years of Marx's intellectual development and to one hundred years of conflict among his followers — a conflict that has reached its crisis in our time.

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THE AUDIENCE COMMODITY: ON THE "BLINDSPOT" DEBATE

Bill Livant

I

Dallas Smythe's recent article, "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism" obviously struck a sore spot in Murdock, as the following exchange showed.¹ Much of Murdock's reply was a defence of Western *European* Marxist tradition on the question of communications. Smythe has a blindspot himself, Murdock contends; a "wholesale rejection" based on an "oversimplified view" of this tradition. If Smythe would look more closely, he would find that he "is not alone in insisting that contemporary mass communications systems must be analyzed as an integral part of the economic base as well as of the super-structure" (p. 110). There are others looking at the same spot as he is, but he is blind to them.

It is important to get clear just what the blindspot is. Smythe states a more specific conception of the blindspot than simply the general idea of lack of attention to the economic base of communications. He states it in his first footnote:

None of them address the consciousness industry ... function through demand management (concretely through the economic processes of advertising and mass communications). This is precisely the blindspot of recent Western Marxism. (p. 22)

This is Smythe's attempt to put the finger on the blindspot.

There is a problem with this description, however. His article gives only a passing mention to a dozen Western European Marxists, but he anatomizes Baran and Sweezy in detail; *Monopoly Capital* is his real target, his real point of

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departure. Baran and Sweezy, however, have *not* been blind to footnote #1. They are very conscious of "demand management ... through advertising"; they attempt to use this concept to solve their main problem of the disposal of the surplus. Are they not "Western Marxists"?

Of course, and if footnote #1 adequately described the blind spot on which Smythe insists, Baran and Sweezy should escape his criticism. They don't however; they are his chief target. There is something still more specific in the blind spot.

What is the basis of Smythe's criticism? It is that Baran and Sweezy do not see the *audience*. The audience is kind of passive Jello, through which manipulative "waves" are propagated which result in consumption. It is that, by anchoring "demand management" in the concept of psychological manipulation, the audience becomes simply a highway from the production to the consumption of commodities-in-general. Baran and Sweezy have *dissolved the reality of the audience*.

Consequently, they miss Smythe's main point. What Smythe calls the "Consciousness Industry" is engaged in marketing the whole sphere of commodities to *audiences which they are also producing and exchanging, as commodities*. Baran and Sweezy do not see that the audience *itself* is the *main* commodity of communications. It is the defining mark of the communications industry. How *this* commodity is made, unmade, bought and sold, is the central problem for analysis. That is what is in the blindspot.

Smythe's "spot", therefore, is both more particular and deeper than he indicated in footnote #1. He began with the problem of marketing commodities-in-general, and through it was led to the production and exchange of audiences as commodities. He was led by the method of Marxism to the particularity of the object of modern communication. This is his major theoretical discovery.

Murdock does not make the error of Baran and Sweezy. He is very aware of the reality, and the activity of the audience. Communications mould, mobilize, demobilize and indoctrinate audiences, but the key condition to grasp in order to study communications "as an integral part of the economic base as well as of the superstructure" is the commodity character of the audience.

The main point Smythe puts to Baran and Sweezy on the one hand, and to Murdock on the other, has a slightly different emphasis within it — but an essential one; for it allows us to take a "binocular fix" on the blind spot which both of them share. To Baran and Sweezy, Smythe says: — in the communications of monopoly capitalism, the first and foremost commodity *is the audience*. To Murdock he says: — the audience, first and foremost, *is a commodity*.²

We can see how difficult this point is to grasp if we look at Murdock's reaction to it.

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II

After stating Smythe's general thesis in a paragraph (p. 110), Murdock states that "Smythe deserves credit on at least two counts."

Firstly, in contrast to most Marxist discussions of communications which start from Marx's more obvious statements about ideology, notably *The German Ideology* and the *1859 Preface*, his analysis is firmly grounded in the central economic works; *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. This redirection of attention enables him to highlight a number of formulations which have been passed over previously and which deserve the attention of Marxists interested in communications.

Secondly, Smythe's own attempt to apply these insights to the contemporary situation succeeds well in demonstrating their importance for a full understanding of the role of the mass media in capitalist societies. (p. 111)

Period. End of report. Murdock continues immediately:

Unfortunately though, his argument suffers somewhat from overselling. (p. 111)

Then he launches off into his differences with Smythe.

What is striking in his reply is that *none* of these differences deal with Smythe's *discovery*: the audience commodity. None of them contend with, refute, qualify, modify, or develop it. All of his points have the following form: Yes, yes, of course ... but what about the state? Yes, yes, of course ... but what about Europe? ... but what about class struggle? ... but what about ideology? ... but what about media with "minimal dependence on advertising revenue"?

Murdock's critique takes the form of a collection of exceptions to a proposition *which he does not examine*. For him, it seems self-evidently true, but not terribly interesting. Its theoretical meaning is obvious, already exhausted. There is much that is new outside of it, but nothing new *within* it.

We can see Murdock's attitude at work most clearly in the second of his three

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main criticisms. Here is where he comes closest to the blindspot, only to pass it by.

2. Smythe's preoccupation with the relations between communications and advertising leads him to underplay the independent role of media content in reproducing dominant ideologies. This is particularly clear in the case of those sectors with minimal dependence on advertising revenue — the cinema, the popular music industry, comic books, and popular fiction. True, they are still articulated to the marketing system through equipment sales (you need a record player to play records), through the use of film and pop stars to endorse consumer products, and through the manufacture of commodities based around film and comic book characters — Star Wars T-shirts, Mickey Mouse soap and so on. But selling audiences to advertisers is not the primary *raison d'être* of these media. Rather, they are in the business of selling explanations of social order and structured inequality and packaging hope and aspiration into legitimate bundles. In short, they work with and through ideology — selling the system.

These non-advertising based media are almost entirely passed over in Smythe's presentation in favour of the press and commercial television which are the examples *par excellence* of his thesis. Although secondary, the sectors he neglects are not exactly marginal. (p. 113)

Murdock notes that the media he mentions above are "secondary", but he does not tell us why, or how they became secondary. I suggest it is because the process of making and trading *messages* has come to be dominated by the making and trading of *audiences*. This latter aspect of communications reorganizes the former in the service of the new, emerging object of its production.

TV is an "example par excellence" of Smythe's thesis *not mainly* because of the commercials on the tube. There are commercials in the comics, cited by Murdock, as well. It is mainly because in TV the process of making and trading audiences is most advanced, most visible, and the process of its measurement most developed.

There is a very important difference between buying an ad and buying an

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audience. Indeed, when a network — “private” or “state” — buys or builds an affiliate, an audience is exactly what it buys, although it buys no ad at all.

The “ratings war” is no accident and no joke. It expresses in miniature the form of competition under monopoly capital for the communications commodity which has become dominant — the audience. Listen to Mr. CBS and Mr. NBC react to their chagrin over the rise of ABC:

The most sober warning to date has come from CBS-TV’s president, Robert J. Wussler, who recently told a group of securities analysts that a costs-be-damned pursuit of ratings could squeeze profits in 1978 or 1979. ‘The managing of the television network business is every bit as important as being No. 1’, he said, adding, ‘By 1980 it’s conceivable that the third-place network might be the most profitable.’

‘What a comfort,’ snaps Paul Klein, NBC’s vice president. ‘We can all go to sleep and still be profitable. The fallacy is that you then kill your owned stations and affiliates and you spiral down as a network’. He explains that weak ratings, if sustained for any length of time, reduce stations revenues and tempt affiliated stations to switch to another network.

‘Sure I’d like to bury the competition with cheaper programs, but it can’t always be done. You’ve still got to pay for a rating point.’

‘... Starting in 1974, ABC made heavy investments on series, always the keystone of ratings leadership ... ‘Fifty percent of (ABC executive) Silverman’s energies are devoted to maximizing ABC’s ratings, and 50% are devoted to depriving other guys of audiences’, one network executive says.³

Who here is playing Pangloss and who is facing the bitter truth?

Unlike Murdock, Smythe is attempting to grasp the *motion* of the media as a whole. What is primary and what is secondary about them are questions which are not isolated and not static. For Murdock, however, they are both. This is why he speaks of the media as “sectors”.⁴ In certain “sectors” ... (the Smythe sectors) ... *selling audiences* is their primary *raison d’etre*. In other “sectors” ...

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(the non-Smythe sectors), it is not; rather, they are in the business of *selling explanations* of social order ... selling the system.

Murdock does not seem to notice that the second "selling" is a metaphor but the first is not. The first is real selling; there are particular buyers, particular sellers and a particular commodity ... a very peculiar commodity ... being made and traded. This second, "selling" is indeed "not reducible to the first." It is not *reducible to it*; but it is *producible from it*. Analysis should begin with the real relation. From such investigations we will learn what the metaphor means; but not vice versa.

Murdock's examples of the "articulation" to the marketing system" of cinema, popular music, comic books and fiction, miss the main point. Not only as Smythe notes (p. 124), is their *content* cross-marketed; their *audiences* are. When "film and pop stars endorse consumer products" ... in fact, when anyone or anything is attached by the media as an endorsement to anyone or anything else ... what is being bought? Murdock sees only the commodity which the viewer or listener may buy, but what is bought in the media is the *audience* for that film star, that pop star, that personality. The movement of prices paid for it indexes the movement, the rise and fall, of that audience. If and when it disappears, that personality commands nothing.

Similarly with "equipment sales" like the record player. Here Murdock points to the purchase of commodities necessary to *consume messages*; the record player, the TV set, etc. It is curious he did not include the record studio, the master tapes, etc., the commodities necessary to *produce* the messages. They, too, are "articulated" to the purchase of commodities-in-general. When we consider them together, we see that *both* of them are necessary to *produce* the *audience*.⁵ When the listener buys his player, he participates in its production.

Of course, he has to buy something to do so. Smythe has documented what a large portion of the cost of the media the audience pays, but to see this as the *main* "articulation" is to mistake the tail for the dog. Media equipment, both the capital goods of message-making and the consumer goods of message-receiving, is produced and sold to produce audiences, not the other way round.

It is the *audience* which is being made and traded. One of its clearest indications is the immense growth of the business of measuring it.⁶ Are the audiences for films, for books, for music; in short, for Murdock's "other sectors" being measured? Certainly. It is precisely this that allows the star's audience to be bought and sold.

In *some* of the media, *some* of the time, commodities-in-general are being sold; but in *all* sectors, *all* of the time, the audience commodity is being made. In all sectors it is being traded, in all sectors it is being measured.

For Murdock, the "articulation" of various communications media to the

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marketing system is effected only *externally*; only through a variety of *other* commodities. The media themselves however, have no *internal* unity. There is no commodity form through which the media are internally articulated.

Only, there *is* such a form: the audience.

III

The historical rise of the audience as the main media commodity, and the subordination of making messages to making audiences, can be observed within the content of the messages themselves. One of the most easily observable differences in content is between the "commercial" material⁷ and the news, features and entertainment; what Smythe calls the free lunch. Audiences surely know it; they go to the bathroom during the commercials.

Both Smythe (pp. 5-6) and Humphrey McQueen (p. 124) make a point of challenging a generally held view of this distinction, and they challenge it in the same way. People have mistaken the dog for the tail and the tail for the dog; consequently, they have misunderstood what wags what:

Commercial mass media are not news and features backed up by advertising; on the contrary, the commercial mass media are advertisements which carry news, feature and entertainment in order to capture audiences for the advertisers. (p. 124)

Why is this point important? Because it enables Smythe and McQueen to *locate* what the commodity of the media *really is*. As long as the correct relation is seen upside down, we are fixed on the "ideas" transmitted; we cannot even ask what the *commodity* is.⁸

When we attend to the commercial messages as the main thing, we see that they are not the objects of exchange; they are more like the medium of exchange. Something else is the object: the audience. As McQueen says,

It is a complete mistake to analyse the relationship between media and advertising by supposing that the media's prime function is to sell advertised products to audiences. On the contrary, the media's job is to sell audiences to advertisers. (p. 124)

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Clearly, Smythe and McQueen are forcing us to examine the assumptions we hold about the following question: Just what is "an audience"?

Even to raise the question may cause surprise. What is the problem? Is an audience not as my big *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* says, "a gathering of spectators or listeners as at a concert" or "the readers, hearers or viewers reached by a book, radio broadcast or television program"?

If this question causes surprise, it shows that we think about the concept of an audience in certain ways which are fixed, irrespective of time, place and condition.

- (1) We define audiences *by* the *messages* they receive. We *start* with the messages — the audience for the world soccer match, the audience for jazz, the audience for Bogart movies, etc.

Audiences, of course, can change; there was no TV audience before TV. However, we define this change as depending on the change in classes of messages. In short, we have a message-based definition of audiences.

- (2) Therefore, we define *membership* as a relation between a *person and a message* he "receives". Audience membership is a relation we define on a single individual in isolation. The audience as a whole is therefore conceived as an *aggregate* of individuals. There may or may not be "interaction" among members of the audience, but the *definition* of audience-membership is quite independent of this; it is a relation solely between a person and a message.

- (3) We define audiences as *receivers*, as "consumers" of these messages. The audience may be active, it may "participate" or not, but the definition of the audience is quite independent of this. It is defined in terms of what is *done to it*, not in terms of what *it does*.

These features are *fixed* points in our conception of the audience. Whatever the historical changes in the audience, we regard its *underlying form* as fixed, as absolute. This form undergoes no historical change.

I believe the line of thinking opened up by Smythe and McQueen lead us to question the fixed character of all these points. Does the commodity form of the audience, the process of making and trading audiences, not lead us to question the message-based definition of the audience? Does the production of the audience for maximum exchangeability among many different classes of messages not lead us to question it? I suggested earlier that it is precisely the subordination of the making of messages to the making of audiences which marks the modern media. It is just this process which Murdock misses.

Are we perhaps in the situation Marx described in discussing the emergence of the idea of *labour* as a general category?

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Indifference with regard to a specific kind of labour presupposes a highly developed totality of real kinds of labour, no single one of which is the predominant one any longer. The most general abstractions arise as a rule only together with the richest concrete development, in which one thing appears common to many, common to all. At that point it ceases to be conceivable in a particular form alone ... Indifference towards specific labour corresponds to a form of society in which individuals pass easily from one kind of labour to another, and in which the specific kind of labour is accidental, and therefore indifferent to them. Labour, not only as a category but in reality, has become a means to create wealth in general and has ceased to be organically tied to particular individuals in a specific form. This state of affairs is at its most developed in the United States, the most modern form of bourgeois society in existence ...⁹

Well, well, the United States ... in 1859!

The line of thinking that leads out of Smythe and McQueen requires, I believe, that we break with the message-based definition of audiences. Raymond Williams, cited by Murdock (p. 109) complains that:

'the main error' is that they substitute the analysis of ideology 'with its operative functions in segments, codes and texts' for the materialist analysis of the social relations of production and consumption.

Quite so, and we can extend this point. The analysis of "codes and texts", the method of starting with the message as the basis of everything else has produced the blindspot. The blindspot is the non-historical conception of the audience itself.

IV

The production and exchange of the capacities of audiences to do things is a very modern development. The commodity form of the audience itself is very modern; we are only beginning to grasp the implications of this fact. Smythe

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(p. 121) remarks that, "commodities as well as ideas carry ideological meaning." Indeed they do, but we usually acknowledge this observation by examining the ideological meanings of any and all commodities *in-general*. What is the meaning of the stereo bought on time, what is the meaning of the deodorant, etc.? Smythe confines himself to such examples.

However, are there no ideological meanings which arise from the commodity form of the audience itself? I am not speaking here of simply a psychological "transfer", a "carryover" of meanings from the consumption of commodities-in-general to other spheres of social life. I refer rather to the commodity form of the audience *itself* as the basis for the ideological meanings of *all* objects, not just consumable ones. The ideological significance of communications is not restricted to the meanings simply of what audiences *buy*. Murdock and others are correct in pointing this out. Rather, the commodity form of the audience itself is the economic base which carries the commodity form of ideological meanings, meanings not merely of consumption but of the whole domain of social life.

The economic analysis of the audience commodity has barely begun; therefore it is premature for me to do more than suggest how these meanings arise. I believe, however, it is important to focus on the effects of the commodity form of the audience on the production and destruction of the basis of *group membership*.

Once we break through the message-based definition of audiences, we can see that it is not correct to regard a modern audience as simply an aggregate of individual receivers of a common message. People locate themselves in audiences. Therefore, the nature of the movement of these audience-commodities governs the process by which people locate themselves. People strive to locate themselves as *members of groups* within a process which is constantly reorganizing them as *aggregates*.

Smythe (p. 122) touches on one of these ideological effects of the audience-commodity, when he speaks of the capacity of modern media:

to absorb the energies of the population in such a way that the old-style class struggle withers away, and conflict takes on the "demographic" character that Murdock uses to describe it (which happens curiously enough to be the specifications advertisers use to identify the audiences which they buy from the media).

However, there is a *difference* between these "demographic" aggregates

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constructed in the media and the groups that people *as members of audiences try to construct.*

We can see this on occasions when the media make *errors*. Here is an example given by a teacher who used the early morning edition of *Washington Post* to teach English to "illiterate" black teenagers:

The newspapers were an enormous success with the children, but they were something less with the teachers. The children liked everything about them including the relatively large number of typographical errors in the edition we were using. When I asked for this particular edition, Post executives had been unhappy. It was, after all, their earliest and worst. As first edition on the streets of a morning paper, the "bulldog" is rapidly composed and even more rapidly proofed. Consequently, its errors are many and often spectacular. Nothing more certainly guarantees its popularity with young readers.

What could be more exhilarating for a child than to find adult grammar or spelling in error? For the adolescent to discover patterns and reflections of his own imperfections in the successful adult world (*very different from finding them in the failed adults whom he knows too well*) *is to build his faith in the possibility that such a world may also have room for him.* The children glorified in finding misspellings; Cleo and Wentworth were a microcosm of the school in their daily contest to find the most misspelled words. Of course Cleo had the great advantage of being able to read the newspaper openly in her classrooms where it was being used as a textbook. Wentworth was finding it more and more difficult to keep his literacy under cover. (My emphasis.)¹⁰

These are errors on a small scale, I know, but what about those on a large scale?

People know that, today, everyone is in the audience. Their struggle for group membership goes on under the difficult condition that they are being traded as audience commodities, but the groups that *actually emerge* in the audience sometimes hold surprises for the bourgeoisie. We should attend to them.

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Smythe has so far focussed his attention on what we might call "consumption-groups". This is a necessary beginning, but they do not exhaust the processes of group production and destruction by the modern media. These await further investigation. I suggest only that the commodity character of the audience itself is the necessary starting point for the study of its ideology.

Still, what is the nature of this audience-commodity; what kind of commodity is it?

V

No element of Smythe's work appears at first so peculiar as the notion that the audience labours. Murdock is completely silent on it. Yet I believe none will prove as important. Once we have gone into the blind spot and located the audience as the central communications commodity, we are forced to ask precisely what it is, precisely what it does.

It is indeed peculiar and it does many peculiar things; this is the main reason we have been largely blind to it. There is a great difference between commodities-in-general and the audience commodity. An historical reminder is appropriate here. The development of production and exchange of commodities constituted a *preparation* for the capitalist system; but the fundamental mark of capitalism is the commodity form of labour. This is the economic foundation of its social formations.

I suggest that in the social formations which arise from audiences as commodities, we see a further development of that same process in the period of monopoly capitalism. It was only on a sufficient preparation of the development of audiences for the exchange of commodities-in-general that *the activities of these audiences themselves could become objects of exchange*. In the development of the modern media, the process moves *from* the production of commodities for sale to audiences *toward* the production of audiences-to-sell.

Engels, in speaking of money, described this "breakthrough" well:

Once the commodity-producing society has further developed the value form, which is inherent in commodities as such, to the money form, various seeds still hidden in value *break through* to the light of day. The first and most essential effect is the *generalization of the commodity form*. Money forces the commodity form *even on the objects which have hitherto been produced directly for self-consumption, and drags them into exchange ...* (my emphasis.)¹¹

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Therefore, to examine the forms of what the audience *does*, Smythe follows this material development in his theory. He generalizes the commodity form of labour time. In the society of modern monopoly capital ... (and in those "problematic" forms Murdock, p. 112, mentions as well) ... *all* time is labour time. Labour time occupies the totality of time. It has no "holes" in it, no separate pieces outside it, no blank spots, no leftovers. This totality of time as labour time is not homogeneous; there are qualitative divisions within it, but they are precisely *within* it. The labour time is *one* thing, monopoly capital itself has brought all time within the sphere of labour time.¹²

Smythe has opened up the investigation of the forms of the labour of audiences produced and exchanged as commodities. Virtually everyone is organized into the complex tapestry of these audiences, whose underlying properties we are just beginning to understand.¹³ For one thing, the production, destruction, division and recombination of audiences is a vast and turbulent motion. For another, the audience commodity is a *multipurpose* capacity. It is the other side of the labour power that Marx discovered in the production of commodities-in-general, and it is as protean in its capacities.

Smythe has concentrated his study on the *first* great form of the organization of this commodity — the audience commodity as a market. This form emerged historically first and with the greatest clarity in the United States. It is not an accident that Smythe's experience is American and Canadian. A proper understanding of this form and of the experience on which it is based enabled Smythe to discover the commodity character of the audience itself.

This form is the first, *but not the last*. It is not possible at this time to theoretically grasp the multiple forms of the audience commodity when there is still a prevailing theoretical blindness that it even *exists*. The main purpose of these comments is to contribute to clarifying its existence.

The many-sided totality of its labours will not become visible all at once. Marx describes the great difficulty in an earlier period in grasping it; again and again, theory slipped back into one-sidedness:

... It was a great advance when the Manufacturing or Mercantile System put the source of wealth not in the object but in subjective activity — labor in trade and manufacture — but still considered this activity within the narrow confines of money-making. In contrast to this system, the Physiocratic one posits one specific form of labor — agriculture — as wealth-creating ...

It was an immense advance when Adam Smith rejected all restrictions on wealth-creating activity ... How difficult

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and immense a transition this was is demonstrated by the fact that from time to time Adam Smith himself relapses into the Physiocratic System ...¹⁴

Should we not expect comparable "relapses" in our attempts to grasp the *other* side of labour which has emerged under *monopoly* capital? I believe so.¹⁵

Smythe's discovery of the audience-commodity, and his generalization of labour time as the tool for its analysis are, in my opinion, two important steps. He unpacks the hidden contents of the blind spot. For there *is* a blind spot. That is why Murdock totally passed it by.

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Notes

1. Smythe, D.W. "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1977, pp. 1-27
Murdock, G. "Blindspots about Western Marxism: A Reply to Dallas Smythe", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1978, pp. 109-119.
Smythe, D.W. "Rejoinder to Graham Murdock", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1978, pp. 120-129. In this paper, when I cite Smythe and Murdock, it will be to these articles that I refer. Page references 1-27 refer to Smythe's main article, pages 109-119 to Murdock, and pages 120-29 to Smythe's rejoinder.
2. Smythe's original paper contained a detailed critique of Enzensberger as well as Baran and Sweezy. It was on this paper that I wrote my paper, "The Communications Commodity" (Smythe, p. 24, fn. 24). For various reasons, Smythe's critique did not appear in his article in this *Journal*; it appeared earlier in another place *Journal of Communications*, 27:1, 1977, 198-202. This is unfortunate, for it is revealing to consider Baran and Sweezy and Enzensberger together. At first glance, their treatments of communications appear to have nothing in common, but this is deceptive. Baran and Sweezy treat communications simply as a means to induce the purchase of *all* commodities-in-general; there is nothing *peculiar* about communications. For Enzensberger, there is something *very* peculiar about them — in their essence, they have nothing to do with commodities at all. "The mind industry is monstrous and difficult to understand because it does not, strictly speaking, produce anything ... to concentrate on their commercialization is to miss the point." If we look at this carefully we can see that both authors are saying the same thing: *communications has no particular commodity form*. Baran and Sweezy reduce the *particular* problem into commodities-*in-general*; Enzensberger elevates it into the mind of the manipulator. What unites both authors is what they both *deny*; better, what they do not *even* see. They will not fit together, for both accounts of communications conceal the same thing. The mixture of the vulgar materialism of Baran and Sweezy and the subjective idealism of Enzensberger is reproduced — in the same place — in Murdock.

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3. "The Most Expensive Season: A Spending Spree by Television Networks Touches Off Worries Over Future Profits", *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October, 1977, p. 40. Is a "public sector" network immune to this process? Not in Canada.
4. This "sectoral" error is very common. It is, for an example, a major weakness in James O'Conner's influential book, *Fiscal Crisis of the State*, 1973. See Hugh Mosley, "Is There a Fiscal Crisis of the State?", *Monthly Review*, 30:1, 1978, pp. 34-45.
5. Splitting apart production and consumption, and establishing an analytical *symmetry* between them blocks investigation into the nature of the object which is being *produced* which includes both "production" and "consumption" in the more restricted sense. It is not an error to study consumption as an *object*. Rather, the error is in the *point of view* of consumption in the study of *any* object. This is why Murdock has missed the appropriate object in his examples. Further, this incorrect symmetry is often carried over invisibly into communications in the analysis of the production and consumption of messages. I touch on this in part III of this paper. Murdock is not the only one who takes the "point of view" of consumption. So do Baran and Sweezy, and their error is more comprehensive. Anwar Shaikh, in his "An Introduction to the History of Crisis Theories" (pp. 219-240, in *U.S. Capitalism in Crisis*, Union for Radical Political Economics, New York: 1978) notes the underconsumptionist essence of the theories of crisis in both Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* and Sweezy's earlier *The Theory of Capitalist Development*. Shaikh remarks (p. 229):
The fundamental error in Sweezy's analysis is the traditional underconsumptionist one of reducing Department I to the role of an 'input' into Department II. Once this assumption is made, it necessarily follows that an increase in production of producer goods must expand the capacity of consumer goods. But this is false. ...
The underconsumptionist orientation of Baran and Sweezy leads them to liquidate the audience, as I discuss in part I of this paper.
6. See Smythe (p. 4). One of the marks of bourgeois epistemology is the assumption of the independence of the way phenomena are produced and the way they are measured. We seem to have to gaze at the uncertainty principle from physics in order to find the courage to question this notion. In fact, the main impetus to the rise of measurement is the rise of commodity production. Where something begins to be measured it is an almost sure sign it is being traded. Is the assumption of independence a reflection of the petty bourgeois professionals' assumption of their independence from the bourgeoisie? The bourgeoisie "make things happen"; the professionals tell us "what's happening" and how much.
7. Or, for that matter, "political" material in some of those societies Murdock describes (p. 112) as "problematic" from the standpoint of Marxist theory. Is the audience not also bought by the state through its government agencies?
8. It is interesting that both Smythe and McQueen specialize in the political economy of communications, not the analysis of messages. Despite this ... because of it, I would say ... they are able to re-analyze a very revealing difference *within* the field of messages themselves. Their *method* is also of great interest. Notice what they do *not* do. They do not mix functions eclectically and say messages are a "bit of both". Nor do they say that "all messages are ideological" and they are all "selling the system", as Murdock does. For more on this method, see Mao Tse Tung: *On Contradiction*, (part IV).
9. Marx, Karl. *Preface and Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1976, p. 36. Since the Preface is *part* of the Grundrisse, it is not clear why Murdock casts it *outside* of the "central economic work" of the latter. (See my quotation from Murdock in this paper.)

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10. Fader, Daniel. *The Naked Children*, Bantam, 1972, pp. 51-2.
11. Engels, F. *Anti-Duhring*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking: 1976, p. 26.
12. Undoubtedly, there is much resistance to this point. Why? Because we still have a "sectoral" view of time, as we found earlier that Murdock has a "sectoral" view of media. Intimately related to this sectoral error is the error of seeing all the time "outside" of labour time as the time of consumption. It is difficult to grasp what can be produced in this "outside" time, or by whom. This view leads quite naturally to an emphasis on the *passivity* of people in their "outside" time. The way is thus prepared for the concept of *manipulation*. Smythe has discovered this concept consistently in the literature; and he correctly objects to it.
13. Smythe refers to the organization of the labours of the audience as a commodity, as "mind slavery" ... "a kind of ideological tunnel vision" (p. 121). I think this expression detracts from the direction of his work; it relapses back into the psychological manipulation frame of thinking for which he properly criticized Baran and Sweezy. Smythe may consider "mind slavery" the other side of Marx's "wage slavery". If it meant to point out the reality of constraint within the appearance of freedom, it is not too misleading, but Marx did not use the analysis of slavery to *discover* the true nature of the wage relation, of surplus value, etc. Quite the contrary; the analysis of the wage relation illuminated some of the illusions of slavery. In short, "mind slavery" does no analytical work.
14. Marx, Karl, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7.
15. Smythe's work, past and present, focusses on the audience commodity as a market for the purchase of commodities-in-general. Thus his attention is on its place in the economy as a whole. By contrast, I focus on what I regard as Smythe's central discovery — this multi-purpose audience commodity itself. The main error previously was to dissolve it away into something else, thus making it invisible. In my focus, however, one can fall into the opposite error of separating it from everything else. I think this error can be avoided. After all, what is the *main task now*? To open up the blind spot, and try to show what is *inside*. That "blind-spot" is not just a metaphor. It is truly a *hole*, in the exact sense of its Indo-European etymology; not an *empty* place but a *hidden* one.

CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE: A RESPONSE TO BEN AGGER

Andrew Wernick

Despite its limitations, Ben Agger's attempt in *Dialectical Sensibility I & II* (CJPST I, 1 & 2) to provide an orientation for contemporary critical theorising has the merit of thematising most of the key issues. In the politically, ideologically and theoretically confused aftermath of the 1960's, the emancipatory project needs philosophical clarification. Any coherent metatheoretical proposal addressed to that end is indeed to be welcomed — if only as a provocation to debate.

Agger's vision of how radical intellectuality ought to develop has a great deal of appeal, especially for those of us grappling with the uncomfortable antinomies of academic existence. Critical theory, emancipated from the elitisms of party and school, re-integrates itself with mass politics by identifying itself with the social and anthropological self-consciousness of actual rebellious constituencies; at the omega point, criticism finally loses its character as a separate, specialised activity altogether and merges into the universal "dialectical sensibility" it has engendered. Unfortunately, Agger's position is vitiated by the very qualities that give it resonance. His particular distillation of early Marx, Marcuse and Freire expresses a form of self-negating moralistic utopianism that is all too prevalent in the contemporary intellectual left. Agger's recommendations deserve serious attention; their inadequacy points towards a critique of the perspectival matrix within which they have been generated, and which in my view must itself be transcended in any project of re-vitalising and re-politicising critical theory. Without pretending to be systematic, the following more specific objections to Agger are being advanced.

1. The Frankfurt Question.

In *Dialectical Sensibility I*, Agger's negative evaluation of the Frankfurt

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thinkers (particularly of Horkheimer and Adorno) goes overboard. I have no quarrel with the view that during the Hitler-Stalin period critical theory succumbed to fatalism, and a radical de-politicisation which drove it by the mid-1940's into an un-dialectical dead-end. By the end of World War II the Frankfurt thinkers had begun to fixate on their dystopian projection that a "totally administered" industrial order was destined to emerge on a global scale, its social contradictions permanently frozen, and the prospect of liberation extinguished, even as a dream. The unrelieved pessimism of such works as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* indeed represents a marked retreat from the dialectical openness of theory to historical potentiality which the Frankfurt thinkers hoped to recuperate from the materialist tradition. Critical Theory's descent into despair had its aspect of truth. The tendency towards social pacification and cultural incorporation highlighted by the Horkheimer circle may not represent the principal axis of late capitalist socio-cultural development; but it is, nevertheless, a real feature of that development and one that persists into the present.

Agger correctly criticises Horkheimer and Adorno for hypostasising the particular period of historical catastrophes through which they were living; but instead of elaborating this insight by exploring an alternative reading of modern history, he perpetuates their error of de-historicisation (in his terms, their "historicism") by counterposing to their abstract account of the dialectic of enlightenment an equally abstract argument about the eternal psychological nature of man. One can readily accept the principle, fundamental for a Marcusean, that the human instincts react negatively when the organism's desires and projects are manipulated or frustrated. Domination and alienation imply rebellion, and it is worth grounding such an anthropological *a priori* in order to show how social domination has psychological limits. Only once in the last forty years has there been any real evidence of mass revolutionary potential in advanced capitalist societies, "working-class" or otherwise. Who could deny that there has been a steady decline in the autonomy and efficacy of "public opinion" as a power in the actual formation of state policy, *pari passu* with the rise of a highly centralised communications and entertainment complex, peddling its confetti of facts, myths and opinions to an increasingly privatised populace? Even after one has taken note of Horkheimer and Adorno's error in extrapolating the corporatist trends of the nightmarish 1930's and 1940's into an indefinite future, one is still left with the problem of how to account for the historically relative truth that the period between 1920 and 1960, which formed the immediate backdrop to critical theory's strident neo-Weberian polemic against the rise of instrumentality as a master-category of public discourse, did witness the consolidation of a remarkably "one-dimensional" socio-cultural order. That this phase of conservatism was followed by new

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rebellions and extreme cultural turmoil does not diminish advanced capitalism's prior success in containing its structural contradictions, it merely indicates the actual course of history for which critical theory must *post facto* find some rational account.

In short, granted the need to de-absolutise and de-ontologise the Frankfurt theses concerning the "eclipse of reason", the "decline of the individual" and the triumph of "total administration", what is required is less the re-thronement of philosophical anthropology that Agger prescribes than theoretical developments in the domain of socio-historical analysis. As a priority, we need to better understand the complex and contradictory dynamics alive in the "superstructural" and mass-psychological development of industrial capitalism. The problem for theory is how to combine an understanding of the structural moments of opposition and containment in a single, synthetic, historically concrete analysis. How, in other words, does the dialectical tension between cultural normalisation and crisis/revolt actually function in a given conjuncture, and how are we to account for the apparently unpredictable alternations between periods of adaptive conformism and periods of ferment? Armed with this kind of knowledge, not only would we be able to refine our understanding of issues confronted by the Frankfurt thinkers themselves — such as fascism, consumer consciousness etc. — but we would also be in a position to grapple with certain contemporary puzzles. What, for example, is critical theory to make of the recent outbreak of a messianic youth movement, or of the contrasting experiences of France, where that movement combined with a working-class upsurge to produce a quasi-revolutionary explosion, and the United States where "middle America" proved to be the Nixon-supporting rock on which it smashed to pieces? Again, what is the real political significance of the ecological question, punk rock, Anita Bryant? In general, how do the rhythms of culture mediate political-economic processes in advanced capitalism, and what conclusions follow for transformational politics?

If Agger appears to underestimate the force of the social analysis that accompanied their drift to pessimistic contemplativism (and so misidentifies the theoretical corrective that should be applied), he also polemically distorts what the Frankfurt thinkers considered to be the real practical aim and value of their work. "People do not revolt or act constructively to transform society because they have read works of critical theory" says Agger, intending to be devastating, "but because their current lives are no longer bearable" (CJPST II, p. 22). However it is a crude misconception to suppose that the Frankfurt School intended its critique of ideology to stir people into action, let alone *en masse*. It is impossible for anyone reading Adorno, for example, to imagine that his philosophically opaque commentary was conceived as propagandistic communication with "the people". A small audience of fellow theorists is

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evidently what he had in mind, and even here he realised he was thinking against the grain. In the Preface to *Philosophy of Modern Music* he writes:

The author would not wish to gloss over the provocative features of this study. In view of what has happened in Europe and what further threatens the world, it will appear cynical to squander time and creative energy on the solution to esoteric questions of compositional techniques ... From an eccentric beginning, however, some light is shed upon a condition whose familiar manifestations are now only fit to disguise it ... How is a total world to be structured in which mere questions of counterpoint give rise to unresolvable conflicts? (p. xiii)

The practical posture of critical theory in the 1930's and 1940's was essentially defensive, to preserve in a form that could not be swallowed up into the gibberish of slogans and media vulgarisation, a theoretical tradition that refused accomodation to the givens of the modern world and a critical sensibility which experienced that world as a tragic negation of its own civilisational potential.

We are wholly convinced — and therein lies our *petitio principii* — that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. Nevertheless, we believe that the notion of this very way of thinking, no less than the actual historic forms — the social institutions with which it is interwoven — already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today. If enlightenment does not accomodate reflection on this recidivist element, then it seals its own fate ... In the enigmatic readiness of the technologically educated masses to fall under the sway of any despotism, in its self-destructive affinity to popular paranoia, and in all uncomprehended absurdity, the weakness of the modern theoretical faculty is apparent.

We believe that these fragments will contribute to the health of that theoretical understanding...

(Horkheimer and Adorno,
Dialectic of Enlightenment,
Herder and Herder p. xiii)

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The oracle of substantive reason may be tinged with idealism, but it certainly harbours no agitational ambitions. Far from assuming thought to be the prime mover in the historical process, its fate is seen to be bound up with the progress and regress of social freedom.

As for the actual content of the critical sensibility which the Frankfurt thinkers wished their theoretical work to keep alive, Agger's criticisms are more to the point. He mentions their under-emphasis of the oppressive dimensions of the traditional family, and their typically high bourgeois prejudice against potentially creative forms of mass-popular culture. I would add that, because of an understandable but exaggerated fear of modern irrationalism, they also lacked an adequate appreciation of the Dionysian, ecstatic and magical elements of human experience. A yearning for mass pagan ritual was as important an ingredient as authoritarianism in the mass-psychology of German fascism — but one to which critical theory gave virtually no attention. In Horkheimer and Adorno's hysterical opposition to the contestative and theatrical aspects of the 1960's student movement, and in the latter's notorious polemic against jazz, one can see how much they were in the grip of an unreflected reaction-formation against antinomianism which at times seriously undermined their capacity for making rational aesthetic and political judgements.

Allowing for these ideological deficiencies, however, the Frankfurt School must be considered to have been remarkably successful in the practical goal it actually set itself. The critical theorists of the Institute did manage to keep alive, during the Dark Ages of fascism and the Cold War, a current of philosophically grounded social criticism which was resistant to invasion by the dominant forms of mystification and "terrible simplification", and which they were ultimately able to relay to a future generation better situated than its mentors to actualise their critique in revolutionising praxis. Besides the diffuse international influence in the 1960's of such popularised slogans as Marcuse's "one-dimensional society", in West Germany itself the line of filiation between Frankfurt School writings and the ideas of the New Left was unambiguous and direct. There, the rapid passage from a liberal protest against Cold War censorship and traditional hierarchy in the universities to an anti-authoritarian movement at war with a "society of total administration" would not have been possible without the mediation of modern German radical theory. The historical irony is that the New Left's ultra-activist "devaluation of theory and ... overhasty subordination of theoretical work to the *ad hoc* requisites of practice" (Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, H.E.B. 1972, p. 33) which so horrified the older generation of critical theorists, was itself rationalised in terms of early Frankfurt analysis of the continuities between liberal-democracy and fascism as variant forms of capitalist incorporation. The

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conviction that history has missed the emancipatory boat can as easily ground a politics of "global contestation" and "wargasm" as it can one of stoical resignation or cautious reformism.

Finally, Agger's contention that early critical theory's central weakness was its hostility to psychological analysis, whose absence from their work is symptomised in the erroneous postulate that human nature is infinitely manipulable (their "denial of subjectivity"), also requires some qualification. I will leave aside the question of the adequacy of Horkheimer's thesis concerning the historical "decline of the individual", except to note that his celebrated essay on the subject in *Eclipse of Reason* argues not that all individuality is becoming extinct, but that in the sphere of mass culture, the cult of the celebrity and the star system masks the process of growing conformism that it reinforces. "The real individuals of our time are the martyrs who have gone through the inferno of suffering and degradation in their resistance to conquest and oppression, not the inflated personalities of popular culture..." (*Eclipse of Reason* 1947 OUP p. 161)

A more general point that Agger seems to overlook entirely is that the very recovery of anthropological and psychological themes by left-wing thought, which he deems so essential and applauds in the later writings of Marcuse, was a collective concern of the Frankfurt School ever since breaking with the economic Marxism of Grunberg and Grossmann in the early 1930's. Along with Wilhelm Reich, one of the Institute's signal historical achievements was to initiate a rupture with the ingrained puritanism of post-1848 official leftism by seriously confronting tabooed questions of sex and psyche posed by Freud. With the *Studien über Autorität* and *The Authoritarian Personality*, the Frankfurt thinkers undertook a path-breaking set of theoretical enquiries into the relationships between family, character-structure, sexuality and authoritarianism. The anthropological interest in reconstructing and accounting for the authoritarian psyche encouraged Marcuse to ransack Freud for insights into the anthropology of liberation. All this being so, it is extremely one-sided to view early critical theory as in essential continuity with the rabid psychologism of the Second and Third Internationals, on the grounds that "they accepted the orthodox Marxist critique of 'philosophical anthropology' and of all theories which tend to hypostasise a static human nature" (CJPST II p. 23). Far from "failing to integrate psychological with sociological perspectives in such a way as to comprehend the biological-anthropological foundation of human being" (*ibid.* p.23) the Institute's attempt to analyse, for instance, the connection between popular support for Hitler and the decline of familial patriarchy represents virtually the first serious attempt since Marx and Engels to examine these missing mediations in the tradition of the analysis they founded.

Of course, what Agger most objects to in early critical theory's alleged anti-

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anthropologism is the way in which it grounded a bleak prognosis for the possibility of liberation. His strictures in this respect are related specifically to Horkheimer's thesis about the "decline of the individual" and Adorno's conception of "the damaged life"; but he is remarkably silent about the extent to which Marcuse, whose lead he claims to be following, himself shared Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimism about the capacity of contemporary individuals to withstand corporatist and consumerist integration. In *Eros and Civilisation*, Marcuse advanced a neo-Freudian psychology in order to show both how capitalism draws on the psychic resources of the population it organises, as well as how the characterological transformation essential for the formation of a free society is thinkable in terms of anthropological theory — and indeed present as a real possibility in the desublimation process late capitalism is constrained to undergo. In that text, and still more in *One-Dimensional Man*, its sociological extension, the accent falls on the negative moment of this cultural dialectic: the way in which, once traditional controls are relaxed, the programme of the pleasure-principle is co-opted to reinforce the subjugation of "happy consumers" to the unmediated pleasures of commoditised gratification.

2. Descent into Pragmatism.

As a solution to the mind/action split he diagnoses to be at the heart of emancipatory theory's current difficulties, Agger urges the development of an activist social theory tailored to the function of "advising and stimulating ongoing rebellion". In his laudable desire to transcend the one-sided contemplativism for which "positivist Marxism" and early critical theory are equally castigated, he unfortunately falls into a form of radical pragmatism that is just as one-sided as the theoreticism he rejects.

I whole-heartedly agree that there is a practical and theoretical need to re-politicise social theory — but the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach ought not to be treated as an excuse for collapsing all the necessary mediations. The kind of synthetic socio-historical understanding Agger wishes to see theorists contribute to the process of radical conscientisation is hardly possible without the utilisation of certain formal conceptual elements whose very availability presupposes the existence of precisely that abstracted mode of theoretical activity he dismisses as "cerebral", "contemplative" and "positivist". *Capital*, for example, may not turn the masses to revolution, but a non-mystified understanding of social reality can hardly avoid reliance on ideas in some measure drawn from it.

It is evident that Agger, in refusing *a priori* the truth claims of social

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scientific and philosophical activity conducted outside the realm of politico-ideological practice, effectively denies the possibility of objective knowledge. The relativism to which such a position leads can paradoxically concede the contemplativist enemy too much: it is more damaging to show how a particular instance of erroneous historical analysis is incorrect than merely to proclaim that every attempt at objectivity is scholastic. Agger's relativism is not, however, whole-hearted. He seems to hold that there is an objective truth to human nature, if not to the historical process sociated man acts out, and that knowledge of this nature is necessary both to give theoretical coherence to the reconstructed consciousness connoted by "dialectical sensibility" and to justify the recommendations/predictions advanced by "radical empiricism". Yet one would have thought that any such notion of a fixed human nature would be irreconcilable with a refusal to allow theorising a meaning beyond that of its practical functioning. What kind of theory is supposed to apprehend this particular objective truth?

In addition to these difficulties, Agger's epistemologically restrictive conception of theory also undermines its capacity to give advice. For Agger, the paramount task of radical social science is to relate "human suffering and the resistance which it occasions to the visible, palpable prospect of a qualitatively different society". In the revolutionary long-run, its special function is taken over by the transformed social collectivity in the cognitive self-management of all by all. Agger's conception not only instrumentalises the relation between theory and praxis (the former is the advisory handmaiden to the latter), but reduces it to purely ideological terms: the relation between self-reflection and action within a process of radicalisation.

Leaving aside the logical question of whether an "advisory" role for theory *now* is compatible with its *eventual* dissolution into praxis, Agger's dismissal of objectivistic socio-historical interpretation in effect deprives the advisory activity he recommends of a crucial political resource — the faculty of strategic reasoning. Agger's radical social science would ideally function only to show those in struggle how their rebellion points to a future beyond domination and alienation, and how their own discontent and resistance is linked to that of others in an interrelated context of structured repression and potential liberation. However, it is never sufficient for the successful outcome of a revolutionary social struggle that there be just mass radical consciousness, the game of power must also be won. Rational political strategy, in which the directing intelligence can be as broadly based as conditions permit, absolutely requires detached, theoretically and empirically informed analysis of the unfolding historical situation. Whatever its intent, the liquidationist attitude to the contemplative moment of theory has as its counterpart a liquidationist attitude to politics.

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In fact, it is precisely here, in an anti-objectivism which in the moralistic name of epistemological democracy refuses to consider the possibility of strategic theory, that Agger reproduces what I find the central weakness of the Frankfurt School thought he criticises. Not pessimism, but anti-instrumental purism stands at the centre of critical theory constitutional apoliticism; and it is this which needs to be corrected in any project of its "repoliticisation". The demonological connotation of "positivism" in critical theory's lexicon, as much as it usefully serves to orient a campaign of de-fetishisation, symptomises an extreme and thorough distrust of all theoretical objectification, the refusal, for fear of joining the ranks of the manipulators in a totally manipulated social universe, to treat the socio-historical situation faced by political actors as a reality external to their projects and hence susceptible to rational calculation.

3. The fate of intellectual culture.

Paradoxically, if Agger's conception of a revitalised critical theory is under-politicised in one respect, it is quite over-politicised in another. Incapable of thinking the instrumental as opposed to the ideological dimension of political activity his position at the same time tends to be totalitarian in its opposition to "disengaged scholarly activity" — *i.e.* to theorising not demonstrably related to practical ends outside itself. Agger does advance "the notion that cognition can become a form of mental play, reiterating Marcuse's vision that alienated work can be eliminated and thus fundamentally transformed under a different social order." (*CJPST*, I, 2, p. 68). (Intellectual) play is inseparably linked with the world of necessity and purpose denoted here by "work". It is arguable that we have reached one of those points in intellectual history where the reproduction of knowledge about "dead" traditions has become an obstacle in the development of new ones. Agger, however goes much further. Silent on any possible distinction that might be made between scholarship and scholasticism, he proposes as a vector for emancipatory practice the virtual dissolution of academia. "While this may be a painful and troubled process", he admits, "I can think of no better way of contributing to social change than to transform the traditional disengagement of the lonely scholar, in the process creating an archetype of dialectical sensibility." (*Ibid.* p. 48) By placing such extreme emphasis on the motive of social engagement, Agger lapses into the kind of immediacy and instrumentalism which Horkheimer and Adorno always thought was fated to dissolve the transcendental element of Western reason — albeit that his intellectual instrumentalism is ostensibly related to the long run emancipatory needs of humanity rather than to the mere bureaucratic demands of the moment.

Worse still, Agger's contempt for "cerebral Marxism" and "experts"

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betrays more than a trace of a populist anti-intellectualism that has always tended to limit the civilisational vision of the left, and which is particularly strong in the moralistic atmosphere of North American radicalism. In his rush to eliminate the invidious and power-ridden dichotomy between "expert" and "non-expert", Agger continually runs the risk of simply endorsing the *ressentiment* of the latter towards the former. In justifying his position that the intelligentsia ultimately has no right to exist as a separate social stratum, Agger situates himself within the utopian project so dear to the early Marx, the abolition of the division of labour. "It would be hypocritical", he says, "to preserve the role of the traditional Marxist intellectual while counselling others to destroy the division of labour." (*Ibid.* p. 68) He takes for granted that the specialisation of activities, particularly along the mental/manual axis, is necessarily oppressive and hierarchical and as such constitutes a malignant feature of social life that it would be progressive to eradicate. Refusing to separate strategy from programme, Agger insists that the battle against the "tyranny and hegemony of expertise" must begin now. "The radical intellectual begins to live the revolution by becoming *more* than an isolated intellectual, refusing to stay within the confines of the academic role. It is this multi-dimensionality of role-playing that I contend is revolutionary." (*Ibid.* p. 47).

Even as a maximalist programme, the traditional leftist panacea of abolishing the division of labour needs a good deal more critical attention than it usually receives. For example, the question of specialisation versus all-round development as a goal for the individual must be clearly distinguished from the structural problem of how to better integrate intellectual, materially productive and aesthetic activities within the social collectivity. Durkheim's distinction between a "forced" and a "spontaneous" distribution of individuals into socially necessary tasks seems a particularly fruitful lead to follow in this context. At any rate, it is one thing to propose that intellectuality be generalised throughout the society, and quite another to urge the disappearance of a specialized intellectual culture, as that is traditionally understood. As a final goal, such an aim is dubious, but to transform the utopian vision of a negated division of labour into a contemporary moral imperative, at a time when the whole tradition of Western intellectuality is compromised by commoditisation and instrumentalisation, strikes me as culturally irresponsible. Agger himself does not side with barbarism, but the Maoist concern to resolve the expert/non-expert contradiction provided ideological cover in China for an unholy alliance between official Zdanovism and popular anti-intellectualism against the entire non-technical intelligentsia, modern-critical as well as traditional. No more than a moment's reflection is required to figure out that a combination of Red Guard "anti-expertism" and rhapsodising *à la*

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1844 Manuscripts is an inadequate foundation from which to develop a critical or strategic perspective on the present condition of Western intellectual and scientific culture.

One suspects that it is precisely the respect they display towards the classical European intellectual tradition that Agger finds most irksome in the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno. Does not an elitist German academic mandarism lurk behind Horkheimer's defense of contemplative rationalism and Adorno's maddening infatuation with convoluted modes of expression? Undoubtedly, but why is intellectual conservatism something of which they should necessarily be ashamed?

To the extent that he lacks a feeling for the cultural issues at stake in what Horkheimer called "the eclipse of Reason", Agger's "dialectical sensibility" is relatively impoverished. Nietzsche, whose writings on the psychology of being dominated helped inhibit the early critical theorists from developing a naive (and orthodox) over-identification with the subjectivity of the working-class movement, outlined in his later works a trenchant analysis of the link between *ressentiment* and anti-intellectualism. The totalising consciousness connoted by "dialectical sensibility" that Agger wishes to foster would have far greater claim to synthetic inclusiveness if Nietzsche's insights could be critically appropriated. This, however would force a rather drastic modification in the vector for radical theorising that Agger recommends.

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Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, translated by E. Jephcott, New York: Urizen Books, 1978, pp. 310.

The concept of civilization originated in eighteenth-century France. It epitomized the confident self-understanding of an age that saw itself as having, once and for all, left behind the primitive life world of subsistence, superstition and barbarity. By its very nature, it was a self-image that entailed a concept of social and psychological evolution that represents probably the earliest secular variant of a world-historical perspective. The empirical indices of civilization were several: economic development beyond the narrow agrarian framework of feudal relations of production; progress in the natural sciences; religious toleration and freedom of thought and expression; enlightened political authority;...and finally a high degree of refinement of manners.

The inclusion of, and emphasis on, manners as an aspect of civilization became the object of criticism as early as the 1750's, with the publication of Rousseau's first two *Discourses*, Diderot's *Supplement* and a few other writings. How can "manners", this superficial and ritualized curtsying of the human being, claim a place alongside the state of science and technology when propriety of conduct is so patently unimportant and so clearly aristocratic in origin? Dissident intellectuals such as Rousseau were quick to pose such rhetorical questions merely to dismiss them. The same happened in Germany, except on a much larger scale. The German Enlightenment, the generation of Kant and Goethe, almost to a man counterposed to "manners" what it thought was a more authentic idea of civilization, namely *Kultur*, which was a specific formation of the inner man rather than a disciplining of the body. This trend continued throughout the nineteenth century, and it held sway over the whole spectrum of philosophical world views and persuasions. To the idealist, manners were too external, too corporeal, too material to have any relevance; whereas to the materialist they were the weakest link in a harmonistic ideology

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that tried to make people believe there were no real antagonisms between them, for they were saying, were they not, "Good day, sir" to one another.

In short, to reflective thought (as distinct from general opinion or from what people think) the meaningfulness of a phenomenon such as manners declined markedly during the nineteenth century. Were manners a telling indicator of social evolution? The very idea made intellectuals laugh. What proponents it still had were all and sundry second-rate apologists of the Restoration or outright imperialists. Beware of manners! Beware lest you take manners for what they are not! Be sure always to unmask the inhumanity that lies beneath them! Such was the drift of the sceptical consensus concerning the notion of manners.

The almost complete rejection of departmental civilization as a major aspect of progress had to be reviewed in a more psychologically oriented age than the nineteenth century, namely our own. Strangely enough, despite the strong tendencies since the turn of the century toward psychologism in theory and introspection in everyday life, and despite the tremendous advances of individual and social psychology as scientific disciplines, there have been few serious attempts to redeem the much-discredited notion of departmental civilization and to put manners on the agenda of modern thinking again. Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process*, published 40 years ago in German, was a first step in this direction, a step that initially made few waves. There may be some secondary ripples now that the first volume of this important two-volume work has finally been translated into English.¹

The fate of the book and its author is perhaps worth telling. In the early 1930's Elias collaborated with Karl Mannheim in Frankfurt, in the hope of "habilitating" himself at a German university. Racist repression in Germany forced him and Mannheim into exile in London, where Elias completed the manuscript of *The Civilizing Process* in the mid 1930's. It took him another three or four years to arrange publication by a small publishing firm in Switzerland. The eventual publication coincided almost to the day with the German invasion of Poland in the fall of 1939 — hardly an auspicious moment for launching a fat treatise on anything, let alone on the historical pacification of the human beast. The apparent naiveté of its main thesis continued to militate against a serious appropriation of *The Civilizing Process* in post-war Germany for well over two decades. The appearance in 1968 of a second German edition that included a lengthy new introduction marked something of a turning point. Shortly thereafter, Elias was discovered in France and his major work translated into French. With that publication, by Suhrkamp Verlag, of a cheap paperback edition in 1976, Elias at last succeeded in reaching a wider audience in his native Germany. All this is to say that the English translation, appearing as it does more than 40 years after the book was written,

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is not the fruit of an idiosyncratically archeological orientation on the part of the American publisher.² On the contrary, interest in Elias is currently running high in continental Europe; making his work available to English-speaking readers is not an eccentric feat of excavation, but part of a trendy revival.

Why this belated popularity? *The Civilizing Process* has a two-fold appeal. First, it contains an important analysis of the formation of the modern state. This is a topic that has in the last ten years begun to interest Marxists who are rightly concerned about the lack of an adequate theory of the state in orthodox Marxism.³ Elias' inquiry into the process of monopolization of power, written in the form of a case study of absolutist France, is probably economic enough in appearance to attract some attention among Marxists, regardless of the author's philosophical orientation, which is not Marxist by any stretch of terminology. I do not intend to comment on Elias' monopolization-of-power theorem which is set out in great detail in the still untranslated second volume of *The Civilizing Process*.⁴

There is another major reason why this renaissance of interest in Elias is timely — the one-sided way social evolution has come to be viewed in the century since Marx. Let us look, from a Marxist perspective, at the great historical movement from an agrarian/feudal to an industrial/capitalist society. More specifically, what did the aristocracy do to bring about the new world of the bourgeoisie? The standard Marxist answer is a kind of undialectical "nothing". At most the aristocracy is credited with having plugged its economic demand for exotic goods into the bourgeois circuit of commercial relations; it is credited with an increasingly friendly attitude toward cash-crop farming and money revenues in place of the old personal servitudes; it is credited with bringing about that increase in the efficient exploitation of the land that ultimately made possible the existence of growing secondary and tertiary sectors; and so on. Hyperbolically put, the feudal nobility for Marx and the Marxists was a group of rationally calculating businessmen whose chief handicap was their being tied to a primitive mode of production. Marxist theory says nothing about the progress from a cruel warrior mentality to the mannered ways of courtly society, which was a clear historical trend between the ninth and seventeenth centuries. As a result Marxism has a much too urbane perspective on the Middle Ages. Far from exaggerating the inhumanity of feudal society, Marxists tend actually to belittle its violence and the aggressive disposition of the warrior nobility.

It is here that we can see Elias furnishing a corrective. By tracing the outlines of a psychogenetic history of the French aristocracy he intends to revamp our false perception of feudalism as a period in which the only socio-historically important phenomena were economic, technological and demographic ones. The taming of "affect", as he calls it, along with purely economic trans-

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formations, is one of the prerequisites for the rise of modern societies. In other words, if it is true that the nobility of the late Middle Ages were the first to impose "affect control" on themselves as a group or class, then we must revise our estimate of the bequest it made to the bourgeois world, assuming it is correct that the middle class did in fact largely inherit the pattern of impulse control from their aristocratic adversaries rather than generating it on their own. (That impulse control is an indispensable trait of bourgeois patterns of behaviour, can hardly be doubted.)

The chief psychological presupposition of *The Civilizing Process* is that modes of behaviour of the kind we generally subsume under the heading of manners are not at all external to the development of the individual and that their phylogenesis, *i.e.* their historical rise to prominence as a modal pattern or structure marks a distinct stage in the progress of mankind. Norms of etiquette, Elias argues, are as firmly lodged in the superego as moral norms, and have the same kind of suasion as the latter. Were it not for this internalization of rules of etiquette, we could not explain a phenomenon such as the shame that attends their breach. Nor could we explain why people dream of situations in which they make fools of themselves in the eyes of others when perpetrating acts regarded as gauche. These are empirical phenomena which while directly pertaining to deportment and manners seem to point to an integration of soma and psyche at a deeper level of human life. They are behavioural manifestations of a depth structure to which is attached the capacity to experience fear of embarrassment, for example, by fantasizing about one's own gaucheness in situations of social intercourse.

All of this had been grasped by Freud. It was he who first saw the depth-psychological repercussions and reinforcement mechanisms of what, to the untrained eye, looked like "mere" conformity to "external" rules of behaviour. If fear of breaking taboos of etiquette can haunt the individual's dreaming and waking hours, we can infer that there is a greater degree of mediation and interdependence between what an earlier view had mechanically separated into external and authentic aspects of being. Concerned as he was with other things, namely the development of a universal theory of mental functioning, Freud did not pay systematic attention to the question of the *historical origins* of what Elias calls "affect control".⁵ In fact, Elias is the first to bring out the implications of the new psychology for the old discredited concept of deportmental civilization, which is an historical concept. In this regard, his two major theses are that the development of manners can be interpreted as a change in the structure of affects and that this change in the affect structure is closely bound up with institutional change: in France, with change during the period of nation-building and absolutism. It is in this way that Elias proceeds to correct the facile critique of the Enlightenment's

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equation of progress with refinement of manners, on the one hand, and to historicise psychoanalysis in the spirit of *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

It is generally next to the impossible to get a clearly defined understanding of "manners".⁶ The concept of manners we know is not coextensive with affect control. Western languages differentiate between manners, morality, law, parental repression, etc., all of them supposedly constituting different *modes* of affect control while often overlapping in terms of the *area* of behaviour they regulate. However, even as different modes of affect control, these phenomena cannot be clearly distinguished. Notably, manners and morality form a kind of ambiguous tangle which is difficult to sort out. Elias, thank God, takes the easy way out. For him, "manners" are those principles of conduct that are laid down in a literary genre called books of etiquette. Substantively these principles govern behaviour related to the ingestive and emissive functions of the body, sleep and sexuality. We can see that while "manners" are the sole judge of the way in which a person ought to blow his nose, they are not unchallenged in their authority over sex, since sexual morality has a separate existence alongside sexual manners. Where do sexual manners end and where does sexual morality begin? This remains, as I have mentioned, an open question for Elias.

Rather than worry about neat distinctions, Elias proceeds to adduce a wealth of evidence, quoting — at times fascinating — excerpts from books on manners written between 1500 and 1800. What is it exactly that is being proved? Answer: The intensification of affect control. What is affect control and especially what is affect, a concept that, unlike "instinct", "unconscious", etc., has no well-defined status in analytical psychology? Looking at the civilization of table manners, what meaning can I attach to the statement that eating with one's hands is "affective" whereas eating with a fork is affect-controlled? Does this mean that eating with one's hand is an act from which the individual derives greater emotional satisfaction? We can with some justification assert this to be the case for the child at a certain stage of immaturity. This however rivets the analysis to the level of ontogenesis which Elias does not address in his book. *The Civilizing Process* is about the historical evolution of modes of behaviour. In this area, if we take a psychological orientation of any kind, all we can say about the ill-mannered squire of the Dark Age is that his not using the fork appears natural to him and to his contemporaries. It is neither instinctually nor affectively more gratifying for him to use his hands than it is for his courtly successors — and finally ourselves as successors of the successors — to use a fork. By the same token, the contemporary gourmet does not feel that the eating implements are getting in the way of his enjoyment. On the contrary, he insists that they be available, clean

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and in a good state of repair. In other words, if affect is what a person really likes to do in the absence of departmental constraints, then civilization is not necessarily a mechanism of affect-inhibition and control. Rather, civilization then becomes an integral part of the individual's cathexes of certain acts and performances.

In sum, I think there is a certain facility about the way in which we tend to chalk up departmental civilization on the side of discipline, denial of gratification, and so on. While this connection may hold for the processes at work in the ontogenetic development of the human being, it does not necessarily and universally hold true for the evolution of stages of civilization, compared longitudinally over many centuries. Granted, Elias does not subscribe to the simple-minded view I have imputed to him. However, some of his formulations are vague enough to invite such a rendering as I have given here.

Putting the most plausible interpretation on the text, I think the phylogenetic thesis about affect control through manners makes the best sense when we view civilization as a process of increasing distances between human bodies. From this vantage point, dipping your hand into a common dish of food is not the same as retrieving some morsels from the same dish by means of a fork, and this in turn is not the same as piling some food from a common dish onto your own plate and eating it with your fork. In this three-stage sequence, the original aspect of a somatic oneness of a dinner community wanes, giving rise to what we might call spatial individuation of bodies. The same phenomenon can be observed in comparing medieval and early-modern sleeping patterns with contemporary ones in terms of the variable of space: Here, too, we see a tendency away from common family sleeping quarters to segregated bedrooms. Elias argues that this kind of somatic distancing, as evidenced by the privatization of sleeping quarters and the introduction of eating implements, reflects the growing sense of delicacy. Conversely, the ability to put space between oneself and one's next of kin is the pre-condition for psychological civilization.

Looked at in this way, the concept of affect control is finally released from its confinement to individual psychology, thus enabling it to play the role of a building-block for a theory of interaction. Manners are fences between interacting individuals, guaranteeing to each a private space of his own that must not be invaded. When of two civilized actors one momentarily disregards a prescription of etiquette, the other will show discomfort, simultaneously a physical and a psychical reaction. More important, the violator of the rule will be ashamed and embarrassed, which is also a psychosomatic reaction. Discomfort and shame are constitutive of internal civilization or affect control only in the presence of others. On the objective side, manners are social definitions of what constitutes appropriate distances and what constitutes

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excessive proximity between human bodies, whereas on the subjective side repugnance and embarrassment are telltale signs that manners have become truly internalized controls similar, for example, to the precepts of moral theology.

It may not be such an outrageous conjecture to think that if *The Civilizing Process* is going to have any specific impact at all, it will be, especially in North America, in the area of interactionist sociology rather than on general theories of social evolution such as historical materialism. In this connection it should be noted that E. Goffman made occasional references to Elias in the 1960's at a time when American sociology had never heard of him.⁷ I take this to be suggestive of a subterranean affinity which is probably going to become more explicit now that the translation is available. What *The Civilizing Process* can contribute to the study of behaviour in small groups is more than anything else, a much-needed historical perspective.

Any analysis of manners exposes itself to one of two perils: it tends to be either too functionalist or too formalistic. Elias does not err on the side of functionalism. He knows that the tortuous kowtows and curtsies of seventeenth-century courts cannot be related to specific purposes of society. Society does not require any *particular* set of deportmental norms governing the interaction of bodies. Unlike the incest taboo and the prohibition of murder, manners do not discipline people in a determinate functional way so that we can correlate even the most minute rule of etiquette with such and such a particular purpose of society. In other words, there does not exist any society whose inviolable foundation is the fact that people blow their noses into handkerchiefs or spit only into spittoons. All these highly specific regulations of conduct enjoined by codes of etiquette are fungible, that is to say not at all sacrosanct or foundational. It seems that nothing matters so much as the specific content of manners. The social purpose, if that is what it is, of manners — *i.e.* the maintenance of distance between bodies — can be achieved in a thousand different ways. Thus it is only in a completely empty and formalistic sense that we can maintain anything like a functionalist explanation of manners. Manners there must be, if society is to progress.⁸

In the last instance then, while freeing the subject from the obtrusive physical presence of other bodies, manners merely reaffirm the "primacy of the object", *i.e.* the primacy of a society that shapes and disciplines its members. In civilization, the object is no longer the somatic unity of an interacting group eating food out of common bowl but becomes instead an abstract and formal principle of order bringing about the individuation of bodies by means of deportmental rules that seem to have no rhyme or reason. That is why quotes from Erasmus *Colloquies* and Francois de Callieres' *Du bon et du mauvais usage*, even when we read them at a distance of several centuries, are not sheer

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fun. Today the most reflective individuals, including those who are least conformist in their thinking, take manners as they come, one set apparently being as good as another. There is a kind of crushing consensus to the effect that since manners are unimportant, the individual's deviation from them does not even have the meaning of a symbolic rebellion any more. It is this attitude of indifference that highlights the lack of freedom in the individual who is both the product and the victim of the civilizing process. Inter-disciplinary in the best tradition of German sociology, Elias' approach lacks sensitivity to the coercive objectivity of the process of rationalization, of which the psychological civilization of the human being is one important aspect.

The apologetic posture Elias takes in relation to manners can be partly explained by the broad scope of the notion of manners itself. If manners cover every type of interaction from common meals to cohabitation, then they are more than just censors of body crudity: at the end of the spectrum that is indicated by sexuality, they become censors of *instinct*. As censors of instincts manners lose the odium of being both risible and blatantly repressive. In accordance with his general view that manners are not a laughing matter, Elias ends the first volume of his book with an analysis of historical "Changes in Aggressiveness" (Ch. X) which I will briefly comment on in conclusion.

To begin with, a reorientation to different types of data is necessary for understanding the alleged pacification of aggression. The manuals on etiquette cease to be serviceable at this important juncture, for as a rule they do not define what constitutes propriety in the area of violent and destructive behaviour. Accordingly Elias gathers his data from a wider array of source materials. Thus he tries to document the civilizing of aggression, for instance, by comparing the cruel subjectivity of the early-medieval *Chansons de geste* with the mannered tenderness of the later troubadour poetry. Similarly, he drags out the old stand-by of the rationalist historian, knightly tournaments, to show how violent conduct was transformed into mock warfare and a sense of sportsmanship. All this we know from Huizinga and other medievalists. What Elias does, in addition to reciting these facts, is to argue in the light of Freudian theory, or of his peculiar appropriation of it, that these phenomena, seen in their historical sequence, allow us to plot "a distinct curve of moderation" (203) of aggression as part of the general trend toward affect control.

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Much has been written since 1939 on the possibility of sublimating or pacifying aggression. In the wake of World War II and the genocide of the 1930's and 1940's, it is little consolation indeed to know that medieval knights developed the idea of the sporting match and that the sensitivity of sixteenth-century Parisians had been refined to the point where they no longer executed heretics at the stake but were publicly burning cats in an atmosphere that was a smelly mix of circus and *Staatsaktion*. We need only extrapolate this ascending line of development into the present where cruelty to animals and even violence in sports tend to mobilize the public prosecutor, and we have a seemingly airtight case for Elias' rationalistic evolutionism. The evidence is all there, neatly arranged and apparently compelling, but what does it prove?

Several years ago *Le Nouvel Observateur* published an interview with Elias in which he was asked whether his view of the pacification of aggression was not altogether too optimistic in view of recent historical events. Here is his reply, quoted at some length:

As far as violence today is concerned, I do not think it has much importance, save for those who become its victims. In comparison with our ancestors we are veritable lambs. I am referring here to violence between individuals, to violence within societies, rather than to violence between states.... We no longer have any idea what a violent society really is. Take ancient Rome, for example, or...medieval society where violence was part of the social fabric itself. The ruling-class was a warrior class. Life was a combination of pillage, warfare and the hunting of men and animals. The historical records draw a picture of incredible rapine where people would constantly be seeking gratification in extreme types of behaviour: ferocity, murder, torture, destruction and sadism.... We ourselves live in relatively pacified societies, although there is present in them a contradictory element, namely the constant preparation

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for armed conflict, hence violence. But as far as their internal life is concerned these societies are nonviolent. Needless to say, if society ever disintegrates, taboos will also go by the board; and then violence will rear its head again everywhere.⁹

Thus three decades after *The Civilizing Process* had been branded naive and untimely, its author fully re-affirmed the thesis on the historical civilization of aggression. The sceptic is to be disarmed by facts that speak for themselves. However do they speak for anything but themselves?

It is all too easy to be overly empirical about aggression. Compiling data about changes in aggressive behaviour does not warrant the conclusion that aggression, an instinctual force, has been tempered. For one thing, too much ambiguity surrounds the status of aggression in Freudian theory for such a concept to be simply adopted without clarification. For another, supposing we knew what aggression is and furthermore we had historical proof that aggression takes on increasingly more "civilized" forms, such a theory would be psychologistic in the worst sense of the word. Whether or not the domestication-of-aggression thesis can be proved, the fact remains that aggression has also been subject to an historical logic of increasing socialization. What was once a trait of irrational individuals unable to control their impulses has become a facet or latent capacity of societies. Psychological sublimation of aggression and socialization of (unsublimated) aggression are two sides of the same coin. The social totality has become the repository and agency of violence to the extent to which the individual has learned to play chivalrous games. Writing on the eve of unprecedented mass murder, Elias gives an underexposed portrayal of the dark side of this coin, stressing instead the emergence of a personality type content with make-believe aggression.

How can society be aggressive in the absence of the personality trait called psychic aggression? Social science today is beginning to understand the mediations between the civilized, nonaggressive personality type and the aggressive society in which he lives. It becomes more and more evident that in trying to enlist people for acts of violence, society does not so much re-activate an aggressive potential in civilized individual psyches as operate through psychological and ideological mechanisms that insure compliance with authority. Society, of course, cannot act violently, or in any determinate manner whatever, except through its individual members. In other words, it must be able to elicit individual behaviour of a patterned, predictable kind. From the point of view of violent society, it is quite beside the point whether or not its *Schreibtischmörder* and pushers of lethal buttons are all and sundry

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gentle lambs at heart, provided they do their job. Critical social theory has to come to terms with this modern configuration of man and society, where the individual's capacity to act in a determinate way is uncoupled from the psyche, as it were, so as to be put directly at the disposal of society. Seeing the problem, Elias capitulates before its complexity as though he were facing an insoluble antinomy of modern life, leaving us with the impression that everything could be well if only the social whole were as civilized as the individual is today — which is at best a defeatist kind of truism.

Truisms have a tendency to be forgotten. That is why people like Elias are needed. It is good to be reminded of the obvious, especially when such reminding takes the form of an expertly guided tour of historical records few scholars have ever bothered to bring to light. In the last analysis it is quite unlikely that *The Civilizing Process* will revamp the thinking of entire schools of thought. For that to happen he would have to be a more powerful theorist than he is. There is a deliberate air of dilettantism about his handling of key concepts of historical materialism and psychoanalysis. Lodging his approach squarely in the tradition of historical sociology, Elias would be the first to deny that his investigations support anything approaching an inclusive theoretical structure. It is he who eclectically raids the theorists' conceptual edifices. All he gives them in return is food for thought. However, this he does liberally and with gusto, although many specialists and satraps of academic fiefs will probably think he is merely throwing sand into their well-oiled disciplines. Wolf Lepenies captured the essence of this intellect well when he spoke of Elias as an "outsider who is full of unfettered, naive insights".¹⁰ He is indeed an outsider, and an intrepid one at that.

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Notes

1. The second volume will be published soon, also by Urizen Books.
2. The English edition is identical with the German one of 1968, except that the new "Introduction" of 1968 is put at the end (Appendix I). In addition, the excerpts from pre-modern sources, translated in the main text, are cited again in the original in the appendix section (Appendix II).
3. Cf. the recent works by N. Poulantzas, J. O'Connor, C. Offe, R. Miliband, P. Anderson, and others.

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4. *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976, volume 2, pp. 123-311. There is some doubt in my mind as to the unifying theme of both volumes together. The analysis of civilization in the first volume and that of the monopolization of political power in the second volume are ostensibly disparate kinds of concerns. In the "Outline of a Theory of Civilization" at the end of volume 2, Elias finds a formula for integrating his materials. It reads as follows:

The peculiar stability of the psychic apparatus of self-control which is an outstanding characteristic in the behaviour of every "civilized" person is closely related to the formation of institutions monopolizing physical force and to the growing stability of central political agencies of society. It is only in connection with the rise of such stable monopolistic institutions that a formative social apparatus emerges which is able to instil a continuous, carefully regulated self-restraint in the individual beginning with childhood; it is only in connection with the former that the individual develops within himself a fairly stable, automatically operating agency of self-control. (*Ibid.*, II, p. 320)

Out of necessity — the necessity of having to forge a link between the two parts of his work — Elias proposes a general theory of evolution that seems to go far beyond what the facts (his facts) support. This generalization may fall flat on its face, depending on what the anthropologists, for example, have to say about the existence of psychic self-restraint in societies with diffuse, undifferentiated structures of authority. The simultaneous emergence of civility and the centralized state may well be a Western oddity. Quite intrepidly, Elias generalizes from his study of a single case, by summing it up in a grand formula of interdependent development which is highly Parsonian, the author's disclaimers in the "Introduction to the 1968 Edition" notwithstanding.

5. Since even psychologists, let alone ordinary-language speakers, often fail to use the term "affect" systematically and with any consistency, it may be in order to give a definition of the concept. Affect is "a feeling state of particular intensity. Sometimes an affect is characterized as a state brought about by actions almost wholly devoid of intentional control in accordance with moral and objective viewpoints". *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Freiburg: Herder Verlag, v.1, p. 28. In other words, affect is not synonymous with emotion but with impulsiveness. The German ordinary-language speaker has the advantage of being familiar with the expression "im Affekt handeln" ("acting on impulse"), which does reflect adequately the technical connotation of the term affect.
6. The definitional problems are painfully obvious for instance in Sumner, but they are no less troublesome for a more philosophically trained writer like Tönnies. See W.G. Sumner, *Folkways*, New York: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1965, ch.1; F. Tönnies, *Custom: An Essay on Social Codes*, New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.
7. See for instance *Behavior in Public Places*, New York, 1963.
8. I was not surprised to read that Elias was a student of R. Höhnigswald, the neo-Kantian at Breslau University. There is indeed a sense in which the idea of manners in *The Civilizing Process* is modelled on Kant's notion of duty, a connection which I can only hint at here.
9. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Apr. 29, 1974.
10. The title of Lepenies' eulogy for Norbert Elias, who last year was chosen to receive the first T. W. Adorno Prize. N. Elias and W. Lepenies, *Zwei Reden anlässlich der Verleihung des Theodor W. Adorno-Preises 1977*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977.

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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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IDEOLOGY AND CULTURAL THEORY

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.

MOTHERING THE CHILD

Nancy Wood

Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University of California Press, 1978. 263 pages.

The issue of whether an appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis is possible, or even desirable, has long plagued feminist theory. Even feminists favourable to this project were initially unnerved when confronted with the psychoanalytic system of thought which assigns central importance to the *unconscious* roots of conscious thought and behaviour. The view that unconscious wishes, fantasies and desires, crucially mediate the realm of conscious intentional activity, undermines our culture's steadfast faith in the unity of the individual and the rational controlling ego. This same Cartesian faith remains a veritable bastion in this period of advanced capitalism. (One need only note the eagerness with which individuals accept the claims proffered by the various therapy movements to restore personal "wholeness", in order to realize its ideological potency.) By contrast, the Freudian subject is held to enter the social world divided, fragmented — achieving an "integrated" personality, (and then only tentatively), after successfully negotiating the prolonged and complex processes which characterize psychic maturation.

Making this appropriation more difficult is the unsettling Freudian notion that sexuality features prominently in the dynamics of our unconscious mental life. Indeed, the reconciliation of the demands of sexuality with those of the social order, played out at the unconscious level, has been identified as the condition of cultural progress itself. At the level of the individual, ego formation and adult sexuality are attained within the context of the organization of bodily-based libidinal demands, and their internal representations. The thin line between the "normal" and neurotic person rests primarily upon the degree of success which has been attained in repressing drive demands and integrating them into the ego.

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Moreover, in addition to asserting that the attainment of subjectivity is itself problematical, Freudian psychoanalysis suggests a trans-historical and trans-cultural dimension to the structure and processes of mental life. The development of an autonomous, individuated ego from a drive-dominated, undifferentiating infantile ego, bespeaks an ontological transition from nature to culture, which is common to all humans, regardless of their historical or cultural specificity.

Finally, the free psychoanalysis offers for its theory does not derive from empirical observations of behaviour, or verifiable "facts", but resides in the interpretation of dreams, fantasies, neurotic symptoms and freely-associated thoughts. In this sense, the acceptance of the most basic psychoanalytic premises presupposes a certain degree of adherence to the interpretive claims of the psychoanalytic method itself.

The initial feminist response to Freudian psychoanalysis was triggered by Freud's description of psychic gender formation and, specifically, his elaboration of the notorious oedipus complex. Supported by the neo-Freudian version of psychoanalysis, early feminists charged Freud with "biologizing" features of psychic gender formation which in their view were culturally constituted. The sense of inferiority surrounding "penis envy", female lack of self-esteem and the rejection of femininity, all of which Freud observed in his female patients, could be understood as a product of the actual oppressed position of women in all spheres of Western culture.¹ Backed by neo-Freudian reformulations, in which cultural factors assumed a determining influence in mental life, feminist critics sought to relativize psychoanalytic categories, arguing that they were specific to individuals raised in the cultural context of the Western, nuclear family.² In so doing, feminists increasingly turned their efforts toward the promotion of progressive conceptions of femininity, with the aim of altering consciously-held, stereotyped sexual attitudes. These early feminist positions consolidated around the neo-Freudian view of the psychology of women, and, with the latest resurgence of the women's movement, provided the backdrop for renewed and broadened attacks on Freud.³

Given this tradition, Juliet Mitchell's defense of Freud in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, (New York: 1974) and her suggestion that Freudian psychoanalysis could be appropriated for feminist purposes, were greeted with extreme skepticism in the feminist community. Critically assessing Mitchell's analysis required tackling the psychoanalytic canon itself, and most feminists were sufficiently satisfied with earlier rejoinders to Freud. However, those who engaged in the debate around Mitchell's book were highly rewarded. Feminist theory concerning the unconscious acquisition of our cultural heritage, and specifically the internalization of gender identity, expanded and sharpened as a

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result of this confrontation with Mitchell's interpretation.⁴

In brief, Mitchell defended Freud on the basis that "Psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one." (p.xv) Perhaps of most importance for feminist analysis, Mitchell returned to Freud's theory of the pre-oedipal and oedipal phases in the structuring and reproduction of male and female personality differences.⁵ As seen by Mitchell, Freud was the first to establish and analyze the primary importance of the mother in the pre-oedipal phase for the infant's future psychic development. *Both* sexes in infancy harbour desires for the mother, as she represents their primary source of erotic gratification. However, the demands of culture require that the mother be given up as a love-object and eventually replaced by non-familial object choices.

The oedipus complex facilitates this transformation by forcing upon the child the recognition that neither sex is sufficiently "equipped" to possess the mother. According to Mitchell, Freud not only stresses that both sexes must give up the pre-oedipal desire for the mother, he also offers an accurate description of the process of psychic resolution undergone by each sex in patriarchal society. The girl undergoes a struggle, sparked by the psychic registration of the fact of anatomical distinction between the sexes, which eventually forces her to recognize the shared "castrated" status of all females. Realizing that she has no physical basis for possessing her mother, the girl renounces her incestuous wish while simultaneously blaming her mother for not endowing her with the essential organ. At this point, she transfers her object love to her father, harbouring the (unconscious) hope of being compensated for her "lack" by receiving a baby from him (symbolically, baby = penis).⁶

The boy, by contrast, resolves his incestuous desire by temporarily ceding to the father's superior position and control over the beloved mother, with the expectation of a similar future reward. The corollary of this is that he also gives up his maternal emulation, replacing it with identification with the father and the social laws he embodies.

Mitchell notes Freud's contention that the girl's resolution of the oedipus complex is particularly difficult because the motive for the renunciation of pre-oedipal and oedipal wishes differs for each sex. The boy dissolves his oedipal complex under a felt threat of castration from the father, but in so doing, preserves his physical integrity, sexual orientation and "active" disposition. The girl is not so fortunate. She must not only accept the *fact* of castration (*i.e.*, she does not possess a penis and never will), but forever repudiate her mother as love object, and thus fundamentally shift her sexual orientation. Her oedipal love for the father is of relatively little psychic significance in comparison with the trauma of giving up her intense, pre-oedipal attachment.

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When the female child perceives her fate as the inevitable consequence of the feminine condition, her mother, and the status of all females, suffer severe dépreciation.

Mitchell maintains that Freud's account of the oedipal process suggests universal features of the infantile experience and the achievement of the nature/culture transition (*i.e.*, the necessity of renouncing incestuous desires toward parents in the interests of sociality). Moreover, Freudian theory also contains an immanent critique of patriarchal gender relations. For only in a culture which insists that infantile sexuality be resolved through strict heterosexual object choice, and submission to male authority, does the renunciation of female "activity" and male "passivity" and the repudiation of femininity by both sexes, attain such psychic prominence. Thus, Freud's infant eventually internalizes representations of libidinally-cathected objects who are themselves social agents of patriarchy. Mitchell praises Freudian theory for assuming the modest task of analysing *how* this process unfolds.

Insofar as it locates the unconscious foundations of gender differences and points to the impossibility of explaining these discrepancies by the socialization process alone, Mitchell's interpretation of Freud is invaluable for feminists. At the same time, she insists upon the socially-specific basis which informs the process of gender formation, thereby making such a deeply-rooted phenomenon subject to criticism and historical transformation.

But her overall case is by no means airtight. Her staunch defense of Freud as a "closet" critic of patriarchy remains fundamentally unconvincing. As one critic has observed: "While 'society' in the form of the family, always plays the decisive role in Freud's case studies, it is never analyzed in its social or historical dimension, but only through its libidinal relationships."⁷ In addition, despite many misguided or misinformed criticisms that feminists have made of Freudian psychoanalysis, it does not seem to me that Freud can be exonerated of the charge of ignoring the crucial influence of historically-evolving patriarchal gender relations on unconscious gender acquisition. Such a critique does reveal Freud's own penchant for regarding society as static and primarily psychically-determined. On the other hand, to the extent that psychoanalysis does speak to the problem of sexual oppression, feminist theory must find a way to appropriate psychoanalytic theory without falling prey to the trap of neo-Freudian revisionism.

At this point the explanatory power of Freud's own interpretation resurfaces. As mentioned earlier, Freud constructed his theories on the basis of his interpretation of fantasies, dreams, symptoms and free associations of his male and female patients. It seems quite possible to posit *other* feminist interpretations of male/female gender acquisition without sacrificing the insights gleaned from this psychoanalytic method of inquiry. It is in terms of this

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possibility that Nancy Chodorow's book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, addresses some of the inadequacies of Freud's (and Mitchell's) account of psycho-sexual development.

Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour. (p. 3) Following in the footsteps of recent feminist anthropology,⁸ Chodorow traces the origins of this division by utilizing the concept of the "social organization of gender" — a process in which kinship and family arrangements confer cultural and social order onto sexuality, procreation and gender identity. In "primitive" society, women's biological claims to reproduction and their assumption of child care responsibilities assured their primary location in the domestic realm and created the basis for the structural differentiation of the domestic and the "public" spheres. (p. 10) To the extent that social and political institutions and social alliances appeared to distance humanity from its "natural" and biological origins, "public" life, (the primary social location of men) became increasingly separated from, and elevated above, domestic activity. Whatever function the "public"/domestic distinction has served historically, it is nonetheless an ideological construct which serves to legitimate continued relations of domination between the sexes. To definitively undermine the logic which naturalizes and universalizes women's subordinate position on biological grounds, Chodorow neatly separates the biological requisites of procreation from the requirements of *social* reproduction, thereby exposing the fundamentally "public" nature of women's mothering.

Despite the changing character of many family responsibilities with the rise of capitalism and industrialization, and the concomitant separation of home and workplace, "mothering" remains central to the reproduction of the social existence of human beings. Although the responsibility for schooling and child care now tends to be usurped by non-familial institutions, there has been an intensified need for the emotional and psychological sustenance which the "mothering" role provides. The fact that this role has been filled almost exclusively by women, and has been largely executed within the domestic sphere, suggest that the reproduction of mothering is a "central and constituting element in the social organization and the reproduction of gender". (p. 7)

However, for the more complicated task of laying the basis for the supersession of *exclusively* female mothering, Chodorow turns to psychoanalytic insights to locate the unconscious base of this pattern of social reproduction. The role of mothering assumes a capacity for this task, and Chodorow believes this capacity is acquired specifically by females in the course of psycho-sexual development. She summons the psychoanalytic theory of personality formation in order to establish the links between the structural division of labour in the family and its continued reproduction by the men and women who undergo

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their psycho-sexual development and attain their gender identity within this context. In her own cogent account: "The sexual and familial division of labour in which women mother and are more involved in interpersonal, affective relationships than men produces in daughters and sons a division of psychological capacities which leads them to reproduce this sexual and familial division of labour." (p. 7)

Like Mitchell's Freud, Chodorow sees the primary function of the patriarchal family to be its transformation of the bisexual, polymorphously perverse infant into a genitally heterosexual, monogamous adult. However, Chodorow does take issue with the manner in which this sexuality is harnessed. The basis of Freud's theory was that psychic development occurred as the various stages of infantile sexuality unfolded and were organized by the developing ego. Chodorow prefers the perspective of object-relations theorists,⁹ who agree with Freud's assessment of the importance of the gradual organization of sexuality, but emphasize the *inter-subjective* dimension of this development. Libidinal drives are "object-seeking". Thus, the organization of sexuality is played out primarily in relation to significant figures in the infant's social relations. It is not simply a question of these figures providing the context in which libidinal organization can take place. The motive behind the experience, manipulation and fixation on bodily zones, is always rooted in the infant's *relational* needs. Against the Freudian stress on libidinally-induced psycho-sexual development, Chodorow argues: "Zones ... do not become eroticized through a maturational unfolding. They become libidinated because they become for the growing child vehicles for attaining personal contact ... [infants] manipulate and transform drives in the course of attaining and retaining relationships." (p. 48)

This orientation shifts the grounds of the pre-oedipal and oedipal conflict slightly, but significantly. It will be recalled that Freud located the origins of pre-oedipal love in the erotic gratification which the mother represents to the child. In the object-relations scheme, the same infantile experience is primarily a relational one — a concern with a sense of "self-in-relationship" — and only secondarily a search for drive gratification through sexual object choice. The quality of early parental relationships is still of primordial importance, but not for the reasons suggested by Freud. This explains why, in Chodorow's formulation, the *asymmetrical* organization of parenting assumes profound psychic, as well as social, proportions.

The early period in which an infant embarks on the precarious road to autonomy and individuation occurs almost exclusively in relation to the mother. This pre-oedipal phase, which is of central importance to Freud, is monumentally so in Chodorow's analysis. For even as the child experiences the mother as primary love-object, and seeks to retain the gratification found in union with her, the attainment of personal independence and autonomy

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depends upon the child's recognition of the mother's separate existence. The confrontation with maternal omnipotence explains the intense ambivalence which characterizes the pre-oedipal phase. The mother represents the promise of total gratification *and* the threat of psychic annihilation if the child's desires are too often indulged. The reaction of each sex to this dilemma constitutes the crux of sexual differentiation. Moreover, this reaction has already been primed by patriarchal norms which the mother herself has internalized.

Chodorow points to the different nature of attachment each sex has to the mother. In the mother/daughter relationship, there tends to be a strong element of over-identification — an inability to completely accord the other a separate status. "Primary identification and symbiosis with daughters tend to be stronger and cathexis of daughters is more likely to retain and emphasize narcissistic elements, that is, to be based on experiencing a daughter as an extension or double of the mother herself, with cathexis of the daughter as a sexual other remaining a weaker, less significant theme" (p. 109). By contrast, the self/other distinction is more easily made in the mother/son relationship, since male over-valuation in patriarchal society serves to emphasize and reinforce the fact of sexual difference.

Probing this logic further, Chodorow locates the oedipal phase as that stage at which the infant must initiate the break away from primary love and identification in the face of perceived maternal omnipotence. She offers here a unique interpretation of "penis envy" which brilliantly illustrates this theme: "A girl wants it [the penis] for the powers which it symbolizes and the freedom it promises from her previous sense of dependence, and not because it is inherently and obviously better to be masculine." (p. 123) To the girl, the penis symbolizes the requisite of a more easily-obtained autonomy — an object needed to defend herself against the yearnings of symbiotic union with the mother. In this instance, the oedipal turn to the father offers one solution to the girl's inner ego crisis prompted by this problematical relational stance to her mother. Female oedipal love may not stem from simple hostility to the mother, as Freud suggested, but from the more complex process of establishing a self/other distinction in light of intense primary love. Taken in concert with the female child's recognition that her mother's preferred love object is phallically-endowed, she is further induced to want the organ that promises this access. Her acceptance of castration, however, is the only path open to her in a world of exclusive heterosexual partnering. In sum, Chodorow emphasizes that the oedipal phase is embedded in, and constantly informed by, psychic *and* social pre-oedipal object relations. Because of its intensity, love for the mother continues to feature prominently for females, especially in subsequent emotional relationships with women.

The male child does not slip through the web of maternal love so adroitly.

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Chodorow counters Freud's account of the relatively straightforward resolution of male oedipal love. The supersession of mother/infant unity must be even more anxiety-arousing for the boy whose masculine identity — hastened by the oedipal phase — rests on a more complete obliteration of his early identification with the mother. In adult life, he may safely retain the heterosexual orientation of his earliest relationship, but must constantly avert the danger of succumbing to its emotional consequences. The devaluation of women and continued assertion of male superiority might be seen as the (unconscious) refusal to acknowledge the maternal identification, and the presence of feminine elements deeply lodged in the male psyche. Consequently, masculine autonomy is a more tenuous state than appearances would lead us to believe.

Chodorow provides us with one of the most developed theoretical perspectives to date with which to further tackle the intriguing dialectic of inner and outer worlds. However, the psychoanalytic perspective she proposes that feminists adopt for this task must be examined more rigorously. As her analysis reveals, object-relations theory and the libidinally-based orientation of Freudian thought are not mutually exclusive. However, points of contention do exist, and because these are significant for psychoanalytic theory in general, and for feminist analysis in particular, it is important to elaborate them. For example, it could be argued that as long as libidinal urges provide the main impetus for the search for love objects, the child of Freudian theory will take a relatively "utilitarian" approach to subjective interaction. Even though sexual drives are operative in the exchange, the child of Chodorow's analysis (and of object-relations theory) seeks, above all, "the connection to the object as another subjective being".¹⁰ Such an approach provides a crucial link between psycho-sexual development and the *quality* of social interaction, noticeably absent from Freudian theory.

The consonance of the object-relations theory of personality formation with the feminist attack on the current familial division of labour, renders it even more appealing. For instance, the feminist demand that men participate in the care and nurturing of children might, among other positive effects, anticipate a new setting for the staging of oedipal conflict. The attachment to familial love objects presumably will still feature prominently in infantile psychic experience. However, with a continued struggle for qualitatively better familial relationships (which demands experimentation with non-traditional forms of family life), oedipal resolution might be fostered under conditions more amenable to sexual equality.

The continuing danger is that in further specifying the conditions which *culturally mediate* the process of psycho-sexual development, feminist theory will tumble into the neo-Freudian trap of positing personality formation as entirely culturally constituted. *The Reproduction of Mothering* stands as proof

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that negotiating this treacherous course is indeed within our grasp.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood", *Feminine Psychology*, New York: 1967; Clara Thompson, "Cultural Pressures in the Psychology of Women", reprinted in Jean Baker Miller, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Women*, New York: 1973; Alfred Adler, "Sex", reprinted in Miller, *op. cit.* For the relationship between neo-Freudianism and the rise of feminism see "Culture and Personality", in Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World*, New York: 1977, and "Freud, the Freudians and the Psychology of Women", in Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, New York: 1974.
2. Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, New York: 1937.
3. See, for example, Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York: 1963; Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes* London: 1970; Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunich*, Paladin: 1971; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, New York: 1970; Naomi Weistein, "'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female", reprinted in Robjn Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful*, New York: 1970. As Juliet Mitchell points out, Shulamith Firestone's, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York: 1970, offers the most favourable commentary on Freud but advises that Freud's ideas be understood as "metaphors" for actual power relations in the family. In Firestone's scheme, there is no appreciation of the unconscious *representations* of the outer world.
4. For a sampling of this lively debate, see the following: Sherry Ortner, "Oedipal Father, Mother's Brother, and the Penis, A Review of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 2, #2/3; Elizabeth Long, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism", (review), *Telos*, #20, Summer 1974; Christopher Lasch, "Freud and Women", *New York Review of Books*, October 3, 1974; Mark Poster, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism", (review), *Telos*, #21, Fall 1974; Eli Zaretsky, "Male Supremacy and the Unconscious", *Socialist Revolution*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3-4, January, 1975; Richard Wollheim, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism", (review), *New Left Review*, #93; Eli Zaretsky, Nancy Chodorow, (reply to Wollheim), *New Left Review*, #96; Lacan Study Group, (reply to Wollheim), *New Left Review*, #97; Gad Horowitz, "The renunciation of bisexuality", in *Repression, Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich and Marcuse*, University of Toronto Press, 1977.
5. Mitchell's book not only offers a new way of "reading" Freud, she also formulates a political prognosis that is highly dubious and which the above reviews address critically. It is often argued with respect to Mitchell, that it is her uncritical reliance on structuralism which makes the theory of permanent psychological structures, and thus "eternal patriarchy" so palatable. For an examination of Mitchell's structuralism, see Zaretsky, "Male Supremacy and the Unconscious", *op. cit.*, and Ortner, "Oedipal Father, Mother's Brother, and the Penis", *op. cit.*
6. "Feces, penis, and baby are closely associated in unconscious thought, not only because they are physical extensions of oneself but because they represent gifts from the child to its parents. It was this kind of evidence, and more generally the connection between eroticism and ex-

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crement — not some naive 'biological determinism' — that Freud had in mind when he made his famous remark that 'anatomy is destiny'." Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World*, *op. cit.*, p. 203 (f. 46).

7. Eli Zaretsky, "Male Supremacy and the Unconscious", *op. cit.*, p. 30.
8. See Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture and Society*, Stanford: 1974, for a collection representing the developing theory of feminist anthropology. Also, Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", pp. 157-210, in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York: 1975.
9. Chodorow acknowledges her debt to the following object-relations theorists: Alice Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother", and 1954, *The Early Years of Life: A Psychoanalytic Study*; Michael Balint, 1965, *Primary Love and Psychoanalytic Technique*, and 1968, *The Basic Fault: Therapeutic Aspects of Regression*; Fairbairn, 1952, *An Object-Relations Theory*; Guntrip, 1961, *Personality Structure* and 1971, *Psychoanalytic Theory, Therapy, and the Self*; Winnicott, 1958, *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, 1965, *The Maturation Processes*, and 1971, *Playing and Reality*; Roy Schafer, 1968, *Aspects of Internalization*, and Hans Loewald, 1962, "Internalization, Separation", and 1973, "On Internalization".
10. Jessica Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology", *Telos* #32, Summer 1977, p. 47. Benjamin offers a very insightful and useful critique of the Frankfurt School appropriation of psychoanalysis from the object-relations perspective.

ON LIBERTY'S LEGACY

Patricia Hughes

Gertrude Himmelfarb, *On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974, pp. xxiii, 345.

Gertrude Himmelfarb writes that as she began to study *On Liberty* in depth, she also began to realise that the message contained therein differed from that appearing in most of Mill's other works; it was necessary, she felt, to face the question, "Why did John Stuart Mill write *On Liberty*?" Himmelfarb's book offers a unique thesis in answer to that question; ironically, however, her book raises its own version of the query which lay behind its inception: "Why did Gertrude Himmelfarb really write *On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill*?" For although part of the book is comprised of scholarly analysis (although, I submit, in the wrong direction), part of it can only be considered propaganda. *On Liberty and Liberalism* is a confused mixture of social history, gossip, interpersonal analysis and a condemnation of contemporary American liberalism.

Himmelfarb begins her book by discussing each of the chapters in *On Liberty*, comparing the thought in them to ideas presented in Mill's other works; she comes to the conclusion that *On Liberty* is an anomaly among the *corpus* of Mill's writings, that the "one very simple principle" that *On Liberty* strives to support is inconsistent in content and style with the rest of Mill's work. Surely it is evident that the existence of *On Liberty* requires special explanation.

To this end, Himmelfarb proposes several reasons why Mill might have written the book and then explains why none of them are satisfactory. What she finally argues is that Mill wrote *On Liberty* at the behest of Harriet Taylor as "the generalized statement, the theoretical formulation" of the argument made primarily in *The Subjection of Women*, namely the need for greater equality and freedom for women. *The Subjection of Women*, we are told, is the only work written by Mill which is compatible with the "simple principle"

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expressed in *On Liberty* and that "Mill's essays on women present striking parallels to the argument of *On Liberty* ... [T]hese are the only writings by Mill which do have a real affinity with *On Liberty*, indeed, which do not actually conflict with it."

First, it must be conceded that this is a novel idea and to some extent one that could be supported. There is no doubt at all that Mill was extremely concerned about the status of women in his society; he proved that concern not only in his writings but also in his actions as a member of the London National Society for Woman Suffrage and of the House of Commons and in his involvement in the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869 which permitted the authorities to compel any woman suspected of being a prostitute to submit to a medical examination — the law in this case "has the genuine characteristics of tyranny," he wrote. Earlier in his life, his support of female suffrage represented one of the few areas of open disagreement with his father, James Mill. Thus we would expect that he would want to contribute a major work to the debate on the topic.

Nor can we easily discount the influence of Harriet Taylor; Himmelfarb herself has shown the extent of that influence in her excellent introduction to *Essays on Politics and Culture: John Stuart Mill*. There she ably substantiated her contention that there were "two Mills", the one manifest before Mill met Harriet Taylor and after her death and the other manifest during the period of her influence, the latter being more radical than the former. In *On Liberty and Liberalism*, Himmelfarb carries this view to an extreme conclusion — the style of *On Liberty* is that of Harriet Taylor who was inclined to perceive issues in simple, clearcut terms, unlike Mill who had a greater capacity to grasp the complexities of an issue. It was at Taylor's urging that Mill devoted *On Liberty* to the statement of a theory which would in a sense "back up" the writings on women.

There is something to be said for Himmelfarb's thesis, but there is more to be said against it. We can cite Himmelfarb's own statements to substantiate this claim. She writes that the problem with which *On Liberty* was concerned was one of the "greatest magnitude". Yet she describes the issue of women's rights as "relatively minor". It might seem strange, she says, to try to explain *On Liberty* in relation to Mill's essays on women, for "*On Liberty* was too momentous an event to be understood, however partially, in terms of the relatively minor subject of women." But we have seen that, "momentous events ... can indeed have the trivial causes." In any case, Himmelfarb does admit that the issue of women has lately been taken "more seriously" and that "we can appreciate, as Mill's generation could not, the potency of the idea of women's liberation..." Of course, Mill did see the issue of women's rights as a question of the "greatest magnitude" and in this sense Himmelfarb's thesis

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might seem, despite her own efforts to minimize the importance of women's rights, to be substantiated by Mill's own emphasis on the issue. Nevertheless, we must ask why Mill's own concern for the problem of social tyranny, even if not a concern shared by many of his contemporaries, was not sufficient cause for *On Liberty*.

More significant and detrimental to Himmelfarb's thesis is the fact that Mill's writings on women are not as compatible with *On Liberty* as Himmelfarb would have us believe but are often antagonistic to the argument presented there. We can summarize the message of *On Liberty* by referring to Mill's definition of freedom. "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it." Among the kinds of rights included in liberty, is that, "of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like", so long as we do not harm others. In *On Liberty*, Mill made it clear that a most important element defining "human being" is that of choice: "The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feelings, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice ... It is possible that [an individual] might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way without [exercising these faculties]. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being?" Of course Mill deplored the influence of custom since it impedes progress and limits the scope of activity determined by the individual himself or herself. We can say, then, that the central doctrine of *On Liberty* is that everyone should be able to plan his or her life according to his/her own interest, independent of custom or any other form of social pressure and subject only to the limitation that one's actions should not be harmful to other people.

Himmelfarb argues that this freedom is what Mill is claiming for women in *The Subjection of Women*, that women should enjoy greater liberty to determine and pursue their own interests, that they, "should not be subjected to restrictions that men no longer tolerated for themselves. They should not be consigned to a realm that others deemed appropriate to them. One sex could no more determine the proper limits of the other than any one individual could make that determination for another individual." And custom stands most in the way of this extension of liberty. "The most formidable obstacle to the liberation of women, Mill found, was the weight of received opinion and custom which had so long relegated women to a subordinate position. It was this body of opinion and custom that had first to be refuted."

One cannot deny that Mill said this sort of thing; he said it very clearly, not only in *The Subjection of Women* and other essays on women but also in passing references to women in other works such as *Principles of Political Economy*. Thus Himmelfarb's thesis does have some truth to it; but one could

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also find passages about the rights of workers and about their need to become more independent through co-operatives, for example, which would just as well conform to the principles established in *On Liberty*. Yet — and this is the point which renders Himmelfarb's thesis void — in both cases one can also find statements which seriously contradict Mill's views as defined in *On Liberty*. Mill did try to tell women what was in their best interests and he conceded the "validity" of that which custom had determined to be the correct division of labour in the family. Himmelfarb does not deal with this other side of Mill's writings on women; she selects as evidence only those passages which agree with her thesis. This is fair enough; she naturally wants to make the strongest case possible. The problem is that she does not attempt to refute these other statements, even to "explain them away"; they simply do not seem to exist for her. In reality, the statements which are consistent with *On Liberty* become the exception to the dominant views held by Mill in regard to women's place in the public and private spheres.

The assertions which Mill did indeed make about the need for greater freedom of choice for women, for the right to enter any occupation they wished, to equal access to the educational system and so on must be placed side by side with statements which effectively deny the impact the achievement of these rights would have. In Mill's "Essay on Marriage and Divorce", written in 1832, he wrote, "It does not follow that a woman should *actually* support herself because she should be *capable* of doing so: in the natural course of events she will not." This view is echoed in *The Subjection of Women*, published in 1869. "The *power* of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, if she has not independent property. But if marriage were an equal contract, ... it would not be necessary for her protection, that during marriage she should make this particular use of her faculties."

Similarly, in both works he argued that women should "*beautify life*" and that the most desirable and functional division of labour between husband and wife (when the family depends on earnings rather than on property) is "[t]he common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure." And we find similar statements in other works. In *Principles of Political Economy*, for example, he wrote (in accordance with Himmelfarb's thesis) that, "even when no more is earned by the labour of a man and a woman than would have been earned by the man alone, the advantage to the woman of not depending on a master for subsistence may be more than an equivalent." This rather positive statement is followed immediately, however, by a qualification (added only after Harriet Mill's death) that, "[i]t cannot ... be considered desirable as a *permanent* element in the condition of a labouring class, that the mother of the family (the case of a single woman is totally different) should be under the necessity of

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working for subsistence'

Mill thought he knew what was good for women and what they wanted themselves, caring for a family "generally suffices" as a "worthy outlet for the active faculties" as far as women are concerned. He was worried that married women would be overburdened if they worked outside the home, since they would still have their household tasks to perform; therefore, only exceptional women should obtain outside employment, assuming that they make provision for their usual responsibilities to be fulfilled.

Himmelfarb points to evidence in another essay which does indeed contradict these statements limiting women's scope of activity; in "The Enfranchisement of Women", the author wrote a statement similar to that which appeared in the *Political Economy*, "how infinitely preferable is it that part of the income should be of the woman's earning, even if the aggregate sum were but little increased by it, rather than that she should be compelled to stand aside in order than men may be the sole earners, and the sole dispensers of what is earned." This comment is certainly more in keeping with Himmelfarb's thesis than are the statements quoted above from Mill's "Essay on Marriage and Divorce" and *The Subjection of Women*. There is probably good reason for the different attitude expressed in the "Enfranchisement" essay in regard to women and the public sphere, for it is likely that Mill did not write it but that Harriet Taylor did. Alice Rossi in her *Essays on Sex Equality* argued persuasively that "The Enfranchisement of Women" expressed sentiments similar to those expressed in Harriet Taylor's "Essay on Marriage and Divorce", also written in 1832, while there are obvious discrepancies between that essay and Mill's writings on women.

Himmelfarb mentions Rossi's argument but does not accept it and she responds directly to it only briefly. She depends mainly on evidence in letters and other works to prove her contention that Mill wrote the article. The comments in "The Enfranchisement of Women" are more consistent with the tone of *On Liberty* than are other writings on women and it would be to Himmelfarb's advantage to be able to show that Mill did have a more positive view of women's employment outside the home than was apparent in *The Subjection* and other writings. The evidence does not offer strong support for either view; an internal analysis, however, does tend towards the view that Harriet Taylor was the author.

On the whole it is hard to accept Himmelfarb's thesis. It is hard to see why *On Liberty's* existence needs to be explained in terms other than those stated by Mill himself. Himmelfarb herself has shown — contrary to her intentions — the significance of the book at the time of its publication; yet she has misinterpreted — or omitted from consideration — important aspects of Mill's writings on women in order to support what she admits is an unusual thesis

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regarding Mill's intent in writing *On Liberty*. All this suggests that she herself had something else in mind when she wrote *On Liberty and Liberalism*.

That "something else" seems to be her castigation of contemporary American liberalism and to a lesser extent, a specific portion of that liberalism, the women's movement. Ostensibly, in the last chapter of the book, she discusses the contemporary inheritance of the doctrine enunciated in *On Liberty*; yet in some ways, this section of the book seems to be as anomalous within the book itself as she claims *On Liberty* is within the body of Mill's writings.

The current use of the term "liberty" has been carried so far, she argues, that it is in danger of losing credibility. No doubt some of what Himmelfarb says is true; there is a tendency to political or philosophical relativism which may undermine a cohesive, effective set of values upon which to base the society and upon which the individuals comprising that society can base their own lives. She has a valid point when she criticizes those "liberals" who claim that "the 'so-called' democracies are no better than dictatorships, ... that a lack of racial equality is equivalent to genocide, ... that any pressure for social conformity is as much a violation of the self as the most egregious act of a tyrant". To equate these concepts and situations is to deprive both words and actions of meaning, and consequently, to undermine solid criticism of what are true injustices in themselves.

But she misses the point when she talks about censorship. She obviously feels that "permissiveness" is too much so, that some "quality control" is necessary. Liberals, she believes, do not understand this and thus are contradictory in their demands, wanting government intervention in some areas but not in others. "While most liberals deny the corrupting or depraving effect of a bad book, they have no doubt of the corrupting or depraving effects — spiritually as well as physically — of slums and bad housing." The point is that one chooses one's books, films and magazines, while one does not normally choose to live in a slum. Government intervention in the case of censorship limits freedom but intervention to improve living conditions extends freedom. Provision of the basic necessities at a minimum standard promotes freedom not only because it allows one to pursue the more "luxurious" activities of self-development but also because it makes a crucial statement about the equal value of human beings.

Similarly, she misconstrues some of the aims and language of the women's movement. She decries its commitment to equality, "and a particular kind of equality at that, not so much the equality of opportunity as the equality of achievement, of results." To her, the women's movement "focuses attention on numbers ... on the assumption that this is the visible test of equality"; this is, she says, "a far cry from Mill's insistence upon free choice and free com-

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petition" and "would seem to encourage a revival of precisely the kind of regulation which he deplored, the determination in advance of the 'proper spheres' of men and women."

This reference suggests a misunderstanding both of Mill and of the women's movement. On the one hand, Mill did deplore this predetermination, but on the other, as we have seen, he was quite happy to continue it, to foster it. As far as the women's movement is concerned, numbers provide a rough and indirect — and thus unsatisfactory yet necessary — measurement of the extent to which women are able to make use of what is claimed to be equality of opportunity; far from predetermining "proper spheres", the movement uses numbers as a way of estimating the distance travelled from that predetermination. Mill limited the travel to single women; he insisted that women make a choice between marriage and a career outside the home.

It is unfortunate that Himmelfarb did not try to respond to these more negative comments by Mill; it is equally unfortunate that her argument to some extent depends on the omission of portions of quotations which do not conform to the point she is trying to establish. For example, in her discussion of the discrepancies between *On Liberty* and other works, she remarks that, "the point of greatest divergence from *On Liberty*", as far as the *Political Economy* was concerned, was Mill's treatment of socialism and communism. During this discussion, she writes that, "[w]here he had originally argued that the present system for all its faults was better than any of its alternatives, the weight of the argument in the later editions [of the *Political Economy*] shifted to the point where the alternative systems, for all their faults, were better than the present one"; to substantiate her point, she quotes Mill:

If, therefore, the choice were to be made between Communism with all its changes, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; ... if this or Communism were the alternatives, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism, would be but as dust in the balance.

This quotation does seem to substantiate Himmelfarb's point, but that is because she has neglected to include all of the quotation. The fact is that Mill did not believe the struggle to be between "this" and Communism, but rather between private property at its best and Communism at its best, a comparison which has not yet been possible because private property, "has never yet had a fair trial in any country; ..." With universal education and population control,

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there would be no poverty, "even under the present social conditions." One might question why Himmelfarb did not include an important part of the above passage; the answer might lie in the fact that the conclusion one would reach about Mill's views on socialism from this passage and similar ones, has serious implications for her attempt to answer the question, "why did Mill write *On Liberty*?"

Gertrude Himmelfarb is right in her contention that there are two Mills: there is the Mill of *On Liberty* who argues passionately for individuality, freedom, and equality and there is the Mill of *The Political Economy* who is reluctant to renounce private property and capitalist market relations. Both Mills appear in *The Subjection of Women* and in most of his works, including the *Liberty* and *Political Economy*. *The Subjection* is not as close to *On Liberty* as Himmelfarb claims it is and the other works are not as distant from it.

Himmelfarb's whole thesis rests on a false premise, that *On Liberty* is an anomaly — it is not. Most of Mill's other works contain some references to equality and freedom while at the same time denying them. *On Liberty* is merely the best expression of one of the Mills. Why did Mill write *On Liberty*? He wrote it because part of him firmly believed in greater equality and freedom; yet another part of him was afraid of both because he was afraid they would endanger private property. Women needed to stay at home because their entrance into the labour market would overburden it and because the family was necessary to the continuance of the moderate wealth which Mill saw as desirable. Quite simply, Mill was a liberal-democrat: *On Liberty* represented one part of the conflict that entails. In that, it was hardly an anomaly, it was an integral part of the perspective Mill held. It does not provide the conflict; rather it is a necessary expression of it.

Gertrude Himmelfarb has devised a thesis which she tries to support through arguments based on omission of important sections of *The Subjection of Women*, on an insistence that Mill wrote "The Enfranchisement of Women" when its authorship is in doubt, and the assumption that *On Liberty* is so different from the rest of Mill's writings that it requires an elaborately devised explanation for its appearance. But a more careful analysis of the works in question show that her thesis cannot be supported and raises the thought that Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote *On Liberty and Liberalism* in order to denounce the legacy of *On Liberty*.

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Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgement to Calculation*, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1976, pp. 300.

Joseph Weizenbaum is the author of ELIZA, a computer program that simulates the role of a Rogerian therapist in a patient's initial interview. This project was directed toward solving some problems in computer understanding of natural language. While he viewed ELIZA as a solution to a limited problem and argued that no general solution was possible due to the contextual embeddedness of everyday discourse, his results were widely interpreted as embodying just such a general solution. Further, his choice of non-directive therapy to demonstrate the technique aimed to avoid the necessity of building a data base of real-world knowledge; in other words, context and relevant knowledge would be provided by the patient. This application of his ELIZA program was hailed as laying the foundation for providing efficient electronic psychotherapy to a much larger group of patients, unhampered by a scarcity of professionals. Weizenbaum was astounded. Uncovering the source of the power of the computer in contemporary life became necessary in order to explicate his own understanding of his work and the forces behind its distortion — a search that has culminated in this book. While it is nominally about computers it is also a chronicle of self-understanding, a journey by someone working within one of the prophetic oracles of a technical civilization — M.I.T.

Computer Power and Human Reason probes the limitations of instrumental modes of activity and thought through a clear comprehension of their presuppositions and procedure. In such an inquiry related aspects of a problem which initially seemed identical require distinction. For example, the utilization of machines in social action does not imply, of itself, that society be conceived of as a machine. The recognition that thought makes use of techniques does not require viewing all of thought as technical. Consciousness of the structure of the models that one is using makes it possible to delineate their applicability and criticize their false universalization. Consequently, once

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one has penetrated the ideological generalization of mechanical methods it becomes apparent that the process whereby a model or metaphor becomes determinative for performing or understanding an activity is not attributable to the metaphor itself. It is a scientific ideology that makes all uses of the mechanical metaphor seem equivalent.

But the point is precisely that the pervasion — we might say perversion — of everyday thought by the computer metaphor has turned every problem into a technical problem to which the methods discussed here are thought to be appropriate.

Weizenbaum therefore finds it necessary to approach his problem in a multi-layered manner. The book moves from a discussion of tools to a consideration of reason. The transition between these rests on the special nature of the computer and its symbolic power. I will discuss the two major concerns separately and return later to the problem of their connection.

Tools are means whereby human purposes can be pursued more effectively than with unaided bodily resources. However, in their functioning within an organized social framework, tools are not merely means. Decisions to further selected means over others transform the human world and thereby those who inhabit it. Consequently, the integration of individual tools into a social complex involves a symbolic and perceptual construction of the world.² The organization of this world is such that additional possibilities are suggested for the utilization of a tool; a correlative result is that development of certain tools limits alternative possibilities for social action.³ As well as functioning symbolically, tools are a "language of social action."⁴ They permit and encourage social action while simultaneously discouraging or making impossible incompatible alternatives.

Computers are highly developed tools. Basically they are information processing machines which transfer one state of the machine into another state by means of rules. An "effective procedure" is a set of rules which, when followed, guarantee that the successive states of the computer conform to the desired process. In order to be comprehensible to the computer, linguistic instructions must carry within themselves all information. They cannot rely on pre-understood and assumed contexts and relevances to make the program understood. Computers work with a formal language that uses only two symbols. The transformation rules by which one expression in a language can be transformed into another can be written in the language as well as the ex-

pressions themselves. Therefore the machine which uses this language embodies not only a set of expressions but also rules for interpreting the expressions and thereby following the desired procedures. This means that a procedure can be communicated to a machine and is at the same time a set of instructions for carrying-out the procedure. "A theory written in the form of a computer program is thus both a theory and, when placed on a computer and run, a model to which the theory applies." Consequently, a computer program requires no reference to a real-world context for its interpretation and interpretation is equivalent to the carrying-out of a procedure. It is the completed idea of a tool, a self-enclosed machine which embodies the orders it executes.

In this light one can see the necessity for proceeding to a discussion of theory and reason — the computer embodies a concept of reason. Weizenbaum's persistent search for the origin of the displacement of human capacities by artificial intelligence has taken him from a consideration of tools to the mode of reason they employ. In the sophisticated form of the computer the effects of tools on human life take on a new urgency. These effects are ultimately dependent on the human purposes externalized in tools which have developed to this crucial point. I will turn to the discussion of reason before returning to this problem.

Computer understanding of natural language is a central problem for artificial intelligence since it raises the question of the extent to which human discourse can be comprehended as effective procedures. Computer languages are functional in the sense that they consist of directives for processing data; data is not embodied in the language but is supplied separately. Thus, the context of the problem that is written as a computer program is excluded by the computer. Data is processed by invariant formal rules that are taken to be applicable to the data but are contained within it.

Weizenbaum correctly asserts that the fundamental issue is the applicability of formalized structures to human experience'. However, this point could be developed in more detail to become sufficiently convincing. A paradigmatic case of formalizing is in numbers such as when we consider "three" apples without respect to their colour, size or taste. This type of formalizing is most complete in algebra in which one even abstracts from the specific number to any specifiable (but not specified) number. On the other hand, there are syntactic rules of language which provide the framework within which meaningful assertions can be made. The developed form of this type is formal logic in which structures of inference of predicated variables are elaborated for application to any desired material. The connection of these two types of formalizing, mathematics and logic, is not readily apparent. Yet it is needed for the critique of formal reason to have sufficient generality. Their relationship has been explicated by Edmund Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.

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There it is made clear that formal ontology (mathematics) is a science of the objects predicated in judging; logic refers to the pure form of judging — predication is itself formalized. Thereby the nature of formalizing, in which, “each individual must be emptied to become anything whatever”,⁶ can be isolated and the essential similarity of the mathematical and syntactic cases demonstrated. (Had Weizenbaum clarified this point the connection between his account of the computer and his critique of quantification and statistics in the social sciences would have been clearer.) Formalizing designates its objects apart from content; however, in its application formal reason must be brought to bear upon a non-formal content. Thus when your teacher claimed that you couldn’t add apples and oranges because they “just aren’t the same” non-formal considerations had to be introduced to determine the applicability of formal techniques. If they were designated as “pieces of fruit” they could indeed be added. Formalizing rests on “presuppositions of sense” (Husserl) in which objects are taken to be capable of being judged about in a single meaningful judgement — but they cannot formally be shown to be so.

The fact that an advanced work in modern philosophy can be brought to Weizenbaum’s argument says a great deal for his penetration through computer science to more fundamental problems. His insistence on the importance of context in natural language is based on the fact that it normally provides implicitly the range of applicability of formal techniques. Consequently, he has given up the attempt to find an “upper bound” for machine intelligence and has focussed instead on that from which machines must abstract — human experience. The problem is not to find a quantitative limit but rather a limit to quantification. Artificial intelligence must necessarily be alien to the presuppositions embodied in the contexts of everyday language. While computers can come to decisions on any subject-matter, they will do so without reference to the multi-faceted concerns of human experience which are rooted in the human body and history.

What I conclude here is that the relevant issues are neither technological nor even mathematical; they are ethical. They cannot be settled by asking questions beginning with “can”. The limits of the applicability of computers are ultimately statable only in terms of oughts. What emerges as the most elementary insight is that, since we do not now have any ways of making computers wise, we ought not now to give computers tasks that demand wisdom.

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The link between the discussions of tools and reason is scientism. Weizenbaum's contribution to the critique of instrumental reason is his concentration on the computer metaphor. He has made an excellent case for its importance by describing the computer as both theory and model, as a physical embodiment of instrumental reason. In this case the connection of reason and action strongly reinforces the tendency to view the computer model as exhaustive for thought. However, while this account can clarify the seductiveness of computer analogies as a reformulation and enrichment of the machine analogies of the seventeenth century, it cannot grasp the roots of scientism. Having penetrated the ideology of instrumental reason, it is clear to Weizenbaum that its power is not explained simply by the existence of tools however impressive they may be. At bottom the metaphoric over-evaluation of computers is rooted in human decisions that choose to apply a means that "eschews substantive change" and denies the existence of social conflict.⁸ But why are these decisions made? To this Weizenbaum has no answer; his critique of scientism does not explain why it prevails but limits itself to effects. This by no means invalidates his contribution. Indeed, to my knowledge, there is only one hypothesis concerning the relationship of social decisions to instrumental reason. The philosophers of the Frankfurt School have argued that it is the dominance of exchange in society — in which commodities are equalized by an abstract quantitative standard — that accounts for the dominance of universalized formal reason in thought.

"Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities. To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion; modern positivism writes it off as literature."⁹

Whatever the merits of this analysis, it does attempt to provide the missing link between the accounts of tools and of reason. Weizenbaum explicitly rejects the scientific view that tools incarnate reason. However, the consequences of this rejection have not penetrated into the structure of his analysis. Though he points to social organization, he gives no account of the type of society that provides the basis for the equation of instruments and thought. That the human purposes externalized in tools have come to dominate reason can only be comprehended through the specific social context by which they are harmonized with the rest of society. The failure to provide the mediating link of a social analysis divides his argument into two parts; they are held together only

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by the scientific ideology that the book criticizes.

The import of this book is summed up in its subtitle, "From Judgement to Calculation". The pervasion of thought and everyday life by mechanical analogies has produced self-enclosed clockwork systems that function without reference to the wider realm of human experience. Abstract mechanisms whose structure is concretely evident in the computer have supplanted the contextually and historically informed concerns of human judgement. Weizenbaum has concentrated on calculation and its defects. Yet, on finishing the book, one wonders what concept of judgement would be able to overcome instrumental reason. Unless some content can be given to the concept of reason besides the insufficiency of instrumentalism, reason will remain with techniques — in recoil from an empty faith in an undefined other.

In criticizing the formalizing universalizations of instrumental reason Weizenbaum has come to emphasize the contextual and experiential richness of everyday discourse and understanding. It would appear from this emphasis that thought and action must remain within given contexts in order to avoid degenerating into calculation. Does this not deny the ability of thought to transcend traditional contexts and action to alter the received concatenation of contexts? He recognizes that invention is precisely a transfer of symbols from one frame of reference to another¹⁰ yet his critique fails to provide any basis for comparing contexts. This point can be approached from another angle. Weizenbaum is justly critical of the metaphorical use of scientific concepts in everyday discourse; such use usually fails to consider the specific scientific realm within which a concept such as "relatively" gains its meaning. Yet he uses the example of relativity of motion to illustrate his argument that intelligence is relative to a frame of reference.¹¹ How can one distinguish a vulgar or misleading metaphor from an illuminating one? At times it seems that it is being argued that metaphors should be abandoned altogether.¹² However, it should be apparent that this would deny any inventiveness to thought. It would chain thought within the organization of contexts sanctified by tradition; Weizenbaum's own efforts would be nullified in this case.

Consequently, one must recognize the necessity for trans-contextual thought and develop a concept of critique that would allow one to distinguish false transfers of context. Judgement, in this case, would have to unearth the relevant aspects of context and include them in the discussion of a metaphoric usage. The meaning of thought developed within specialized contexts would need to be evaluated within a framework of common concerns. That is, specialized sciences derive their justification from a political theory.¹³ Weizenbaum's analysis leans in this direction; his discussion uses an insider's knowledge to focus on the meaning of computer science in a public light.

None of the above criticisms are intended to detract from the achievements

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of *Computer Power*. Indeed, the fact that its thesis can be linked to important developments in social and political philosophy testifies to its perspicacity. Moreover, due to his grounding in computer science, the author enriches and "concretizes" the critique of instrumental reason through a specific content. In speaking from the concerns raised by the place of his special knowledge in contemporary society to his fellow specialists and simultaneously to us all, Joseph Weizenbaum has given us an example of intellectual responsibility all too rare in this age of self-enclosed experts.

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Notes

1. Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgement to Calculation*, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1976, p. 180.
2. Max Horkheimer argued in 1937 that the adage that tools are prolongations of human organs could as easily be reversed. "In the higher stages of civilization conscious human action unconsciously determines not only the subjective side of perception but in larger degree the object as well. "Traditional and Critical Theory" in *Critical Theory*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others, New York: 1972, p. 201.
3. Compare Ivan Illich's observation that industrialized traffic has lessened possibilities for walking. *Energy and Equity*, New York: 1974, pp. 15-9.
4. Cf. David Dickson "Technology and the Construction of Social Reality" in *Radical Science Journal* No. 1, Jan. 74, pp. 29-50. Incorporated into *Alternative Technology*, Glasgow: 1974.
5. Weizenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
6. Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns, The Hague: 1969, pp. 212-3.
7. Weizenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 273.
9. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, New York: 1972, p. 7. Cf. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York: 1974, chapter 1.
10. Weizenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
12. For example, "It is precisely this unwarranted claim to universality that *demotes* their use of the computer, computing systems, programs, etc., from the status of a scientific theory to that of a metaphor." (p. 176). Emphasis added.
13. Cf. Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" in *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Second Series) ed. Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman, Oxford: 1964.